

Discourse Failure as an Aesthetic Motif in the Absurd Theatre: A Comparative Study of Samuel Becket's *Waiting for Godot* and Tawfiq Al-Hakim's *The Tree Climber*

Mohammad Al-Abdulrazaq *, Mamoun Alzoubi

Department of English Language and Literature Al-Balqa Applied University, Jordan

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Abstract

The aim of this paper is to highlight the role of discourse failure in the absurd theatre and prove how it can be actively used as an aesthetic means which enhances the pragmatic effectiveness of communication by grabbing the attention of the audience. The study examines two absurd plays; Tawfiq Al-Hakim's *Ya Tali al-Shajarah (The Tree Climber)* and Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*. The paper shows how discourse failures are not used by both Becket and Al-Hakim spontaneously. They have been used to reveal their aesthetic and dynamic impact on the reader. Both writers try to evoke and control not just the actual focus of the audience, but also their way of perceiving, their mood, which is not directed towards concrete objects, but has to do with their general sensibility.

Keywords: *Waiting for Godot, The Tree Climber*, Discourse Failure, Absurd Theatre.

Background remarks:

Common sense teaches us that verbal communication can be a core consideration for both communication research and language studies. In human cultures, language is the most prevalent means of communication, especially if we consider the enormous variety of communication phenomena in which spoken and written language is mixed with other modalities, such as gestures or images. Asli Özyürek and Bencie Woll maintain that “as humans, our ability to communicate and use language is instantiated not only in the vocal modality but also in the visual modality” (2019, 67).

There have been failings and misunderstandings since man was able to communicate. Whether the communication is cross-cultural or not, miscommunication is a common characteristic of human communication (Dascal 1985; Brown 1995). The purpose of communication is to exchange information. Ideas, feelings, thoughts, and viewpoints are shared by the choice of written and spoken words. Unfortunately, miscommunication is sometimes reflected by not knowing what is said or written by the listener or reader. Brown (1995) claims that understanding is unproblematic as long as the listener comprehends enough for his or her needs and goals at the time of the conversation. Sometimes we mean what we say exactly, but sometimes our clear message does not completely align with our intentions. Communication is successful when the recipient of a thought recognizes the meaning intended by the

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* Corresponding Author: malabdulrazaq@bau.edu.jo

speaker or writer, whether by listening or reading. Effective communication is clear and straightforward, often intensified by emotion, but never confusing.

It is worth noting here that the signs and connotations posed by the symbols of the addressee in the communication process should be similar to the meanings and connotations they provoke in the sender. If this is not done, it is right to conclude that communication between them is not possible because, at the end of the communication process, they do not exchange the ideas. Therefore, when people speak, they have a reason behind it. The speaker has a target he / she needs to share.

The aesthetic and literary creation

A little away from language and literature, the term 'aesthetics' means the arrangement of sensory properties in a systematic way. Zangwill indicates that "aesthetic properties depend in part on sensory properties, such as colours and sounds" (2001, 127). An inherent, irreducible value tends to have aesthetic properties, a characteristic separate from logical and affective values. That irreducible character is most apparent in abstract plastic art, that is, in art that concerns itself solely with the formal arrangement of visual and tactile properties such as colour, shape, density, and texture (Carroll 1995, 106).

A related discussion of what aesthetic is can be found in Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a young Man*. In a part of a lengthy conversation between Stephen Dedalus and his fat friend, Lynch, Stephen manages to prove his hypothesis, that "...though the same object may not seem beautiful to all people, all people who admire a beautiful object find in it certain relations which satisfy and coincide with the stages themselves of all aesthetic apprehension" (1960, 209). The solution for Joyce is to put the aesthetic in a certain kind of apprehension that "finds" such "relationships" in a specific object (wholeness, harmony, radiance). Beauty is not so much in the beholder's eye as in a certain kind of beholding that is nevertheless based on the object's specific attributes.

Literature as a complex mode of writing can be viewed as a mode that creates a communicative system based on the linguistic system and proceeding from it to unfamiliar aesthetic and purposeful horizons that surprise the recipient and shock his expectation, to give itself the ability to persuade and influence the listener or the recipient. This perception stems from the assumption that literature and art are a communicative system that needs to be viewed, not as an empty luxury, or a faded decoration in which a class of people takes refuge at certain times, but rather a communicative system that has its own pattern, its specific theme and its distinct mechanisms, which prove that linguistic communication is not sufficient to be the only or first mode of communication.

From a formalistic view, literature does not convey anything clear or a message that is paraphrased; it even conveys the unspeakable otherwise (Habib 2011, 197). Literature is a unique way of expression. Critics differently suppose preoccupation with form leads to social alienation, withdrawal from the world and a retreat to the aesthetic as a refuge of sensitivity and human values. Literature is no longer seen as intended to represent reality or to convey moral or intellectual lessons, but rather as something in itself, independent, having its own laws and autonomous, having its own internal goals for itself (Ibid).

