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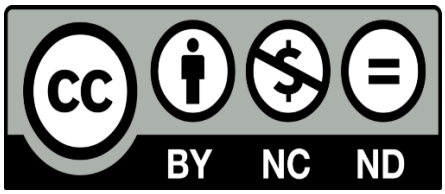

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EDITORIAL

Among the Senufos from the north of Côte d'Ivoire, the sacred grove is called "Sinzang". The first of these would date from the time of the patriarch and leader of Korhogo SORO Zouakagnon (1840-1894). It is the tutelary space of the initiatory institute of the secret society: the Poro. These sacred forests exist in all the villages of the region and are highly protected and managed. The proof is that in their midst, adolescents perform the rite of passage leading them to the age of maturity. The "Sinzang" is also the centre of intergenerational knowledge transmission. Thus, the teaching of ancestral knowledge, ontology and cosmogony-contributing to the future spiritual, moral and social formation of the Senufo elite-is associated with this pantheon.

In line with this pedagogical and academic logic, the SINZANG Journal aims to promote African and Western humanities in Literature, Language, Communication and Education Sciences. To do this, it is part of a process of promoting the reflections and studies conducted by Teachers-Researchers and Researchers for the sustainable development of society.

As distinctive signs of "Sinzang", Jacqueline DELANGE, in *Arts et peuple Sénoufo de l'Afrique noire*, identifies among others the huts, earth cones and statues (masks). The visual identity of this magazine presents two masks, one symbolizing ancestral knowledge and the other Western science. The two facing the entrance of a sacred hut express the encounter of diverse knowledge put at the service of humanity. *In fine*, they export to other horizons, hence the idea of huts in perspective.

SINZANG is a pluridisciplinary and biannual peer-reviewed scientific journal. It is published in English and French but also accepts work written in German and Spanish. Moreover, depending on the requests made at the discretion of its review committee, it may issue special thematic publications and conference proceedings.

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ÉDITORIAL

Chez les Sénoufos du nord de la Côte d'Ivoire, le bosquet sacré est communément appelé « Sinzang ». Les premiers du genre dateraient de l'époque du patriarche et chef de Korhogo SORO Zouakagnon (1840-1894). C'est l'espace tutélaire de l'institut initiatique de la société secrète : le Poro. Lieux fortement protégés et aménagés à l'envi, ces forêts sacrées existent dans tous les villages de la région. La preuve en est qu'en leur sein, les adolescents effectuent le rite de passage les amenant à l'âge de la maturité. Le « Sinzang » est aussi le haut lieu de la transmission de la connaissance intergénérationnelle. Ainsi, l'enseignement du savoir ancestral, de l'ontologie et la cosmogonie- contribuant à la formation spirituelle, morale et sociale de l'élite Sénoufo de demain-est associé à ce panthéon.

S'inscrivant dans cette logique pédagogique et académique, la Revue SINZANG ambitionne de faire la promotion des humanités tant africaine qu'occidentale dans le domaine de la Littérature, des Sciences du Langage, de la Communication et de l'Éducation. Pour ce faire, elle s'inscrit dans une démarche de vulgarisation des réflexions et des études menées par les Enseignants-Chercheurs et des Chercheurs pour le développement durable de la société.

Comme signes distinctifs du « Sinzang », Jacqueline DELANGE, dans *Arts et peuple Sénoufo de l'Afrique noire*, identifie entre autres les cases, les cônes en terre et les statues (masques). L'identité visuelle de cette revue présentant deux masques, l'un symbolisant le savoir ancestral et l'autre la science occidentale. Les deux se faisant face à l'entrée d'une case sacrée expriment la rencontre de connaissances diverses mis au service de l'humanité. In fine, elles s'exportent vers d'autres horizons ; d'où l'idée des cases en perspective.

SINZANG est une revue pluridisciplinaire à comité de lecture et scientifique. Elle est bilingue : éditée en anglais et en français. Mais elle accepte également les travaux écris en allemand et en espagnol. C'est une revue semestrielle, tenant deux parutions l'an. Au demeurant, elle peut

procéder, selon les demandes ou les sollicitations formulées à l'appréciation de son comité de lecture, à des parutions spéciales thématiques et à la diffusion d'actes de colloque.

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NEGOTIATING THE MEANING OF ABSURDITY IN SAMUEL BECKETT'S *WAITING FOR GODOT*

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ABSTRACT

This article describes how negotiating meaning and absurdity interact in Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*. It identifies contexts where meaning emerges from absurd linguistic productions. Using P. Grice's (1975) Cooperative Principles and J. Derrida's (1967) Deconstruction Theory, the study shows that meaning is dynamic: speakers assign their own semantics, creating a polysemic setting where the speaker's model seems absurd to the hearer. Absurdity manifests through contradictions, paradoxes, circular and repetitive speech, non-sequiturs, ambiguity, and vagueness. These features create semantic gaps in communication. However, negotiating meaning through misdirection, deflection, reformulation, redundancy, humour, irony, and extralinguistic items helps bridge those gaps triggered by polysemic absurdity.

Keywords: absurdity, ambiguity, meaning, negotiation, vagueness.

