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**RESEARCH ARTICLE**

## The Versatile Language of Absurd World in Harold Pinter's *The Birthday Party*

**Ahmad Ali Al-Daire**

*Independent Researcher, Jordan*

**Corresponding Author:** Ahmad Ali Al-Daire, **E-mail:** [ahmaddaire@hotmail.com](mailto:ahmaddaire@hotmail.com)

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**ABSTRACT**

Pinter writes *The Birthday Party* in an absurd dead language, but he does not exclude the compassions, love, kindness, menace and good manners. It is known that absurdity is a philosophical concept that refers to individual's attempt to find reason in this life, which is thwarted by human limited constraints where the existence has no meaning. Pinter through his versatile language, does not exclude compassionate sense in an absurd drama. He does not exclude how to sympathize with Stanly by audience as an oppressed person. Meg shows well-mannered towards Stanly in spite of hardships of absurd language and behaviors. Pinter consolidates human actions in one drama through artistic language in an absurd drama. Language plays the role of hero to imitates the chaos of human beings. Absurdity is dominant in everything and everyone, even language and life itself nowadays.

**KEYWORDS**

Absurd World; Harold Pinter's *The Birthday Party*; compassions; love, kindness, menace; good manners

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Absurdity is a philosophical concept that refers to the individual's attempt to find reason in this life, which is thwarted by humanely limited constraints where existence has no meaning. The yield of meaningless existence comes when the describable is indescribable and the consciousness of human is inauthentic. The mass of chaos around human beings in life comes to be void without any meaning whether in time, behavior, thinking and language. The capabilities of understanding man's instincts are also vague including the material world where the individual is in a bemused consciousness. Harold Pinter presents the character's inability and capabilities to deal with things around them but the meaninglessness of existence is obvious in an absurd world through his play *The Birthday Party*. Pinter in his play, employs language through polyphonic style that imitates the bright side and dark side of our existence in a postmodern era. When language has no meaning or disjointed, it means one's consciousness is inauthentic even the words do not lead to an obvious stream like almost our actions nowadays. A world without meaning, devaluation of language, devaluation of time and lack of a precise plot are combined in a Pinteresque style in the realm of absurdity. Pinter presents a magnificent versatile writing in the realm of absurdity where language fails but Pinter reformulates the language of absurdity to imitate the postmodern era that we live in through a magnificent way and through turning with ease from one thing to another. This paper analyzes the versatility and passionate sense of absurd language in *The Birthday Party* by Harold Pinter.

Harold Pinter is considered a philosopher and philological in dealing with language according to Martin Esslin. Pinter's language is attractive to the audience where the sense of soft language encourages readers to follow (Cohn: 339). At the beginning of the play, the language is fully understood to the audience despite the intermittent tone and repetition, but the sense of irregularity by Meg and Petty is there. Meg and Petty discuss the newspaper and the taste of corn flakes. The atmosphere there is normal where absurdity is not there. Later on, Pinter's language is overwhelmingly reversed to follow absurdity. The language of the absurd theatre is fragmented and disjointed. In general, maybe Esslin generalizes his idea about Pinter's language as a fan as

great playwright but not in absurd dramas. Pinter utilizes the absurdist language to employ the failure of language and it has no value in the postmodern era like our actions. Pinter's intentions also remind us about living in a space between words and underneath the web of repetition and interjection (Silverstein:13). Words are ambiguous to audience where language lost its rhetorical element but a compassionate sense and the saner psychological element is lost by Meg. Meg asks about the weather if it is light or dark outside and she could not distinguish whether it is winter time or not or even the time of her husband's work. Suddenly, Meg is interested in the newspaper that her husband reads and she starts asking if there is any good news to listen. News for both Meg and Petty is nothing for them and they start talking as usual couples. The language suddenly shifts to the atmosphere of outside irrespective of there is good news or not **"(Vaguely) It is nice out? Petty: Yes, it's a nice day"** (713). Their Consciousness is absent where there is nothing can be understood except disjointed words. Language thwarted to express the inner feeling of both Meg and Petty in an absurd world. Absurdity is mainly dominant on the stage where speech is fragmented but the sense of passion is there in an absurd world.