An effective way to study an artistic work is to enjoy it. The true context of the work of literature and its specific artistic qualities should be considered to enjoy the text. Both language and artistic techniques make literature play a vital role in understanding our world and become existential issues.

The study of aesthetic texts "allows us to rehearse different ways of seeing the world and different emotional reactions"(Misson 2006, 136). The production of compassion is fundamental to such a study. In a letter, the aesthetic is more than what is merely "beautiful." It refers to the dynamic association between feeling and understanding. It includes a broad variety of subjective and analytical reactions to messages.

The aim of this paper is to highlight the role of discourse failure in the absurd theatre and suggest how it can be actively used as an aesthetic means which enhances the pragmatic effectiveness of communication by grabbing the attention of the audience. The study examines two absurd plays; Tawfiq Al-Hakim's *Ya Tali al-Shajarah (The Tree Climber)* and Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*. The paper shows how discourse failures are not used by both Becket and Al-Hakim spontaneously. They have been used to reveal their aesthetic and dynamic impact on the reader. Both writers try to evoke and control not just the actual focus of the audience, but also his way of perceiving, his mood, which is not directed towards concrete objects, but has to do with his general sensibility.

Straightforward communication forces the pleasures of perception to the margins, as communication is subsumed under practical goals and stereotyped perception. For aesthetic purposes, Becket and Al-Hakim reduce the tempo of communication from all practical purposes, even from existence. The reader faces a challenging task in recognizing the structures and meanings of a piece of art. The experience of finding the meaning releases the remarkable pleasure, remarkable meaning not outstanding, but noticeable. Pieces of art activate this kind of pleasure. This can be compared to the beauty in the withered rose or the barren tree which is a hidden beauty that not everyone can perceive. So sometimes beauty cannot be recognized by ordinary viewers. Thus, words may act as a bridge or a barrier to comprehension and communication. Buarqoub maintains that language "plays a vital role in helping people build a bridge of relationships. At the same time, language acts as a destroyer of bridges of human relations" (2019, 64).

The Thoughts of Absurdity

Theatre of the Absurd was one of the major theatrical movements that developed after World War I. Before that, conventional playwrights used to believe in the idea that reality exists in the world outside. Their thoughts were supported by their perception that, via senses and rational thought, information about reality is obtained. Authors of absurd theatre reject conforming to such rationality. Embracing the idea that man is not able to grasp the absolute reality in the world outside, they shocked their audience and readers by denying all systems of values and beliefs. Michael Y. Bennett indicates that "the playwrights of the Theatre of the Absurd believed that life can have meaning if paradox is worked out. They created heterotopic worlds that lacked a conclusion and had a lingering paradox" (2011, 20). To reach the message that the theatre of the absurd aims at, the readers are deviated from the comfort of their traditional daily life, tacitly making the actions of the person banal in all aspects.

The writers of the absurd theatre, creating a new form of drama, engaged themselves in making a new genre both in form and content. In their works, all writers of absurd theatre have tended to use sarcasm, contradiction, contempt for logic, black comedy, indifference, and philosophical argument over human life being 'nothing.' Additionally, human behavior is studied to appear without any objective and philosophically absurd. Esslin maintains that "the Theatre of the Absurd strives to express its sense of senselessness of the human condition and the inadequacy of the rational approach by the open abandonment of rational devices and discursive thought" (1961, xix-xx).

The term 'theatre of the absurd' was coined by the Hungarian born-British dramatist and critic Martin Esslin in his book *The Theatre of the Absurd*, which was published in 1961. He points out that such a type of drama has no story or plot to speak of and seems often to be reflections of dreams and nightmares. Unlike conventional drama, this kind of play often consists of incoherent babblings (1961, xvii). Albert Camus introduced his theory of the Absurd, in which he argues that man's pursuit of truth is a futile task. In his essay, "The Myth of Sisyphus," published in 1942, he compares man's struggle to understand the world and the meaning of life to Sisyphus, a famous figure in Greek Mythology condemned to an existence of rolling a heavy stone up a mountain only to watch it roll to the bottom (1955, 48). Critics believe that Theater of the Absurd represents human existence as nonsensical and often chaotic. It is the constant conflict between human consciousness and rationality. It highlights the unsuccessful attempts to search for the meaning and reality within life. Martin Gray indicates that theatre of the absurd depicts 'the condition in which all action and endeavor is perceived as ineffectual, ridiculous, even comical, taking place as it does in a world void of purpose' (1992, 9).