NÉGOCIER LE SENS DE L'ABSURDITÉ DANS EN ATTENDANT GODOT DE SAMUEL BECKETT

RÉSUMÉ

Cet article décrit comment la négociation du sens et l'absurde interagissent dans *En attendant Godot* de Samuel Beckett. Il identifie les contextes où le sens émerge à partir de productions linguistiques qualifiées d'absurdes. En s'appuyant sur les Principes de coopération de P. Grice (1975) et la déconstruction de J. Derrida (1967), l'étude montre que le sens est dynamique: le locuteur attribue sa propre sémantique, créant un cadre polysémique où son modèle de communication paraît absurde à l'auditeur. L'absurde se manifeste par des contradictions, des paradoxes, des discours circulaires et répétitifs, des non-sequiturs, l'ambiguïté et le flou. Ces traits créent des fossés sémantiques dans la communication. Cependant, la négociation du sens, par la diversion, la reformulation, la redondance, l'humour, l'ironie et les éléments extralinguistiques, aide à combler ces fossés de compréhension déclenchés par la polysémie de l'absurde.

Mots-clés : absurde, ambiguïté, flou sémantique, négociation, sens

INTRODUCTION

Samuel Beckett's (1952) *Waiting for Godot* is a play that pictures the existential disillusionment and uncertainties of the post-war period. This dramatic text displays a narrative of perpetual waiting, absurdity and resilience. Fundamental to this absurdity is Beckett's innovative use of language characterised by contradictions, paradoxes, and utterances that defy conventional communication logic. These linguistic forms are labelled as nonsensical or incoherent, though they stand for a philosophical strategy. This philosophical setting is nothing but the questioning of meaning and communication through linguistic indeterminacy.

Language is the means by which human beings communicate and negotiate understanding. According to contexts and interlocutors, specific linguistic agreements and requirements are set in order to facilitate exchanges. However, in *Waiting for Godot*, these agreements are constantly disrupted. The disruption stems either from the inability of the speakers to reach consensus or from their deliberate deflection of established communication norms. Such a breakdown of linguistic rules does not simply produce nonsense; it rather stands as a marker of the existential condition of the characters and represents the human quest for meaning in an apparently meaningless world. This aesthetic and philosophical context triggers this study which is framed as "Negotiating the Meaning of Absurdity in Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*".

Absurdity refers to the clash between human attempts to communicate meaning and the inherent instability or silence of the structures they rely upon. In *Waiting for Godot,* this absurdity manifests in various forms, including circular and repetitive speech, non-sequiturs, ambiguity and vagueness. Such linguistic manifestations of absurdity align with the notion that communication is not a transparent medium but a site of struggle over meaning. This struggle reflects the tension between language as a tool of coherence and language as a revelation of existential incoherence.

Absurdity has been catalyst for several studies two of which are by M. Esslin (1961) and R. Cohn (1973). Starting with M. Esslin (1961), he links *Waiting for Godot* to the Theatre of the Absurd. He describes its circular dialogue and fragmented exchanges as a portrait of existential disillusionment. R. Cohn (1973) additionally catalogues Beckett's repetitive and symmetrical speech patterns. She argues that these

patterns create stillness through linguistic means. However, these studies describe the nature of absurdity. They do not explain how meaning is negotiated within broken exchanges. This study therefore fills this gap. It applies Grice (1975) and Derrida (1967) to show that absurdity and negotiation are intrinsically linked.

M. Long (1996, pp. 418–419) defines negotiation of meaning as a process where speakers seek "mutual understanding" through "modified interaction." He identifies "clarification requests, confirmation checks, and comprehension checks" as key signals for smooth communication. However, M. Long (1996) examines negotiation in cooperative second language contexts, not when speakers violate norms as in absurdist drama. This article study therefore fills this gap. It applies M. Long's (1996) framework to Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*. It shows that even when language breaks down, characters still negotiate meaning through repetition, reformulation, and misdirection.

T. Pica (1994) investigates negotiation of meaning in second language learning. She finds that strategies such as clarification requests, confirmation checks, and repetition help learners access meaning. D. Tuggy (1993) studies ambiguity, polysemy, and vagueness. He argues that semantic indeterminacy is not a failure but a continuum. It requires active interpretive work. However, his study does not examine negotiation when speakers deliberately violate communicative norms. The two settings approached by T. Pica (1994) and D. Tuggy (1993) situation are exactly what happens in absurdist drama. Consequently, the present study fills this gap. It extends their insights into Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*. It shows that negotiation strategies bridge the semantic gaps created by polysemy and absurdity.

The study relies on several questions, the principal of which is: to what extent do the notions of negotiating meaning and absurdity comply with one another in *Waiting for Godot?* The subsidiary questions which back up the main question stand as follows: what are the linguistic markers of absurdity in Beckett's play? What are the strategies through which the meaning of absurdity is negotiated? These questions can be answered through the following research objectives, the main of which is: to describe that negotiating meaning and absurdity are intrinsically linked. The subsidiary objectives are first to analyse that absurd language abides by numerous semantic and pragmatic strategies. The second subsidiary objective is to interpret that negotiating meaning compensates the semantic gaps absurdity creates.

The theoretical ground on which this study relies is P. Grice's (1975) Cooperative Principles and J. Derrida's (1967) Deconstruction. Grice's maxims highlight how communication is expected to occur, while Derrida's emphasises how meaning is endlessly deferred and unstable. In *Waiting for Godot*, the characters' interactions show how the collapse of communicative norms paradoxically produces new possibilities of meaning through negotiation. Thus, absurd language pictures meaning as both elusive and negotiable. In a two-part investigation, the study first describes the various semantic manifestations of absurdity. The second part focuses on interpreting the fact that negotiating meaning bridges the semantic gaps triggered absurdity.