The world of no explanation and no reasoning is not the world of authentic existence. When it comes to language, there is logic. Logic is the way of thinking through a rational way in a material world around us or in contacting people with through methodological rational way in speaking or writing. The absurd is saturated with nothingness where the ideas cannot be persuasive whether by listener or reader. The result of this creates a comic and cynical thought and such repercussions only lead to an absurd world (Halloran:97). It is good sometimes to talk in an absurd way according to Sigmund Freud where the feeling of freedom comes when we abandon the stream of logic. The absurdist language tries to shatter the enclosing walls of the human conditions. The loss of logical language brings the cynical sense with living things. Language of the absurd theatre makes a comic sense where the anxieties of life are thrown away. The logical sense is estranged at the moment of watching or reading where it also offers intoxicating freedom that brings one into contact with the essence of life (Tiwari:4). Pinter uses absurdist language to let the audience respond with passions through the realm of absurdity. When Stanly appears on the stage, he is a normal person, but when the conversation starts with Meg, he calls the food that Meg makes succulent and horrible and he says bad words to Meg. Meg seems very compassionate in her answers to say **"You should 'not say that word to a married woman"** (715). Relentlessly, Meg does not stop praising herself as a compassionate wife and dutiful. Suddenly, the atmosphere of absurdity prevails on the stage when Meg asks about if the sun is shining or not. The absurd realm of Stanly suddenly is changed where the sanity of Stanly's language is changed into passions when he tells Meg **"I don't know what to do without you"** (715). Pinter employs the language through a comic and intoxicant ways in a nonsense world that represents our random actions (Raby:82). This binary of Pinter reveals his skill in dealing with the language of absurd people where the existence of meaningless expresses compassions and nonsense thought at the same time.

Pinter's aim about revealing the compassionate language in his plays is commenting on what happened to people's mentalities after the period of World Wars one and two. People after these periods, come to be disjointed and basically unfamiliar to each other. Pinter's absurd language is the yield of such a horrible action where human's thought is locked in a cage (Deewan:135). But the question is: is that true? In an interview, Pinter said: **"Everything is funny; the greatest earnest is funny; even tragedy is funny. And I think what I try to do in my plays is to get to this recognizable reality of the absurdity of what we do and how we behave and how we speak"** (Ali:2). These words reveal Pinter's language that comes to refresh people's mood in time of absurdity where the words are dead and meaningless same as the absurd world we are living in including characters in *The Birthday Party*. Pinter utilizes the absurd language to employ the failure of language and it has no much value in the postmodern era as I indicated earlier in this paper. The essence of existence cannot be changed and the absurdity comes to be yield after a long time of world's chaos, but the feeling of absurdity is varied from one to another. Sartre states that; absurdity is the feeling of freedom according to our conditions (Landau:3). Thus, the freedom is the foundation of our values. The value of characters in *The Birthday Party* are basic choices to them to live in an absurd world and freedom. So, recognizable reality comes to reveal how we behave and how we speak as Pinter states in the interview. Pinter's language comes to be as a vehicle of communication to tell audience more about unescapable realm of the absurd world where the words are dead to be understood through those characters in the play. The words in the absurd drama give the audience a meaningless exchange, but Pinter does not exclude the compassions in the play. The softness of language in Pinter's play is there in absurd drama as Esslin states in spite of absurdity words, Pinter is a philosopher and philologist in dealing with language.

Language is unreliable in the absurd theatre and insufficient to communicate but passion sense in Pinter's words is there. The language of absurd leads the readers, along with the audience to be aware of the possibilities of going beyond daily speeches and to communicate with each other through an authentic way. Pinter paves the way for good communication whereas the language is like absurd hero in the text that brings the human existence to the real situation of daily suffering. Another aspect in Pinter's language of absurdity is a mean to escape from the unbearable existence that people suffer from the Two World Wars (Paul:964). Pinter identifies each character with its specific language and meaningless of language to bring to the audience a unity with living things where most people live in an absurd world. In Pinter's language, every character lives with his/her own freedom