The Importance of Comparative Literature

Comparative literature, in general, is the study of literary texts written in different languages based on their most basic meaning (Sahin 2015, 5). It is also believed that 'Comparative Literature' and 'World Literature' are terms that are frequently used to describe a similar course of study and scholarship. Comparative literature is an interdisciplinary field in which researchers look at literature across national borders, time periods, languages and genres. Literary studies, literary criticism and theory, literary history, translation, area studies, and global studies all benefit from comparative cultural approaches to different cultures, languages, and literatures. (Ibid). According to Rohib Sangia, "Many comparatists also share the desire to integrate literary experience with other cultural phenomena such as historical change, philosophical concepts, and social movements" (2014, 1). In his book *Introduction to Comparative Literature*, Francois Jost states that "The comparatist's effort and reward is to perceive the literary world in its fundamental unity" (1974, xi). Charles Bernheimer demonstrates that critics agree that "the work of comparison involves first and foremost a reflection on the aesthetic phenomenon of literariness in a cross-national context" (1995, 10). Therefore, this paper is arguing with Bernheimer's view concerning the task of comparative studies. It highlights the role of discourse failure and its aesthetic impact within the context of the theatre of the absurd in two different plays from different cultures.

The Tree Climber

Introducing the absurd into the Arab world in the fifties was a matter of dispute. Some critics rejected the movement on the ground that it is a foreign import and others defended the absurd as a result of both the overall transformation of the Arab world and the local cultural elements that Arab critics long ignored (Abu-Haif 2002, 13-14). Tawfiq Al-Hakim exhibits a playful attitude towards time and space and seems more concerned with showing the absurdity of rational discourse than with building any systematized view of the world. Al-Hakim's *The Tree Climber* which was written in 1962 was taken from an Egyptian folk song that reads: "Oh, tree climber bring me a cow with you, milk it and feed me with a Chinese spoon". Al-Hakim believed that this song does not have a meaning, and it has an unreasonable idea, and he assigned his play to belong to the absurd theatre. This song can be symbolic, and it is probably running on the tongue of a poor man, asking whoever has become rich (meaning the climber of the tree) to provide him with a cow that gives him milk to drink.

The play talks about a couple, Bahadur and Bahana, who live in their apartment, separated from the outside world. The husband, Bahadur, is busy with a tree in his house, watering and taking care of it. The wife, Bahana, is busy sewing clothes for her child whom she miscarried. Then the wife disappears for three days. The police question the husband about her disappearance, but the wife returns suddenly without knowing the reason for her disappearance.

An argument between the husband and wife about the reason for her disappearance leads him to suffocate her. He buries her under the tree, but the corpse disappears, and an old lizard appears instead. It is noticed through the dramatic construction of the text, that the play combines in its treatment method the symbolic and the absurd, as many indications appear that indicate the belonging of the text to the theater of the absurd. Al-Hakim begins his play with a realistic situation, which is the disappearance of the wife, but this soon develops from the realistic to the unrealistic.

It is also noted that the dialogue that takes place between the husband and the wife is not reasonable, as each of them talks about what concerns him, without any communication between them. The wife talks about the fetus that she aborted in the fourth month, and the husband talks about the orange fruits that fall from his tree, without being fully developed. Thus, we feel that the language has lost in this scene its function as a means of dialogue and understanding between people, because the dialogue has turned into an isolated individual soliloquy. Likewise, there is no such thing in the play as time and place in the traditional concept, as we find that the present and the future exist in one time. Times and places overlap, where the husband is in two separate places and times at the same time, and this is close to the technique of theater inside a theater. The Darwish is summoned from the past to the present, to testify to a crime that has not yet been committed. The husband and wife live separately from the world, and no one visited them, nor did they communicate with anyone, and this is a feature of the theater of the absurd that appears in the text.

Al-Hakim believes in life's emptiness and absurdity. Failure, fortune, success, youth, and love are all just words that mean nothing. People are alienated and they have become estranged. They lost all contact with the rest of the world. There is little action, and the conversation is monotonous and inconsistent.

Language, like everything else, is incapable of imparting sense to an absurd world. In a nutshell, language has lost a lot of its communicability.

Accordingly, the discourse failure that takes place in the play is employed by Al-Hakim to function as a technique that helps him demonstrate his ideas about the absurdity and meaning of life. This also enables the readers to go through the text thoughtfully and question the worth of such technique and consequently reach the aesthetic and symbolic value of discourse failures.

Symbolism, which is the use of objects, people, or places to stand in for bigger ideas, is one of the most important devices used in the theatre of absurd. Dace points out that “absurdist employ techniques derived from traditional Occidental drama, including those of fantasy, allegory, symbolism, farce, satire, parody, drama, melodrama, expressionism, surrealism, Dada, and realism” (1967, 193). In *The Tree Climber*, the effects of language used by characters grimly underline the themes of tedium and absurdity that dominate the play. Al-Hakim, in his use of discourse failures, shows the unreliability of language as a medium for communication of metaphysical truth. He shows how writing remains a constant struggle, a painful wrestling with the spirit of language itself. The themes of *The Tree Climber* show the difficulty of finding meaning in a world subject to continuous change. Al-Hakim's use of discourse failures reviews the limitations of language both as a means for the expression of valid speech and an instrument of reflecting thoughts or truths.

