The Essence of Language in Samuel Beckett’s waiting for Godot

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ABSTRACT: Language is what piece the regulated world together, the meaning of which provides the origination of our culture, our activities and our relations. It defines our personality as a form of assurance. It deals not only with the impossibilities of knowing the motivation of human beings, but also reveals the problem of communication between human beings. Speech is, certainly, the evidence of existence as well as a way of challenging silence, loneliness and death, and it is man’s unique heritage. Absurd dramatists’ use of language investigates the limitations of language both as a means of communication and as a device of thought as there can be no definite meanings in a world disadvantaged of values, beliefs and virtues. This research aimed to survey Beckett’s "Waiting for Godot" in the essence of its language. Becket used the language of gesture and movements to make non-living things play their action, and to consign dialogue. He reduced language to a very secondary role. His language becomes the sufficient representation of stagnant life and meaninglessness – it relates to life without action, describes man deprived of history. In this play the author tried to choose and write in a language devoid of content to become the adequate representation of stagnant life, he presented language as an inefficient tool to express one’s thought, to comprehend the world, or to define one's self.

Keywords: The Essence of Language, Waiting for Godot, Identity, Language, Communication.

INTRODUCTION

Beckett’s work is defined consciously, hence words are powerless to express the inner self and concurrently by the approval of this fact that language is vital in human situation and cannot be eradicated. Regarding to Beckett language is as constitutive of the identity of the self; it is on this belief that his sadness for the human condition and the power of his writing depend, because of the asymptotically and expressed approached of self, words moving in a scope without ever touching the center. Beckett’s approach towards language is then, the paradoxical acceptance of self-refutation as the condition for any artistic practice; a identification of the inherent incapacity of words to correspond to anything other than themselves together with the potentiality of expressing this incapability to express. Beckett did not consider language as a self-sufficient system of concepts exoteric to the theme which was bound to express, the imposition of dramatic form was in turn problematic. The naturalistic view of language as having a direct and unambiguous relation to the world can allow for an unproblematic organization of meaning at this level, like "waiting for Godot". Beckett defined language as a system of differences in which a series of binary oppositions keep up the verbal system, with resistances between presence and absence, positive and negative being the most determinate ones. In “Waiting for Godot” he represented these particular binary oppositions in structure of the play. Didi and Gogo were stood in opposition to Godot much as presence in opposition to absence in the Saussurean system. Didi and Gogo were in a binary relationship with Godot, powerless of dissociation because they were referential one to another. The play was constructed on this consciousness, by means of direct references to their relation with him. Words were enabled them to recuperate from the consciousness
of their difference from Godot at the moment of their utterance, but their sense of difference cannot be omitted because it was intrinsic to the language they use and woven into their being.

The circular structure of the play together with the paradoxical symmetries which pervaded the whole play obviously proved that all the characters' yesterdays were the same as today and that tomorrow would be no different from that. Hence, the play was masterfully depicted the best formal representation of absurd life in modern society which illustrated a real life in this era. Becket materialized the absurdity of modern life and human condition in his play. Samuel Beckett wrote in a language that always indicated the absurd and chaotic world, alone and depressed man. He indicated that language is the essential means of deception and as a system without content which moves only with itself. His language was a mixture of elements which were infrequently found together in the same narrative and were “murky, baffling, and full of offensive details, furious violence and sardonic, circular contradictory, terrifying insights into the meaninglessness of human life and was not easy to interpret for its general verbosity by the difficulty of the words and phrases. It was serious because it mostly dealt with complex and oddly tragic characters who cannot reconcile the unreality of the seen world with the reality of the unseen.

Speech, another mark of man’s finitude, broke down within the individual. Moreover, it sometimes leads to deterioration and often to total failure of communication with others. Since Beckett used language to show its function in human existence, the speech patterns of the characters were recurrent vocabulary, pronoun shifts, and sound effects and also re-enforced the major themes and the mixed tone of the play. In other words, the comic effects of language were used by characters grimly underline the themes of boredom and absurdity which directed the plays. In "Waiting for Godot" Vladimir was the character who groped for meaning, but the meaning did not emerge his attempts, decreased to incoherence and finally were silence by his partner Estragon.

**DISCUSSION**

James mentioned some characteristics of this work like repetition, monologue, stichomythia, pathic communion, word grouping, intentional syntax, contradiction, clichés and pratfall, indelicacy, structural closure, and absence of language (silence).

**Repetition**

Language in this play was repetitive. Words, phrases and sentences recurred endlessly. The technique of repetition not only revealed the monotonous repetitiveness of human action, but also broke the sense of linear progression for everything ended the way it was begun. In addition the repetition suggests the characters’ failure to solve the problems, or even their unawareness of the problems. The repetition of words often destroyed the power of words, and distanced the words from the time of the event which the words tried to describe the phrase “nothing to be done” was repeated four times noticeably in the first act (37, 41, 42 and 58). Instances are numerous in the play. “Dialogue has the peculiar repetitive quality of the cross-talk comedians’ patter”. Here are some examples of the repetition in "waiting for Godot".