1-SEMANTIC MANIFESTATIONS OF ABSURDITY

In Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot,* the threshold between what is semantically odd and acceptable is not straightforwardly defined. The characters resort to existing but improper linguistic items which do not fit the context or fail to communicate a clear-cut meaning. The misuse or miscommunication of meaning triggers absurdity. As a matter of fact, in a given interaction, participants who are outside the context of the communication may find some linguistic productions absurd. The absurd quality, of these productions, dwells in the fact that logic or rationality in conversation moves and depends on the context in which it occurs. Only the speakers have the ability to attribute meaning on the linguistic items they use.

The ability of the speaker to be the only one who can stick meanings on the language items his/her linguistic production recalls P. Grice's (1969) concept of *speaker meaning*. It suggests what a speaker intends to communicate by producing an utterance, beyond the literal or conventional meaning of the words used. In the light of this concept, speakers fix meaning by relying on their backgrounds which include education, religion, beliefs, philosophy or social nets. Contextual meaning is what constitutes the oddness of the overall communication in the corpus. The oddness of the semantic landscape of the corpus manifests through two linguistic phenomena which are ambiguity and vagueness.

1.1-Perceiving Ambiguity through Absurdity

For S. Löbner (2013, p. 39), "ambiguity stands for a term used to characterise linguistic phenomena that have more than one meaning. Those meanings are distinct from one another and have no close features in common." In simpler words, ambiguity suggests the

ability of a linguistic item, be it a word, a phrase, a sentence or a structure to bear at least two meanings. In the Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*, ambiguity is a trigger of absurdity and vice versa. It manifests through several types which are lexical ambiguity, metaphorical, morphological ambiguity, referential and structural or syntactic ambiguity.

1-1.1. Lexical Ambiguity as a Manifestation of Absurdity

Referring to R. Trask (2007, p. 37) "lexical ambiguity results merely from the existence of two different meanings for a single word". This definition means that lexical ambiguity can be a word or a phrase which involves two lexical items that have identical forms, but have distinct or unrelated meanings. An example of lexical ambiguity is:

> You should have seen the bull we got from the Pope. The sentence is ambiguous, because the word bull may stand for several distinct things either a male animal of different kinds, a swearword or an official order or statement from the Pope. But, as ambiguity is context dependent lexical disambiguation (knowing which word meaning has been used) is quite easy in most cases when considering previous expectations and context (G. Chierchia & G. McConnell, 1993, p. 32).

This example works as a chart which helps identify lexical ambiguity from the corpus. The data which refer to this category of ambiguity are data (1), (2), (3), (4) and (5). They are developed as follows:

(1) "Nothing to be done." [Act I, p. 7][27]

The lexical item 'nothing' in 'Nothing to be done' expresses a lexical ambiguity. As a matter of fact, the polysemous 'nothing' may express an existential void, the futility of human venture and the impossibility of progress. The speaker compresses within a single signifier both a banal observation and a philosophical meditation. This semantic overlapping suggests two divergent semantic layers. Relying on P. Grice (1975), the contradictory semantic relation in (1) constitutes a violation of the maxim of Quantity, since the contribution is less informative than the communicative situation seems to require.

The fact of being less informative does not merely obstruct communication; rather, it displaces interpretive responsibilities onto the audience who are bound to negotiate between contradictory semantic possibilities. Absurdity, perceived under such perspectives, does not emerge from pure nonsense, but from the over-determination of meaning. The structure 'nothing to be done' therefore exemplifies

[27]The overall data from the corpus which backs up the development is introduced that way.

how lexical ambiguity threatens communication by providing a semantic umbrella nature to lexical items as 'nothing' exemplifies for that peculiar case.

(2) "We are waiting for Godot." [Act I, p. 10]

The utterance 'We are waiting for Godot' gives room for lexical ambiguity the focus of which is put on 'we', 'waiting' and 'Godot'. As far as the item 'we' is concerned, it triggers many interpretations which make the delamination of its semantic range tougher. The difficulty dwells in the fact that 'we' can embed at least two persons, a whole village, city, people or even a whole country. This interpretative set of 'we' is just a droplet in the definition of its semantic span. Then, two persons, a whole village, a city, a people or even a whole country is waiting for Godot. This set may appear odd but not false since there is no extralinguistic markers which help restrain the semantic volatility of 'we' and at the same time the one of the whole structure.

Tackling the item 'waiting', it generates two distinct semantic orientations. The first one denotes the concrete act of anticipating the arrival of an absent interlocutor who is Godot. This act rouses the idea of interpersonal pragmatics[28]. The second interpretation of the item 'waiting' triggers in (2) is the reference to an existential condition of perpetual suspension in which human beings' existence itself is defined by expecting a perpetually postponed event. This dual semantic horizon destabilises the semantic equilibrium of the utterance. The element 'Godot' also works in putting the semantic steadiness of (2) at stake. As a matter of fact, the referent 'Godot' is never disclosed. He may be a literal character, a political authority, a theological saviour, or an allegory of human hope. However, the absence of specification gives the name the label of signifier without a signified.