Al-Hakim shows how absurdity and discourse failures are connected. This may lead readers to the conclusion that thoughts about life and its meaning in absurd writing can control the language and its function as primarily a means of communication. Therefore, a writer shares his mysterious and confusing thoughts about life by attempting to formulate a language which is also mysterious and confusing. The traditional view of language as having the capability to shape and programme our thoughts and minds is reversed here, and the relationship between language and thoughts is presented influencing each other profoundly, inversely and correlatively. Language, according to Schooler, Ohlsson, and Brooks, aids in the shaping and expression of insights; insights, in turn, aid in the articulation of language (1993, 166).

Thus, language in absurd theatre is no longer dependent on defining formulas, and its ambition is no longer limited to introducing the characters, adopting their case, or making them the main axis in the text. The characters' job has become to serve and support ideas, and not to show themselves, and they no longer need to act. This is done to show how characters unfold life not through actions but through words. Therefore, this play contains two types of dialogue, dialogue that is necessary for the event, and the other that seems unnecessary.

Detective: When exactly did your lady disappear?

Maid: The time when the lizard returns to its hole.

Detective: You mean at sunset?

Maid: I did not see the sun setting.

Detective: And when does the lizard return to its hole?

Maid: When my master appears from under the tree.

Maid: And when does your master appear from under the tree?

Maid: When my lady calls for him...

Detective: And when does your lady call him?

Maid: When it is humid in the garden...

Detective: And when is it humid in the garden?

Maid: When my lady tells him that?

Detective: And when did your lady tell him that?

Maid: When I finish my work here and get ready to go home. (37-38).¹

At first glance, this dialogue like the whole play, may seem simple and even justifying. Examining the play closely will reveal that Al-Hakim was opening a way for An Arab modernity linked to authenticity. There is no doubt that he succeeded at that time in the bet he made. Watching or reading *The Tree Climber* taught people how to deal with art, not only on the basis of searching for content and message, which already exist in Al-Hakim's absurd plays, but also from the standpoint of aesthetic pleasure and dealing with renewed forms of art. This made many playwrights quickly follow the footsteps of Al-Hakim, but often without reaching the artistic level that he reached, especially in *The Tree Climber*. Al Sharadgeh emphasizes that "Al Hakim is considered an innovative and a pioneer of modern Arabic drama" (2019, 18).

It is clearly noticed that Al-Hakim made the language of the dialogue between the detective and the maid serve the form and the content of the absurd theatre and his views about life. By creating situations of discourse failure and misunderstanding among the characters, Al-Hakim presents language not as a means of communication rather as a means for manipulating the senses and human psychology. Such language aims at expressing reality without reality and resorting to the irrational and illogical in every artistic expression to generate new effects and understanding of the absurd existence of man.

This involves readers in more than just knowing what the play is about. It mixes both understanding and non-understanding as two sides for the same coin: the psychological structure of man, about which Al-Hakim said, "Man is a strange structure, logical and illogical, reasonable and unreasonable" (Faraj: 1964, 92). The following dialogue between the wife and the Detective is an example of the apparent understanding associated with the unconscious non-understanding:

Wife: Is it him?...he never spoke about the tree...

Detective: But I heard him with my own ears

Wife: Perhaps you heard wrong sir... I was the one who was talking to him about the tree... and I always talked to him about it... because I know he loves it...

Detective: You were talking about... your daughter...

Wife: My daughter... Really... But he was the one who was talking to me about my daughter... And he was the one who always talked to me about her. " (133).

It seems that Bahadur and Bahana are both present and absent at the same time, and this is what resembles dreams. The dreamer in his vision feels as if what he sees in front of him is real, and the dreamer here is the Detective who is confused how to embody before him the life of Bahadur and Bahana.

They are present for him just like a dream, and they are actually absent for him, and this confusion that the Detective fell into becomes clear in the dialogue with the wife:

Wife: What is this confusion!... Do you understand what you are saying?

Detective: No...

Wife: Nor I... I don't understand...

Detective: Actually, I don't understand what I was saying... It seems to be meaningless...

Wife: Of course." (126-127).

It seems evident that discourse failures throughout the play cause the confusion that the detective feels about the reality of the absence of the wife. Discourse failures in *The Tree Climber* mostly come as a result of the overlap of time and place which Al-Hakim professionally interjects to confuse the detective and readers. The fact that the wife is present and absent at the same time is symbolic. It manipulates reality and makes understanding the truth that the Detective seeks more difficult.