1. ‘Unless they’re not the same…’ (Page 52)
   a. Vladimir repeated this fragment three times, but never manages to finish it. No meaning or point, show hopelessness and despair.
   b. They don’t actively use their minds to think as there is no point (Godot will not come faster if they do).
2. ‘We’re waiting for Godot’ (page 51)
   a. This section was repeated several times over the course of the play. The idea of waiting for something, state of not knowing was a fundamental existentialistic idea.
3. Estragon can’t remember (does things on purpose) (page 52 line 3-8). a. When seen in act II, his forgetting of Pozzo and Lucky is repeated.
   b. As he says: forgetting creates discussion, thus prove their existence.
   c. Also allow hope for something better when one does not know
4. The meeting with Pozzo and Lucky (page 5 line 3)
   a. They must have met before, as Vladimir said that they have changed.
   b. Pretend not to have met then before (they don’t recognize each other) so that they can talk. (People pretend to not know they can have a purposeful discussion, existentialism. In addition, both acts end with the same words, voiced differently.
ACT I:

ESTRAGON: Well, shall we go?

VLADIMIR: Yes, let's go.

ACT II:

VLADIMIR: Well? Shall we go?

ESTRAGON: Yes, let's go.

Monologue

Beckett’s characters in this play just wanted to express their own thoughts and they did not pay attention to other dissertations. That is also why they had to repeat their questions several times before they got an answer. Generally the answers were not related to the questions. Lucky uttered a puzzling monologue when ordered to think, the monologue was used by Pozzo when the tramps asked him to make Lucky “think”. He asked them to give him his hat when Lucky was wearing his hat, he was able to think. The monologue is long, rambling logorrhea, and does not have any apparent end. It was only stopped when Vladimir took the hat back. Within the gibberish Lucky made comments on the arbitrary nature of God, man’s tendency to pine and fade away and finally the decaying state of the earth.

Stichomythia

In Beckett’s "Waiting for Godot" stichomythia elevated prose to the level of poetry but did not elevate language or construct beautiful metaphors. By using rhythmic stichomythia, Beckett called our attention to the changing of the order of daily reality into a “new order of artistic reality”.

Phatic communion

Characters used words as a mean of passing time, as they waited for the things to take their course in” Waiting for Godot “. That is why there were so many word games in his plays and there is no escape. The tramps remind the readers that what they are reading is not unique, “What did we do yesterday”? 

Intentional dyntax

It bewildered the readers and it seemed to show a mind which is out of control. Lucky’s speech was symptomatic of his diminishing powers. He was like an automaton, programmed to make certain deductions from a confusion of material, thinking without reflection, a mechanical act devoid of wisdom. Though Lucky’s powers were on the decline, he could still manage to communicate the very essence of his thought.

Contradictions

Beckett uses contradictions to work against the efficiency of language, to imply that language has lost its function. However, his use of contradiction is ironic, for it is derived from discrepant awareness on the part of the figure on the stage and the audience. In this work throughout the life, one waits for something to come, and seemingly Godot symbolizes whatever one waits for. The anticipations which involve waiting are endless: birth, growth, graduations, employment, marriage, having children and so on. This human condition reflects contradiction. On one hand, one will be eager to wait for the next step or station to come; on the other hand s/he will try to escape the final one to come: the death. “Waiting for Godot “presents the dilemma between despair and hope in an interesting way because “oddly, the effect of the play isn’t total gloom,” and the audience “leave the theatre both amused and bemused by it” (Kennedy, 1987:1149).

Labyrinth of Language

The dialogue between the characters was studded with words that had no meaning for normal ears. They (words) merged themselves with reason that made the dialogue often puzzling. Beckett made it
difficult to demonstrate which came first, memory deterioration or language disintegration, one evidently accompanied the other. Hence, in Lucky’s case a devastated memory was mixed with “partial a phasia and ultimately total silence”. This situation manifested itself in stuttering (acacacacademie; anthropopometric; qua-quaquauqua, in stammering (etabli tabli tabli, ce qui suit qui… etc. as well as the aphasia and stuttering there was some evidence of a certain amount of speech disintegration that were ellipsis and stammering which were observable in Pozzo’s speech from the stress of Vladimir’s criticism: I can’t bear it…any longer… the way he goes on… you’ve no idea… it’s terrible… he must go… (he waves his arm)… I’m going mad (He collapses his head in his hands)… I can’t bear it… any longer…