In Derridean terms, 'Godot' exemplifies différance[29], a sign the meaning of which is infinitely deferred and never straightforwardly present. Pragmatically, in the

[28] Interpersonal pragmatics is a subfield of pragmatics, which itself is a branch of linguistics. While pragmatics broadly studies how context influences the interpretation of meaning in language, interpersonal pragmatics focuses specifically on the social and relational functions of language. Those functions describe and explain how people use language to manage relationships, negotiate social roles in the regulation of communication and interactions.

[29]J. Derrida (1963, p. 460) coins the term "*différance"* . The term is a deliberate misspelling of the French word *différence*, which means both "difference" and "deferral". This play on words stresses J. Derrida's (1963) argument that meaning in language is not fixed or inherent but is produced through a dynamic interplay of differences and temporal deferrals.

logic of P. Grice (1975) utterance (2) violates the maxim of manner as it intentionally triggers obscurity rather and hazes clarity. The absurd in this datum is then inscribed in the impossibility of securing a stable referent. This impossibility in sticking a proper referent to 'Godot' makes the act of waiting the only certainty.

(3) "We always find something, eh Didi, to give us the impression we exist?" [Act II, p. 44]

Datum three vehicles a case of lexical ambiguity through the use of the indefinite word 'something.' Usually, 'something' functions as a placeholder term when the speaker either cannot or does not specify a concrete referent. Its use within this utterance suggests a set of ambiguous interpretations. This set of interpretations of something epitomises in any physical or intelligible activity such as eating rice, taking off a boot, exchanging smiles or transferring ideas. In Gricean terminologies, the utterance (3) transgresses the maxim of quantity as it withholds essential information and compels interlocutors to reconstruct the intended referent.

(4) "Yes, in this immense confusion, one thing alone is clear. We are waiting for Godot to come." [Act I, p. 76]

The semantic instability of datum (4) manifests through the items 'immense' and 'clear'. Starting with the item 'immense', it gives rooms for several interpretations which are: physically vast, but also intense, too great to handle, the quantity of confusion or the quality, beyond all limits or something very large compared to ordinary proportions. As far as 'clear' is concerned, delimitating its semantic range can be twofold. The first range refers to a more epistemic transparency[30] which calls for clarity as factual certainty. The second range suggests an affective conviction[31] which may be epitomised in clarity as a subjective belief. However, it is impossible to decide which sense is operative in this particular context. This utterance flouts the Grecian's (1975) maxim of quality, because the speaker asserts certainty without verifiable grounds.

(5) "It's always at nightfall." [Act I, p. 15]

The structure (5) suggests a case of lexical ambiguity triggered by the polysemic item 'always' which carries a two-fold interpretation. On the one hand, it functions as

[30] *Epistemic transparency* means that knowledge is presented in a way that is **open, clear, and checkable**, so that others can see *why* it counts as knowledge.
[31] *Affective conviction* means a **felt sense of certainty or belief**, something someone holds to be true because he *feels* it deeply, not necessarily because of rational evidence.

a quantifier which suggests habitual recurrence like 'the arrival of Godot is expected at the same time every day' in datum (1). On the other hand, within the repetitive temporality of the play, 'always' means an endless postponement, an indefinite repetition in which nightfall comes but 'Godot' never appears. The temporal structure is thus split, as the word simultaneously evokes recurrence and delay.

From a Derridean (1967) perspective, 'always' inscribes différance, since the signifier promises stability but delivers only delay. From the Gricean (1975) point of view, the statement (5) complies with cooperative principles but violates the maxim of quality. Indeed, the truth value[32] of (5) is unverifiable within the play. Then, 'always' is more than an adverb. It stands as a linguistic mechanism through which the linear temporality of things by picturing absurdity as the perpetual suspension of expectation.

1.1.2-Structural Ambiguity as a Manifestation of Absurdity

The foundational work on structural ambiguity is inextricably linked to N. Chomsky (1965, p. 3) and the generative grammar framework he established. He argued that ambiguity provides a critical window into the underlying mechanisms of the human language faculty. This critical window helps distinguish between "surface structure" which stands as the linear order of words and "deep structure", the abstract hierarchical organization of sentence constituents. In *Waiting for Godot*, traces of structural ambiguity are noticeable through datum (6) and (7).

(6): "Nothing to be done." [Act I, p. 7]

The structure 'Nothing to be done', is from a structural perspective, elliptical. This elision manifests with the omission of the subject position 'there'. The overall structure (6) could be reconstructed as 'There is nothing to be done' which stands as a more conventional and finite construction. Subsequently, the structure generates a set of interpretative openness which can be understood as a description of a factual state of something in which no action is possible. It can also mean 'doing nothing is the only thing to do'.

The ambiguity in datum (6) is not only semantic, but also structural. As a matter of fact, the syntax suggests a dual categorisation of meaning which annihilates the

[32] The concept of truth value is mainly associated with Gottlob Frege especially in his 1892 essay *On Sense and Reference*where he argues that the reference of a declarative sentence is its truth value either true or false.

stability of interpretation. Datum (6) also expresses a violation of P. Grice's (1975) maxim of quantity because it provides less information than expected in its structure. It displays no additional or extralinguistic information which could help fill the structural gap and avoid the violation. Then, the grammatical structure of datum (6) reveals how minimal variation in syntactic structure can increase interpretative ambiguity.