Detective: But I came here, because you went out of the house, and you were absent and disappeared....

Wife: But you saw me and my husband here talking to each other....

Detective: Yes, I saw that with my own eyes and heard with my own ears....

Wife: this must have happened....as you are confirming that you have seen him by your own eyes and heard him by your own ears....

Detective: I'm sure and confident....

Wife: since you have seen me here with your own eyes, and you have heard me with your ear talking to my husband and he is talking to me, why did you proceed to investigate the matter of my absence and my disappearance?..... (135-136).

The husband confirmed incomprehension to the Detective through his confession of killing his wife, "There is no doubt that this pleases her, that her whole body turns into fertilizer... a good-quality fertilizer that nourishes this tree, producing a great-growing orange, and it is she who is very interested in great growth"(Al-Hakim 1962, 60). Through the paradox of understanding and non-understanding, Al-Hakim emphasized that his characters do not feel any affection for each other, "the husband is a symbol of art busy with the fruits of his production, and the wife is busy with the fruit of life that she aborted prematurely" (Mandour 2004, 149).

Discourse failures in Al-Hakim's *The Tree climber* are generated as a result of rejecting the traditional tale framework through which Al-Hakim is able to convey how absurd our reality may be. He puts his characters in absurd, out-of-nowhere, stupid circumstances, and so the discourse failures are established. Al-Hakim skilfully presents time, place, and identity as all fluid in absurdist writing. It gives the author a chance to surprise and entertain his audience. This is reflected in the overlap of time and space. In the beginning, the play starts in the present, but soon the flow of this present is interrupted, so we go through another time, the past, to show us how Bahadur and Bahana are in harmony, but in fact they were talking inconsistently.

The characters fail to communicate as a result of how the place also overlaps in this play. It is, on the one hand, related to the external natural world, and on the other, we find it embodiment of the inner, subjective world. For example, Bahadur is present with the Detective, and then at the same time we see him on the train in which he was an inspector, which moves the readers to his past life before he retired. The past included another time, the future. For example, Darwish predicts the accident of Bahadur's killing of his wife, Bahana. And then this future, in the second act of the play, turns into a past time.

The abolition of space and time separators is also noticed in the image of the fruiting of the tree, which gives oranges in winter, apricots in spring, figs in summer, and pomegranates in autumn. The same is true about the train which does not stop. This is embodied in the dialogue between the Inspector and Darwish:

Inspector: (to Darwish): From which station did you get the train, Si Al-Sheikh?

Darwish: I did not get it from any station.

Inspector: You mean you got the train on the way?

Darwish: Of course

Inspector: Was the train stopping or slowly moving?

Darwish: it was moving as usual (79).

We notice no separations between times and places. The past, present, and future are all times merged in one time, just as in one place the sounds coming from separate places, such as the whistle of the train and the song of the tree climber are mixed together. This overlap created discourse failures and confusion for the reader. Here, the goal of Al-Hakim appears in making the reader in constant search for the meaning of what is happening in front of him even after the play ends.

Waiting for Godot

Waiting for Godot by Samuel Beckett is characterized by being a play in which nothing happens. Estragon and Vladimir, two tramps, spend the entire play anticipating the coming of someone named Godot, who never arrives. While they wait, they talk about everything from Jesus to suicide, among other topics. The presence of two characters, a master and a slave, graces the stage, only to disappear and reappear now and then. There's also a young boy who is supposed to convey Godot's messages to Estragon and Vladimir.

Waiting for Godot is a literal and prime example of the theatre of the absurd. Different things help to the creation of an absurdist tragedy in *Waiting for Godot*. The play is full of ridiculous lines, play on words, meaningless speeches, and characters who unexpectedly shift emotions and fail to recall everything, extending from who they are to what occurred yesterday. Samuel Beckett has chosen to write in a language that constantly emphasizes the absurdity and chaos of the universe, and the isolation and misery of man. In his play *Waiting for Godot*, he shows how language is the most basic kind of deceit. According to Oteywey, Becket "demonstrates that language is the fundamental means of deception" (2016, 63). His language, on the other hand, is employed as a system that contributes to establishing new and creative modes of expression that provoke readers' awareness and understanding of the world.

Because Beckett utilizes language to demonstrate its importance in human life, the characters' speech patterns, such as recurring vocabulary, pronoun changes, sound effects, and so on, reinforce the play's primary themes and mixed tone. For example, discourse failures serve to emphasize the monotony and absurdity that pervade the play.