throughout the play. Throughout the play, every character tries to conceal the self with his/her own absurd language where many linguistic signs, silence, pause, repetition and gestures where the language of those characters are intermittent with their senses. Stanley Webber has no desire to tell the truth to Meg: **"Shall I tell you who they're looking for"** (717). Despite that, Meg is the one who tells about the coming guests next morning to that boarding house. When Stanley knows about the two guests, the sense of insecurity captured him. Pinter's idea is that the world is no more secure to Stanley. Pinter shows Stanley's existential crisis where the world is harsh for him through absurdity. The postmodern world has no place for people like Stanley where the world is full of fear and anxiety to that pathetic person. Pinter's language in an absurd world reveals the insecurity for Stanley. When Stanley meets Goldberg and McCann **"Stanly does not answer"**. **"Stanly sit still"** (721). Pinter's language points to the poverty of communication to Stanley and the mutual understanding will not be lost in an absurd drama. Failure of communication is a main aspect in Pinter's play like the failure of language that represents the postmodern era where everything is in chaos same as Stanley's case (Saraci:385).

When Goldberg and McCann arrived, Stanley is captured by hesitations. McCann asks Goldberg to have a seat and relax: **"take a holiday"** (718) Both of them represent their serenity away from the chaos of life away from absurd language. Also, they try to make an autonomic atmosphere for both of them to let Stanley go back to his normal life. But for Stanley the outside world is harsh and communication with people is very hard. Of course, Goldberg and McCann represent the annihilation for Stanley at the end of the play. Both of them represent the instability to Stanley and they will take from him the values of his freedom (Lowe:508). Pinter dramatizes the language of the newcomers when they start speaking about the old days. McCann starts talking about the old days with his uncle Barney. Goldberg does not stop talking about the memories of old days with his uncle Barney. Goldberg's uncle is a respected urban man **"Respected by the whole community"** (718). Pinter dramatizes the scene and he makes it sensible to the audience. Pinter's language estranges the realm of absurdity in that scene. Pinter is a discursive writer and he knows when to take break and be away from absurdist language for minutes. Pinter demonstrates his power in writing and he asserts Esslin's words about being philological in dealing with language. This scene makes a quantum leap to the audience where after the caesura a logic speech starts with Goldberg **"(Sitting right table) The secret is breathing. Take my tip"** (718) afterwards, reminiscence starts going out from Goldberg. The wondering by the audience is there where these comers are coming for purpose. Pinter pauses to both characters to inform the audience and process information about their identity (Kunkel:17). Pinter's language inheres the logical expressions from Goldberg and it gives an indirect impact to the audience to let the audience think about what will happen later through a quite discursive dialogue (Dukore:7). Pinter's language reveals his versatility in employing the language of absurd theatre.

Pinter keeps describing Stanley's fear and drawing the sense of freedom in his personality in an absurd way. The essence of freedom to practice alienation from the chaos of world is there through Stanley's nagging questions about the new visitors: **"What do they want here"** (721). Stanley shows his innocent language when he meets McCann as a normal man, but suddenly language is reversed. Stanley does not want to have his birthday party and he wants to celebrate on his own. Later on, Pinter reverses the prestige of conversation to let Stanley be responsible about the guest house and does not want these two men in the house as free man: **"I run the house 'I'm afraid you and your friend will have to find other accommodation"** (724). This again reveals the thematic language of absurdity by Pinter. He asserts the hardships of communication in postmodern era like the chaos of the Two World Wars where the Western world passed through nihilism. Stanley's essence of freedom is obvious to be alienated in his own world. The failure of communication also represents Pinter's language in describing the characters. Pinter gives pauses, stutters in speech, blundering in behavior, absence of mind and menace like the insane motion of the world. The space of Stanley is private and does not want anyone to share with him that space that represents freedom away from the chaos of the world. Such practice by all the characters in the play represents a dilemma of identity as they often fail to protect their sense of themselves which is defined by harsh world outside (Arikan:37). Stanley isolates himself from the chaos of the world under the protection of Meg and Petty. The couples do their best to make him feel comfortable even they deal with him as their son. Stanley's atmosphere is violated by unexpected force represented by McCann and Goldberg to take the essence of his freedom. Pinter describes McCann and Goldberg as quiet visitors but later on their language is changed to be violent toward the isolated Stanley therefore his fear is aroused. Pinter through his discursive language gives the audience a sense of tranquility about the new visitors at first whereas later on, gradually the visitors come to be enemies.