(7) "Let's go." [Act I, p. 10]

The structure "Let's go" displays a case of structural ambiguity that stands between a literal directive and a metaphorical exhortation. As an imperative construction, it conventionally functions to initiate a joint action involving both the speaker and the hearer. However, its meaning remains open to multiple interpretations depending on the context of interaction. It can be understood literally as an invitation to leave a place, while it may also function metaphorically as an encouragement to act, move forward, or embrace change.

The inclusive nature of "Let's go" contributes significantly to its ambiguity. Unlike prototypical imperatives that position the speaker as a giver of orders, this expression presents the proposed action as a shared undertaking. As noted by D. Crystal (2004), imperatives with inclusive reference occupy an intermediate position between directive force and collaborative suggestion. Consequently, "Let's go" may be interpreted either as a command carrying a sense of urgency or as a cooperative proposal seeking the hearer's agreement.

In *Waiting for Godot*, this ambiguity is reinforced by the discrepancy between speech and action. Although the characters repeatedly utter "Let's go," they remain motionless. The expression therefore loses its straightforward directive function and acquires a paradoxical dimension. It simultaneously signals the intention to depart and the inability to act upon that intention. This tension between linguistic meaning and physical inaction creates an absurd effect, making "Let's go" a striking example of how ambiguity contributes to the negotiation of meaning in the play.

The structural ambiguity in datum (7) can further be described through J. Searle's (1969) approach to pragmatics. He claims that speech acts depend on felicity conditions. In datum (7), the conditions for action which may be physical ability, willingness or context, are not met. This gap in the fulfilment of felicity conditions makes the imperative ineffective. The ambiguity therefore lies not only in syntax, but also in the pragmatic realisation. The contradictory result is that the command (7) is

grammatically intact, but communicatively void. Then, datum (7) suggests that linguistic structures can help encode potential actions without securing their performance.

1.1.3-Metaphoric Ambiguity as a Manifestation of Absurdity

According to W. Empson (1930), metaphoric ambiguity refers to a type of ambiguity that arises when a metaphor or a figure of speech used in a text can be interpreted in more than one way. Metaphoric ambiguity also refers to a situation where a word or a phrase is used in a metaphorical sense. In this kind of structure, the sentence or the utterance meaning is not straightforwardly decipherable because it can be interpreted in multiple ways. It occurs when the metaphorical use of language can be understood in more than one way, creating subsequent confusion as the speakers may be uncertain about the intended meaning. In *Waiting for Godot*, metaphoric ambiguities are epitomised in data (8), (9), (10), (11) and (12).

(8) "We're not saints, but we have kept our appointment." [Act I, p. 76]

In datum (8), the speakers Vladimir and Estragon stress that their punctuality in arriving at the designated spot contrast with figures of sanctity. Nevertheless, metaphorically, the noun 'appointment' stands as a polyvalent signifier. On the one hand, it denotes a scheduled meeting. On the other one, it suggests a fate-like obligation to which they remain bound. In this sense, datum (8) becomes a metaphor for humanity's relationship to destiny. G. Leech (1981) highlights the multiple layers of meaning in words that carry both denotative and connotative significance, and 'appointment' exemplifies this ambiguity. The ambiguity therefore arises from the impossibility of distinguishing between a pragmatic obligation and a metaphorical enactment of an existential duty.

(9) "Time has stopped." [Act I, p. 15]

Datum (9) is an utterance which exemplifies a destabilisation of temporal semantics. As a matter of fact, it could literally mean that a clock has ceased to function or that the characters perceive no change in their environment. Metaphorically, however, 'time' itself is treated as a dynamic force which is able to come to an end. The metaphor in (9) is in line with H. Bergson (1911) perception of time. He distinguishes two types of which are chronological time and lived duration. This reference to H. Bergson (9) helps understand that the metaphorical ambiguity in (9) fails to abide by the laws of a chronological time and lived duration as lived time becomes still. The

ambiguity lies in whether the utterance refers to a temporal illusion or to a metaphorical experience of existential paralysis.

(10) "We're tied." [Act I, p. 15]

The lexical item tied in datum (10) is semantically ambiguous because it denotes both literal and metaphorical states. On the literal level, it could refer to a physical bondage, such as being tied by ropes. On the metaphorical level, it could connote obligation, captivity, or any existential constraint. The existential constraint may be materialised by the fact that the interlocutors are bound not by ropes but by their condition, their waiting, their inability to leave. E. Goffman (1967) shows that interactional metaphors of 'binding' standardise social obligations, while G. Lakoff (1993) argues that metaphors of physical restraint are usually mapped onto abstract constraints. Then, the metaphorical ambiguity in (10) is triggered by the ability of (10) to evoke both the image of physical bondage and the metaphorical sense of humanity bound by destiny, futility or any other concept.

(11) "All mankind is us, whether we like it or not." [Act I, p. 15]

This utterance functions literally as a generalisation. Metaphorically, the pronoun 'us' shifts from an indexical reference to a universal symbol for humanity. E. Benveniste (1971) highlights the role of pronouns in creating subjectivity and collective identity. In this datum, the personal pronoun is expanded to encompass the whole mankind. D. Halliday (1978) further argues that language constructs social reality through metaphorical extension of categories. The ambiguity arises from whether 'us' refers strictly to the two speakers or metaphorically to humanity in its entirety, hence the destabilisation of person deixis.