The general feeling in *Waiting for Godot* is that of fragmentary language, which mirrors the objective of absurd theatre. Discourse failure defines what an absurdist thinks about life in the way that it does. The functions of language as a means of communication and as a means of thought are reflected in Beckett's use of words. This is because in a world empty of ethics, integrity, and virtues, there can be no defined meanings. To become a representation of static life, he has opted to write in a language devoid of content. He portrays language as incapable of expressing human thought, understanding the world, or defining oneself. In his play, Beckett embodied the meaninglessness of modern life and human suffering. Ghanim Obeyed Oteiwiy in his article "Language in *Waiting for Godot*" indicates that "language has lost its function as a means of conveying thoughts...dialogue, like all actions, becomes a mere game not to convey the thought but to pass time" (2012, 20)

Beckett's first words in the play, 'Nothing to be done', early advises the reader of the lack of actions and establishes his patterning by making lack of actions reflected on the type of the language used in the play to emphasize the endless circularity of the play. The cyclic structure of the play is shown in the fact that the events in Act II largely repeat and parallel those of Act I. Ihab Hassan points out "the inaction of the play is cyclical, and its events are endlessly repetitious; its two acts are symmetric, both equal images of an absence. Two acts, as Samuel Beckett knew, are enough to represent a sequence stretching to infinity" (1967, 176).

With its growing leaves, the tree in Beckett's play represents the passage of time (Worton 2008, 81). On the first day, two more men come to visit the two tramps, the dominant Pozzo and his obedient servant Lucky. The third visitor is a boy who declares every day that Godot will not come today, but that he will surely come tomorrow. On the second day, Vladimir and Estragon do not remember the first day very well. But there are subtle differences: the tree lays its leaves, and Pozzo becomes blind. Beckett does not mention how long Vladimir and Estragon were waiting for Godot. Maybe just a couple of days, but it could be their whole life fifty years or more. They become more confused and more desperate.

VLADIMIR: Was I sleeping, while the others suffered? Am I sleeping now? Tomorrow, when I wake, or think I do, what shall I say of today? That with Estragon my friend, at this place, until the fall of night, I waited for Godot? That Pozzo passed, with his carrier, and that he spoke to us? Probably. But in all that what truth will there be? (86)

Beckett also here involves readers in constant quest for the meaning. Vladimir himself who is supposed to be more intellectual than Estragon and has a better memory, and he's more logical fails to understand and feel himself. Unfortunately, while Vladimir cerebrally exploring this, he is busy ignoring Pozzo's cries for help from the ground. While Vladimir may understand suffering intellectually, he certainly cannot deal with it emotionally or practically, which is likely why hearing other people's pain is

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so difficult for him: he messes with his concept of reality. He can't keep the idea of suffering abstract if he has to watch it happen before his eyes.

It seems that discourse failures in Becket's *Waiting for Godot* are caused not only by manipulating time, but also by emotional inadequacy. Both Vladimir and Estragon spend half of their time discussing whether they should be friends or if they would be better off apart. They never really come to any solution, as we anticipate from the play. The nature of their friendship, like everything else in *Waiting for Godot*, is ambiguous; the only certainty is its ambiguity. It seems that Vladimir refusal to get closer to Estragon stems from his strong reactions to see others suffering. The dialogue below shows the way he reacts when Estragon wants to discuss his "private nightmares":

ESTRAGON: (restored to the horror of his situation) I was asleep! (Despairingly) Why will you never let me sleep?

VLADIMIR: I felt lonely.

ESTRAGON: I had a dream.

VLADIMIR: Don't tell me!

ESTRAGON: I dreamt that—

VLADIMIR: DON'T TELL ME!

ESTRAGON: (gesture toward the universe) This one is enough for you? (Silence.) It's not nice of you, Didi. Who am I to tell my private nightmares to if I can't tell them to you?

VLADIMIR: Let them remain private. You know I can't bear that (11-12).

In *Waiting for Godot*, suffering is present all the time. It is a constant state of being. All the characters are always suffering. This results in a lack of interest in each other's misery. Vladimir refuses to listen to Estragon's dreams because Vladimir is unable to identify and understand Estragon's needs, which the need to be heard is one of them. However, Vladimir himself is unable to understand what he desires from himself which make it difficult to understand the needs of Estragon. Lack of awareness of others' emotions can not only impart feelings of lonesomeness and uncertainty, but also results in discourse failure.

Repeated words and utterances in the speeches of the characters describe the same confused, unsatisfied but determined men in speech of realizing the world and themselves through their narratives. Concerning the reaching to their quest, all the characters waver between hope and despair. They declare their optimism for development and advancement in their search, only to contradict themselves by sliding into despair, yet they are late in rekindling their hope. Language becomes a murmuring sound to them, meaningless and empty. The repetition of "nothing to be done" in the play can be interpreted as the emotional and psychological confusion experienced by the burdened Estragon and Vladimir during their waiting. It cannot be tolerated getting up every day with little hope of a better future. Both men are disappointed by their state in life.