“Waiting for Godot” was opened on an ambiguous note, “Nothing to be done,” that did not lead into a dialogue but into monologues - Estragon discussing his shoes, Vladimir their boring existence and their inability to alter it. Again misunderstanding arose from ambiguous syntax when Pozzo asked “Are you friends?” Estragon interpreted this was to mean “Are you and Vladimir friends?”, and Vladimir had to explain that Pozzo was asking whether Vladimir and Estragon were friends of his. The language of this work probes the limitations of language both as a vehicle for the expression of valid statement - an instrument of thoughts or truths, Beckett was used language not as a delightful instrument but as mere senseless buzzing. It was used “in a world that had lost its meaning, language also became a meaningless buzzing.” Language was used like difficult music heard for the first time as Niklaus Gessner in his The inadequacy of language, has tabulated ten different modes of disintegration of language, they ranged from simple misunderstanding and double-intenders to monologues (as signs of inability to communicate), clichés, repetitions of synonyms, inability to find the right words, and telegraphic style (loss of grammatical structure, communication by shouted commands) to the farrago (medley, hotch-potch, indiscriminate mixture of different elements) of chaotic nonsense and the dropping of punctuation marks, such as question marks. Language is used in an empty and meaningless mode with no real desire to communicate. In this work we find hollow sound effects that support the themes of horror and conversational emptiness. Staccato sound repetitions occur in such phrases as ‘Dis, Didi’ and in Vladimir’s lullaby which is comprised of words “Do do do” and “Bye bye bye bye, repeated over and over. Therefore, the characters fail to communicate, and their use of language seems to become more and more trivial. Language (notably in the form of clichés) is a form of reassurance, but not real connection occurs, instead language is a noise to fill the void created by the absence of meaningful human contact. Therefore the presence of clichés in the discourse of the characters points toward the fact that in real life most verbal exchanges are regularly devoid of real communication.

Language dealt not only with the unfeasibility of knowing the motivation of human beings in their actions, it also presented the problem of communication between human beings, which preoccupies Beckett, Adamov and Ionesco. Like waiting, talking was part of their habitual life. Without them, they cannot live. They talk in order to be able to live. Their talking in fact alleviated the agonizing waiting which in turn was used as a painkiller to comfort the impossible life they live. Beckett used the language based on patterns of real images rather than argument and discursive speech. Since language was trying to present a sense of being, it can neither investigate nor solve problems of behavior or morals or communication. From the general devaluation of language in the flood of mass communication, the growing specialization of life had made the exchange of ideas on an increasing number of subjects impossible between members of different spheres of life which have each developed their own specialized jargons. That is why communication between human beings is often shown in a state of breakdown. Esslin said in this regard “language has run riot in an age of mass communication. It must be reduced to its function – the expression of authentic content, rather than its concealment”.

Inefficacy of language for conveying thought, passing time

Since Beckett’s characters were deliberately drawn as generalized characters, their speeches had the function of not individualizing but generalizing them by means of recurring words and phrases in their speeches which portray the same puzzled frustrated but determined men in speech of comprehending the world and themselves through their narratives. All the characters vacillated between hope and despair concerning the completion of their quest. Robinovitz asserted that “these characters can be linked when they set out with the same naïve belief, that with a little more effort their quest will be ended”. Ellipsis and stammering are observable in the character’s speech for example Pozzo’s speech from the stress of Vladimir’s criticism: “I cannot bear it… any longer… the way he goes on you’ve no idea… it’s terrible.” A certain character talks as a baby talk because of a lack of comprehension on the part of his listener. Hesitate in speech is also observable in the characters' speech. Estragon speaks with Vladimir: “Er… you’ve finished with the… er… you don’t need the… er bones, sir? The speeches of the characters subverted the conventional function of speech to individualize characters because their language contributes to their anonymity and because their speeches like their actions are similar to each other, giving the sense that the same puzzled and frustrated voice. This never-ending conflict also made the lucid man suffer, for he recognized the futility but his need for order and system
did not let him give up the struggle. Thus, Esslin point out Conscious being inevitably entails suffering.” There are different modes of degeneration of language observable in “Waiting for Godot”. They ranged from simple misunderstanding to dropping of punctuation marks. In order to pass their time, they talk and talk about Godot whom they really don’t know much about.

ESTRAGON: Nothing to be done.
VLADIMIR: I’m beginning to come round to that opinion.

Although the phrase was used in connection to Estragon’s boots here, it is also later used by Vladimir with respect to his hat. Essentially it describes the hopelessness of their lives.

VLADIMIR: That passed the time.
ESTRAGON: It would have passed in any case and later when Estragon finds his boots again.
VLADIMIR: What about trying them.
ESTRAGON: I’ve tried everything.
VLADIMIR: No, I mean the boots.
ESTRAGON: Would that be a good thing?
VLADIMIR: It’d pass the time. I assure you, it’d be an occupation since passing the time is their mutual occupation and Estragon struggles to find games to help them accomplish their goal.

CONCLUSION

Disintegration of language is achieved through various methods in Absurd drama of “Waiting for Godot”. The use of meaningless words uttered repeatedly with no logical links or grammatical structure occurs in absurdist’s plays. These dramatists make little use of language as a means of influence. In this work Language which tries to finds a meaning characterization is hardly achieved. Beckett occupied with the failure of language to communicate the menaces of life and its meaninglessness. Therefore, he uses language as an atmosphere of entrapment. Beckett used the language of gesture and movements to make inanimate things play their action, and to relegate dialogue. He reduced language to a very subordinate role. His language becomes the adequate representation of stagnant life and meaninglessness it relates to life without action, describes man deprived of history.

REFERENCES