(12) "The tears of the world are a constant quantity." [Act I, p. 15]

Datum (12) stands as an impossible claim about the total volume of tears. This claim pictures an image of fixed physical measurement. Metaphorically, 'tears' suggest suffering. The utterance suggests that the amount of human misery is unchanging, distributed differently across time and space. This idea is strengthened by G. Lakoff and M. Johnson (1980) for whom biological fluids serve as metaphors for emotion, and in (12) tears embody grief as quantifiable. Then, the impossibility of measuring 'the tears of the world' triggers a metaphorical wondering about the constancy of suffering. The ambiguity lies in whether utterance (12) describes a physical impossibility encodes an existential maxim.

1.2-Vagueness as Absurdity Trigger

D. Tuggy (1993, p. 167) defines vagueness as a linguistic phenomenon, where "two or more meanings associated with a given phonological form are united as non-distinguished subcases of a single, more general meaning". Then, vagueness involves a lexeme with a single but non-specific meaning. Thus, vagueness stems from a lack of precision in the meaning or reference of a term or phrase. Moreover, D. Tuggy (1993) sets a theory of 'fuzziness' that accounts for the vagueness one can find in natural language. He argues that fuzziness or vagueness arises from the fact that the categories one uses to organise the world around are not always clearcut. Instead, there are borderline cases that are difficult to classify. In the corpus, there are several manifestations of absurdity through vagueness. The following data express it:

(13) "Nothing to be done." [Act I, p. 7]

Datum (13) is an example of semantic vagueness in *Waiting for Godot*. On the surface, it fails to communicate a clearcut meaning on what is impossible to be done. The semantic range of the possibility of what is not able to be done is so wide that the readers cannot easily decipher the what 'nothing' refers to. Indeed, the indefinite pronoun 'nothing' is underspecified and context-dependent. According to J. Lyons (1995), vagueness arises when lexical items lack precise denotational boundaries. Moreover, the verbal structure 'to be done' is unspecified. It may refer to action in a narrow physical sense, or to a meaningful action in a philosophical sense. D. Sperber and D. Wilson's (1995) relevance theory suggest that the linguistic vagueness forces the audience or interlocutors into interpretive instability. They, through this theory, stipulate that hearers must deduce intended meaning from a range of possible contexts.

(14) "We're waiting for Godot." [Act I, p. 10]

Datum (14) expresses semantic vagueness because the referent 'Godot' is not identified and decipherable. Proper names normally refer to unique individuals however, 'Godot' lacks any stable referent. This hazy reference triggers radical indeterminacy. On a semantic approach, this semantic haziness, namely 'Godot' represents what S. Kripke (1980) calls a failure of rigid designation. The name 'Godot;' designates no identifiable entity in the extract (14). Then, the audience is left with a multiplicity of interpretations: 'Godot' could symbolise God, hope, salvation, all those possibilities or nothing at all. Moreover, the present progressive aspect 'we're waiting' carries an inherent vagueness. As a matter of fact, it implies an action in progress

without end and broadens temporality into an indefinite duration. In terms of the Gricean implicature, the expectation of an eventual arrival is continually broken. Then, the conversational maxim of relevance is suspended.

(15) "We always find something, eh Didi, to give us the impression we exist?" [Act II, p. 44]

Datum (15) expresses a semantic vagueness. This vagueness is primarily materialised through the item 'something'. As a matter of fact, 'something' is vague because it is non-specific and cannot match any slight activity such as eating a carrot, arguing, playing with friends. Then, there is a semantic failure in the expression of the meaning of 'something'. The second half of the utterance amplifies this effect. Indeed, existence is framed as an 'impression' which implies that the fact being is not stable but, dependent on perception or performance. This semantic stretching hazes the ordinary meaning of existence, hence the idea of vagueness.

2-Bridging Semantic Gaps: Strategies for Negotiating Meaning

According to H. Sacks *et al.,* (1974), negotiating meaning refers to the interactive process by which interlocutors adjust and repair utterances to maintain conversation. In this study, the expression 'negotiating meaning' refers to the interactive process by which interlocutors adjust, repair, and reinterpret utterances in order to reach a shared understanding, even when that understanding remains partial, provisional, or temporary. In Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* (1952), absurdity creates semantic gaps that block conventional communication. The characters do not nonetheless fall silent. They constantly attempt to negotiate meaning across those semantic gaps.

Drawing on the work of conversation analysts H. Sacks et *al.,* (1974), one can observe that even broken conversations follow implicit rules of repair and adjustment. In the corpus, four main strategies emerge for negotiating meaning across absurdity: misdirection and deflection, reformulation and redundancy, humour and irony, and the use of extra linguistic items. Each of these strategies helps the characters maintain a fragile form of communication despite the constant erosion of stable reference. This section describes each strategy in turn, provides linguistic evidence from the corpus, and explains how these strategies bridge the gaps that absurdity produces.

2.1-Misdirection and Deflection as Negotiation Strategies

Referring to J. Heritage (1984), misdirection and deflection are conversational strategies in which a speaker avoids answering a question directly or shifts the topic to a different subject, thereby managing face and conversational trouble. Misdirection and deflection are conversational moves in which a speaker avoids answering a question directly or shifts the topic to a different subject. These moves prevent the conversation from collapsing entirely when a direct answer is impossible or undesirable. J. Heritage (1984) links such strategies to the management of face and conversational trouble in ordinary interaction.