To pass the time and provide the idea that they exist, Beckett's characters use nonsensical language. However, Beckett's language depicts man as puzzled, disoriented, and lost. Despite his desire for

knowledge, man has just the words of his speech, which are insufficient. Because each word is surrounded by the overtones of its own past, words are poorly suited to knowledge. Words fall short of capturing the essence of reality. Beckett's use of language is intended to reduce language as a vehicle for conceptual thought and ready-made solutions to the human condition's problems. Meaningful discourse is missing from his writings.

Answering questions with a question is a deliberate device used by Beckett to break down the communication in the play, which can have a variety of meanings. It is possible that the person being asked the question does not understand what the questioner saying. Or he understands but is attempting to divert attention away from the fact that he does not have an answer to provide. It is possible that he is trying to have more time to think about the answer. The process of answering the question with a question results in discourse failure and diminishes the human willingness to continue the conversation. The purpose of asking a question is either to get an answer or to be sure about something.

VLADIMIR: And they didn't beat you?

ESTRAGON: Beat me? Certainly they beat me.

VLADIMIR: The same lot as usual?

ESTRAGON: The same? I don't know (5).

It seems that Estragon is confused and trying to recall what happened to him last night. Both men appear disoriented in their strange surroundings due to their inability to locate themselves due to their deteriorated memories, and their lack of recollection appears to be emblematic of the bizarre world they live in. Furthermore, their failure to recollect the prior day leaves the audience wondering how many times act one has occurred.

One of the fundamental features of the absurdity is the communication failure. Beckett shaped his dialogue out of the stylized breakdown of hyper literary styles. A crisis of thought is accompanied by a crisis of language, in which words have lost their meaning. In *Waiting for Godot*, the use of pauses and silences marks discourse failure. There are 53 instances of 'pause' and 56 times of 'silence' throughout act one. In act two, the number of instances of 'silence' and 'pause' rises to 118 and 84, respectively. These seconds of silence and pause are the key moments of Beckett's drama in which something important is intentionally left unsaid. Richard Gilman indicates that the silences or pauses "test the extremes of human behaviour: they are the silences of resistance, of terrified and of outrage." (1998, 237).

ESTRAGON: (gently.) You wanted to speak to me? (**Silence**. Estragon takes a step forward.) You had something to say to me? (**Silence**. Another step forward.) Didi...

VLADIMIR: (without turning). I've nothing to say to you. ESTRAGON: (step forward). You're angry? (**Silence**. Step forward). Forgive me. (**Silence**. Step forward. Estragon lays his hand on Vladimir's shoulder.) Come, Didi. (**Silence**.) Give me your hand. (Vladimir half turns.) Embrace me! (Vladimir stiffens.) Don't be stubborn! (Vladimir softens. They embrace. (12-13)

Beckett dramatizes silence and pause, considering them as useful and eloquent practices that emphasize the themes of his plays. He demonstrates that out of the unspoken language one can get a lot.

Vladimir and Estragon struggle in silence to undergo the challenge of the need to speak and the need to be. In *Waiting for Godot*, pauses and silences indicate the fact that language for the absurdists is no longer central. It is impotent and incapable to convey meaning. Pauses and silences portray discourse failure, the gap between self and self, as well as self and others. People lose their ability to understand and to communicate. That is the common crisis of modern people, in which things like understanding and interacting with one another have no place. The idea that language is an ambiguous and a meaningless tool that individuals use to repress their inner discomfort is depicted through pauses and silences. In Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*, pauses and silences signal a break in the discourse.

Conclusion

This paper spots the light on the relationship of discourse failures, literary aesthetics and absurdity as a subject valuable in its own right. It raises important questions about the critical role of discourse failure in the absurd theatre. Discourse failure establishes the absurdity of life of modern man due to lack of meaningful communication between characters. It provides a more valid understanding of the texts examined. The study of discourse failure, in the selected plays, adds to the meanings and artistic effect of the plays. The study also provides a framework for understanding texts and their relationship to human identity and existence.

In both texts, discourse failure and absurdity are closely linked. Nevertheless, it is indicated that language for the absurdists is no more significant. It is useless and is not able to convey any meaning. *The Tree Climber* and *Waiting for Godot* have one major and well-recognized similarity: a complete lack of order or logic. This can be noted not only in the plot but also in the characters of the plays themselves. Discourse failure, in both plays, hinders the plot forward which more significantly helps the reader to understand the absurd, nihilistic world in which the plays are framed. Although the two plays do this in very different ways, the result is the same: to present for the readers and audience a world devoid of order, logic, or reason. Both plays employ discourse failure in such a way that it emphasizes the notion that *The Tree Climber* and *Waiting for Godot* are both absurd plays.