Pinter's discursive language comes to be comic in the second scene and never loses the sight of its versatility in coming actions. Blind man's buff game that is suggested by Lulu in the drama gives a vital atmosphere to the drama. Through the game, Pinter disguises the harsh outside world through his language. Language plays a comic role and it gives the audience a turning point about their former bad expectations about McCann and Goldberg. The sense of joy in an absurd world comes to be almost rational to the audience. Laughter in the play changes the atmosphere of absurdity. Pinter responds to absurdity through laughter, playing an absurd game and flirting from Goldberg: **"Lulu: (to Goldberg). Kiss me. They kiss"** (730). Fredrick Nietzsche suggests facing the absurd nature of human existence through laughing and even smiling (Gordon:364). Pinter utilizes the atmosphere of joy through his language to dramatize the scenes through a seriocomic style. In spite of failure of language,

gestures of happiness and laughing are almost rational to let the audience escape from their grim reality of world (Burkman:149). Pinter asserts the reality of our actions in absurd world in what we do or act or speak. Pinter's main goal is not to keep the style of the absurd in the play where there should be a stylistic variation in the realm of play to keep the mainstream of drama versatile. So, Pinter employs his language almost in all the aspects of life in his drama whether, laughing, loving, relations, menace and so on. Absurdity characterized by a meaningless life and existence has no meaning. The hopelessness of life, the need to refuse the world without renouncing it is absurd feel. The absurd for Albert Camus is an absence of correspondence between the mind's need for unity and the chaos of the world. The mind experiences the obvious response that is either suicide or in the opposite direction to struggle with time (Hinchliffe:35). However, Pinter makes the absurd world joyful and compassionate in some phases of the play through character's relations and actions. Flagrantly, absurdity of Pinter in dealing with words are alive through the versatility of language.

In act three, the grim reality of both visitors comes to threaten Stanly's case more and more. Stanly lives in the essence of freedom and he scares the world to make himself alienated. Almost every person internally knows the consequences and outcomes of his/her own actions or speeches. Stanley is an artist to deal with himself in an alienated place and absurd world. So, Stanly is a subservient in absurd society but suddenly mass of toxicant words fall upon his head by Goldberg. Goldberg and McCann come to be like a war motivator when they start asking Stanly about things he is not aware of. Stanly starts stuttering and does not know what to answer except saying some nonverbal expressions such as Uh-gughu to express his fear. Ironically, both of McCann and Goldberg want to save Stanly from his absurd situation while they are victims of the power they serve. Goldberg says: **"He needs a special treatment"** (737) while he himself needs the treatment with his friend (Chui:15). Pinter's language affirms the absurdity in the play but within discursive and dramatized way to keep the mainstream of play. At the end of the play, Stanly is taken away and the cycle of absurdity stands still with Meg and Petty. In Pinter's language the meaning is ambiguous and there are many manifestations of the meaning. He attains this unique dynamism by a clever manipulation of the exchange pattern of the dialogue. Pinter also stresses four different aspects of language: rhythm, tempo, intensity and tension that show his skill in dealing with words. Absurdity never shapes itself, but in Pinter's language it is almost shaped and understood through a sophisticated dramatist style. The character's language in *The Birthday Party* is shattered and repetitive, but the sequence of words is understood despite the death of meaning in the realm of absurd drama (Azizmohammadi:2061). As Pinter states in his interview when he describes the chaos of the world through the play and such actions reflects the world's words in Pinter's *The Birthday Party*. Pinter's language comes to be as a vehicle of communication to tell the audience more about unescapable realm of the absurd postmodern world where the words are almost dead sometimes to be understood through those characters in the drama. It is good sometimes one talks and thinks through an absurd way to escape from the life's hardships as Freud states and Pinter wrote.

Pinter writes *The Birthday Party* in an absurd dead language, but he does not exclude the compassions, love, kindness, menace and good manners. It is known that absurdity is a philosophical concept that refers to individual's attempt to find reason in this life, which is thwarted by human limited constraints where the existence has no meaning. Pinter through his versatile language, does not exclude compassionate sense in an absurd drama. He does not exclude how to sympathize with Stanly by audience as an oppressed person. Meg shows well-mannered towards Stanly in spite of hardships of absurd language and behaviors. Pinter consolidates human actions in one drama through artistic language in an absurd drama. Language plays the role of hero to imitates the chaos of human beings. Absurdity is dominant in everything and everyone, even language and life itself nowadays.

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