In *Waiting for Godot*, one way the characters negotiate absurdity is precisely by avoiding direct answers. When faced with a question that cannot be answered because the required information does not exist or because the answer would lead to a dead end, they shift the topic or respond with a non sequitur. This strategy allows the characters to keep talking without resolving the underlying absurdity. The negotiation happens not through the transmission of new information but through the shared acknowledgment that no specific information is available. The following exchange illustrates this strategy.

(16) “What did we do yesterday?” / “We waited.” [Act I, p. 13]

In this setting, Vladimir asks Estragon what they did the day before. Instead of giving a factual account that would distinguish one day from another, Estragon simply says, “We waited.” That answer is true but empty. The answer deflects the question by reducing all possible actions to the single, meaningless act of waiting. The audience understands that waiting is what they always do, so the answer provides no real information. However, the answer does provide something else: a confirmation of their shared condition. Vladimir accepts this answer because any other answer would be equally uninformative. Through this deflection, the characters negotiate a minimal understanding: we waited yesterday, we are waiting today, and we will be waiting tomorrow. That understanding is not rich, but it is a form of accorded meaning.

(17) “Let's hang ourselves immediately!” / “It would be better to wait.” [Act I, p. 12]

When Estragon suggests suicide, Vladimir deflects that suggestion by proposing to wait. The suggestion of immediate action is met not with refusal but with postponement. This circular logic, acting only to wait and waiting only to act, deflects the urgency of the proposal. The negotiation preserves the status quo while

acknowledging the possibility of change. Vladimir does not say no; he says later. That postponement keeps the conversation alive. If Vladimir had simply rejected the proposal, the exchange might have ended. Vladimir, by deflecting, transforms a potential dead end into a continuation of dialogue. This strategy does not resolve the absurdity of their situation, but it allows the characters to remain in relation to one another. The semantic gap created by the impossibility of meaningful action is bridged by the shared decision to defer action indefinitely.

2.2-Reformulation and Redundancy as Negotiation Strategies

According to D. Tannen (1989), reformulation and redundancy refer to the repetition or rephrasing of utterances, a process that creates coherence and involvement in discourse. Reformulation and redundancy refer to the repetition or rephrasing of an utterance in order to clarify or reinforce meaning. In ordinary conversation, redundancy is considered inefficient or even a violation of Grice's maxim of Quantity. However, in the corpus, redundancy becomes a lifeline. D. Tannen (1989) argues that repetition creates coherence and involvement in discourse. Repetition signals that the speaker is still engaged and that the hearer should remain engaged as well. Beckett's characters repeat themselves endlessly, not because they have nothing to say, but because repetition is the only way to hold meaning in place. Each repetition reaffirms the shared condition of waiting. This strategy is particularly visible in the following recurring exchange.

(18) "Let's go." / "We can't." / "Why not?" / "We're waiting for Godot." [Act I, p. 10]

This exchange recurs throughout the play, almost verbatim. The reformulation does not add new information. It reaffirms the mutual condition of waiting. Each repetition negotiates the same fact: there is a reason to stay, even if that reason is never fully explained. The redundancy creates a ritual that makes the absurd situation bearable. By saying the same words again and again, the characters build a small island of predictability in a sea of uncertainty. The audience knows what comes next, and the characters know what comes next. That predictability is a form of negotiated meaning. It is not the kind of meaning that advances a plot or develops a character, but it is the kind of meaning that sustains a relationship. Through reformulation and redundancy, Vladimir and Estragon tell each other that they still understand each other, even when they understand nothing else.

(19) "Well, what do we do?" / "Don't let's do anything." [Act I, p. 12]

The plan to act is met with the proposal not to act. The reformulation shifts the frame from action to inaction. The negotiation does not resolve the question but settles on a negative consensus. Doing nothing becomes the agreed upon course of action. That agreement, though negative, is still a form of negotiated meaning. The characters could have argued about what to do. They could have listed possible actions and debated their merits. Instead, they choose the simplest reformulation: do nothing. This choice is not a failure of communication. This choice is a successful negotiation of a shared response to an absurd situation. The semantic gap between the desire for meaningful action and the impossibility of such action is bridged by the collective decision to abandon action altogether.

2.3-Humour and Irony as Negotiation Means

According to S. Attardo (1994), humour and irony are discursive strategies that allow speakers to express meaning indirectly, by violating conversational norms in a playful or critical way. Humour and irony are discursive strategies that allow speakers to express meaning indirectly, by violating conversational norms in a playful or critical way. S. Attardo (1994) shows that humour arises from the violation of Gricean maxims. When a speaker says something that is obviously false or irrelevant, the hearer must infer that the speaker is joking. That inference requires cooperation. In *Waiting for Godot*, humour is not mere entertainment. Humour is a way of negotiating absurdity by making light of the characters' condition. Irony, similarly, allows the characters to say one thing while meaning another, creating a shared understanding despite the surface nonsense. The following examples illustrate this strategy.