In *Waiting for Godot* and *The Tree Climber*, both writers address the issue of the elusiveness of the self, beginning with the characters' loss of contact with their familiar self and with the world that they previously knew, which causes to them considerable anxiety. Both plays intertwine with the place of the event and the evasiveness of meanings and concepts. Discourse failures in both plays manifest how the vocabulary of the absurd dramatic construction is a significant device, where what is known as the dramatic event in the structure of the theatrical text is replaced by the dramatic case, and the dramatic discourse is based on the request for logic in an absurd medium, where the action contradicts the saying, and the silence is equivalent to the speech; aiming for confusion where the dramatic situation does not end with a change.

The discourse failure is used by Beckett and Al-Hakim to explain the threats and meaninglessness of life. As a result, language is being utilized as a trap. To show a world of chaos that mocks established

institution and conformity, they replace traditional plot and structure with fragmented, conflicting, and frequently nonsensical conversation.

It can be concluded that Al-Hakim in *The Tree Climber* was undoubtedly inspired by Western absurd dramatists, yet his play differed substantially from western examples of absurd drama in form, meaning and impact. Al-Hakim displays a playful attitude towards time and space and is more concerned with demonstrating the absurdity of rational discourse than with the construction of any systematized world view. Becket's *Waiting for Godot* provides a more pessimistic and nihilistic approach. Vladimir and Estragon are vividly aware that all they can or are willing to do in life is wait for Godot together endlessly which make them discuss suicide in Act 1 and Act 2.

The analysis of the two plays above generates the question whether the East and the West can accept the idea that the thoughts of each are not as divergent as they may appear. Al-Hakim's *The Tree Climber* shows that reconciliation between the two cultures, Eastern and Western, in the fields of literature and philosophy is possible and natural. Al-Hakim uses in his play *The Tree Climber* a familiar Egyptian folklore song to introduce Western ideas, specifically those of the theatre of the absurd. Bahadur and Bahana are challenged with the meaninglessness of the duties they are involved in and yet, in their struggle, they found in life's absurdity and its meaninglessness a purpose to live for. *The Tree Climber* is known today as an important example which introduces the Arab public to a new genre that was once unfamiliar. It could be that Al-Hakim was interested in introducing ideas and beliefs he admired from different cultures. His purpose was to introduce these ideas in his own writings.

Al-Hakim was preoccupied with the search for purpose and meaning, as well as the search for an Arab identity in light of the many philosophies of his time. Shereen Shaw indicates that Al-Hakim "believed that there is a meaning in life, but he agreed that we have to have "faith" to believe so, and al-Hakim added that we must not forget the limits of our knowledge as human beings" (2015, 177). Therefore, according to him what man can do is try to search for meaning by himself, despite the absurdity and meaninglessness of his life. Man may find the solution by constructing his own meaning and meanwhile accepting his limitations.

فشل الخطاب كعنصر جمالي في المسرح العبثي: دراسة مقارنة لمسرحيتي (في انتظار جودو) لصموئيل بيكيت و(يا طالع الشجرة) لتوفيق الحكيم

محمد العبد الرزاق، مأمون الزعبي
قسم اللغة الانجليزية وآدابها جامعة البلقاء التطبيقية، الأردن

الملخص

الهدف من هذه الدراسة هو تسليط الضوء على دور فشل الخطاب في المسرح العبثي وإثبات كيف يمكن استعماله استعمالاً فعالاً كونه وسيلة جمالية تعزز الفعالية البراغماتية للتواصل من خلال جذب انتباه الجمهور. تتناول الدراسة مسرحيتين تنتميان إلى المسرح العبثي ؛ (يا طالع الشجرة) لتوفيق الحكيم و(في انتظار جودو) لصموئيل بيكيت، وتبين الدراسة كيف أن فشل الخطاب لا يستخدمه كل من بيكيت والحكيم استخداماً عفويّاً، فلقد أُستعمل كونه أداة للكشف عن تأثيره الجمالي والديناميكي على القارئ، ويحاول كلا الكاتبين الاستحضار والتحكم ليس فقط في التركيز الفعلي للجمهور، ولكن أيضاً في طريقة إدراكه، ومزاجه، الذي لا يتم توجيهه نحو أشياء ملموسة، بل نحو أشياء لها علاقة بإحساسه العام.

الكلمات المفتاحية: يا طالع الشجرة، في انتظار جودو، فشل الخطاب، المسرح العبثي.

Endnotes

¹ This and all subsequent quotes from the play are the authors' translation from the original Arabic text.

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Discourse Failure as an Aesthetic Motif in the Absurd Theatre: A Comparative Study of Samuel Becket's *Waiting for Godot* and Tawfiq Al-Hakim's *The Tree Climber*

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