(20) "We are happy." / "We are happy." [Act I, p. 76]

When Vladimir and Estragon say that they are happy, the audience knows that they are not happy. The irony is that the characters know this fact as well. The statement is manifestly false, but by uttering the statement together, the characters negotiate a temporary agreement to pretend. That ironic pact is a form of meaning making in the face of despair. The semantic gap between their actual misery and the claim of happiness is bridged by the shared recognition of the irony. Neither character believes the statement, nor both characters understand that the statement is a joke. That understanding is authentic communication. The humour allows them to acknowledge their suffering without being destroyed by it. They laugh together, and that laughter is a negotiated meaning that words alone cannot provide.

(21) "That passed the time." / "It would have passed in any case." "Estragon offers a comforting observation: at least we did something. Vladimir punctures that comfort with a logical truth: doing nothing would have had the same result." [Act II, p. 44]

After a particularly pointless exchange, Estragon observes that the exchange passed the time. Vladimir dryly replies that time would have passed anyway. The humour lies in the absurd logic: the activity was useless, but so is every other activity. The joke negotiates the gap between effort and outcome by accepting both effort and outcome as equally meaningless. This shared laughter becomes a bridge across the semantic gap. Estragon offers a comforting observation: at least we did something. Vladimir punctures that comfort with a logical truth: doing nothing would have had the same result. The audience laughs because the exchange is both true and absurd. The negotiation here is not about reaching a factual conclusion. The negotiation is about agreeing on how to face the absurdity together. By joking, the characters demonstrate that they are still cooperating, still trying to make sense, even when sense is impossible.

2.4-Extra Linguistic Items as a Negotiation Strategy

Referring to E. Goffman (1967), extra linguistic items refer to non-verbal elements of communication, including gestures, objects, and physical actions, that carry meaning in the absence of clear verbal reference. In *Waiting for Godot*, words fail. However, the characters can still point to boots, put on hats or hold ropes. Those objects are concrete. They do not slip away like the meaning of Godot or nothing. E. Goffman (1967) notes that face to face interaction relies on non-verbal cues. In Beckett's play, boots, hats, carrots and ropes become tools for negotiating meaning. Those extra linguistic items are concrete anchors in a sea of verbal instability. The following examples demonstrate this strategy.

(22) "Estragon struggles with his boots throughout the play." [Act I, pp. 7-8; Act II, p. 41]

The boot becomes a symbol of physical existence. Estragon cannot take the boot off, and then he cannot put the boot back on. The boot is a problem that can be touched, seen and manipulated. When language becomes absurd, the boot remains real. The negotiation of meaning shifts from words to objects. The characters talk about the boot, struggle with the boot, and through that shared physical activity, they maintain a connection. The boot does not mean one thing or another. The boot simply

is, a pair of shoes. By focusing on the boot, Estragon and Vladimir bypass the failures of language. They do not need to agree on the meaning of Godot or nothing. They only need to agree that the boot is stuck. That agreement is small, but it is real. The semantic gap opened by abstract absurdity is bridged by the concrete absurdity of a boot that will not come off.

(23) "Vladimir and Estragon exchange hats repeatedly" [Act II, p. 48-49]

The hat swapping scene is almost silent. The characters try on different hats, discard those hats, and pick up other hats. This pure physical negotiation creates a rhythm and a shared activity. The hats stand for roles, identities, or thoughts, none of which fit properly. However, the act of swapping the hats is a form of communication that bypasses the failures of language entirely. Through this extra linguistic negotiation, the characters create meaning without relying on stable verbal reference. The audience sees two men exchanging hats. That action is not ambiguous. The action is clear. The meaning of the action, what it signifies about their relationship or their identities, may be ambiguous. But the action itself is a shared reality. By engaging in this physical exchange, Vladimir and Estragon tell each other that they are still there, still together, still playing the game of waiting. That message does not require words. The extra linguistic negotiation bridges the semantic gap by moving communication out of language altogether and into the body.

CONCLUSION

This study describes how the negotiation of meaning and the experience of absurdity work together in Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* (1952). The analysis has shown that absurdity is not simply nonsense or the absence of meaning. Absurdity emerges from specific linguistic features, including lexical ambiguity, structural ambiguity, metaphoric overloading, and semantic vagueness. These features create gaps in communication where stable interpretation becomes impossible. But, the characters do not fall silent. The characters continue to speak, to repeat, to deflect, and to joke. The characters use reformulation, redundancy, irony, and physical objects to keep the conversation going. In so doing, the characters negotiate meaning across the gaps that absurdity has opened.

The theoretical framework combining Paul Grice's (1975) Cooperative Principles and Jacques Derrida's (1967) Deconstruction proves useful for this analysis.

Grice's maxims help identify where and how communication breaks down. Derrida's concept of différance helps explain why meaning never fully arrives. Together, these two frameworks show that the collapse of communicative norms does not necessarily lead to silence. The collapse instead leads to a different kind of communication: a communication that acknowledges its own failure and yet persists. The characters negotiate not to reach a final, stable meaning but to sustain the act of meaning making itself.

Returning to the research questions, the linguistic markers of absurdity in the play include contradictions, non sequiturs, circular speech, ambiguity, and vagueness. The strategies for negotiating meaning include misdirection, reformulation, humour, and extra linguistic cues. The two notions, absurdity and negotiation, comply with one another intimately. Absurdity creates the need for negotiation, and negotiation keeps absurdity from becoming utter silence. In Beckett's world, the human condition is not meaningless. The human condition is, rather, a condition in which meaning must be constantly and painfully negotiated, one absurd utterance at a time.

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