CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.0 PRELIMINARIES

The present chapter divides itself into four parts. The first part deals extensively with pragmatics. It comments on the use of the term pragmatics in modern context. The second part of the chapter deals with ‘Theatre of the Absurd’, its origin and prominent absurd dramatists. An extensive review of Harold Pinter’s life and works as well as a brief summary of the plays selected for the present study is included in the third part of the chapter. The fourth part of the chapter justifies the present research work, which is limited to the two concepts, that is Presupposition and Conversational implicatures in relation to Pinter’s selected plays. The methodology includes the selection of conversational passages with a brief textual background and the analysis.

1.1 INTRODUCTION TO PRAGMATICS

1.1.0 Introduction

Pragmatics is the study of the principles of the use of language in social interaction. Austin, Searle and Grice are the three philosophers whose ideas provided the theoretical basis for pragmatics. These philosophers envisaged that pragmatics studies the use of language in contextual background. The significant concepts in pragmatics have also been discussed elaborately in the theory chapters.

1.1.1 Journey of Pragmatics

Introduction

The journey of pragmatics started with an article ‘On Sense and Reference’, written by Gottlob Frege in 1891. Frege explained his theory of meaning and the theory of sense and reference in his most prominent article.

Emergence

The traces of the term ‘pragmatics’ can be found in ancient Greece and Roman, where the term ‘pragmaticus’ is found in late Latin and ‘pragmaticos’ in Greece. Both these terms mean ‘of being practical’. Philosopher Charles Morris (1938) used the term pragmatics in the modern sense. Morris was basically concerned with Semiotics or the study of signs. He formulated three distinct branches of inquiry: Syntactics, Semantics and Pragmatics.
According to Morris, Syntactics is the study of formal relations of signs to one another, Semantics is the study of relations of signs to the objects to which the signs are applicable and pragmatics is the study of the relation of signs to the interpreters. Carnap (1956) developed the idea of pure pragmatics, which would be concerned with concepts like beliefs, utterances, intention and their logical inter-relation. The idea that pragmatics is the study of aspects of language with reference to the users of that language, led to a very natural further restriction of the term pragmatics in conversational analysis.

**Gottlob Frege**

Frege (1848 - 1925) was a German mathematician, logician and philosopher. Pragmatics took its first step with Frege’s article ‘Sense and Reference’ (1891). He formulates his most prominent theory of meaning and sense and reference in his significant work ‘Uber Sinn und Bedeutung’ (1892). He uses mathematical equations to distinguish between the sense and reference of signs in language. He is the first philosopher to attribute objective existence to sense and thoughts. He proposes that the existence of sense and thoughts is independent of language or mind, rather they are said to be exist in a timeless third realm of sense. Their existence is separate from the mental as well as physical condition. The existence of senses does not depend on psychology of a person though they are not obviously physical entities. One of the prominent features of sense is that it is interpersonal as it is possible that the different people grasp the same senses and communicate them. Different expressions in different languages can be used to express the same sense or thought. Frege is of the opinion that sense and reference are abstract objects which are incapable of full casual interaction with the material world. They are real only in a limited sense. They show their effect on those who realize them, however, they are incapable of being changed or acted upon. They cannot be created by our uses of language or thinking.

**Charles Morris**

Morris (1901 - 1979) was an American semiotician and philosopher. He focused on the development of semiotics within the context of science of behavior. He puts forward the idea that semiotics may play a significant role in bringing together various disciplines such as biology, psychology as well as social and humanistic sciences. He investigates the syntactic, semantic and pragmatic relations of linguistic and non-linguistic signs in his most prominent work ‘Writing on the General Theory of Signs’ (1971). In this book, he
explains how signs play various roles in influencing human behavior. He presents a
theory of signs which defines signs as stimuli to patterns of behavior. He illustrates that
language may be governed by syntactic, semantic and pragmatic rules. Syntactic rules are
significant while determining combination of signs which may function as
grammaticalized statements. Semantic rules may determine the conditions in which the
signs may be applied to the objects. Pragmatic rules play a prominent role in determining
the conditions in which sign-vehicles may function as signs. He proposes that semiotics is
crucial in the development of the theory of language. He thinks that the rules governing
the condition and signification of signs are the two prominent aspects, with which
language may be defined.

1.1.2 Defining Pragmatics

Introduction

It is, by no means, easy to provide a comprehensive definition of the term ‘Pragmatics’.
Various philosophers and linguists have defined the term in different ways. Following is a
review of some of the prominent contributions made by well known linguist-
philosophers:

Stephen Levinson

According to Levinson, each of the definitions contains deficiencies and difficulties. As
he explains it, pragmatics is specifically concerned with features of language structure.
The definition cited below focuses on the grammaticalized relations between language and
context.

Pragmatics is the study of those relations between language and context
that are grammaticalized, or encoded in the structure of language

This emphasizes the role of pragmatics in the study of certain aspects of linguistic
structure and aspects of language usage in context. It implies that pragmatics is concerned
with meaning in context, that is, meaning not captured in semantic theory. Levinson
characterizes pragmatics as the study of relations between language and context that are
basic to an account of language understanding.

Gerald Gazdar

Gazdar has defined pragmatics in line with Levinson’s definition:
Pragmatics has as its topics, those aspects of meaning of utterance which cannot be accounted for by straightforward reference to the truth conditions of the sentences uttered. Put crudely: PRAGMATICS = MEANING + TRUTH CONDITIONS (1979:2).

Such a definition draws attention to the fact that understanding an utterance involves a great deal more than knowing the meanings of the words uttered and the grammatical relations between them. Above all, understanding an utterance involves the making of inferences that will connect what is said to what is mutually assumed or what has been said before. It recognizes, as Thomson (1977) states, that pragmatics is essentially concerned with inferences. Given a linguistic form uttered in a context, a pragmatic theory accounts for the inference of presuppositions, implicatures, illocutionary force and other pragmatic inferences.

William Lycan

Lycan has given the following definition:


Stalnaker (1972) simply provides a list of the phenomena for which a pragmatic theory must account. As per such a definition, pragmatics is the study of deixis, implicature, presupposition, speech acts and other aspects of discourse structure.

Nirit Kadmon

Kadmon defines pragmatics in the following way:

I take it that Semantics covers truth-conditional interpretation. I don’t know if it covers things that can’t be called truth-conditional. At any rate, I think that roughly, Semantics covers ‘literal meaning’. Pragmatics has to do with language use, and with ‘going beyond the literal meaning’ (2001:3).

In other words, Semantics deals with literal meaning whereas pragmatics deals with meaning that is not explicitly expressed by words.

George Yule

Yule defines pragmatics as:
When we read or hear pieces of language, we normally try to understand not only what the words mean, but what the writer or speaker of those words intended to convey. This study of ‘intended speaker meaning’ is called pragmatics.

(1997:127)

According to George Yule, pragmatics is mainly concerned with the four areas: speaker meaning, contextual meaning, how more gets communicated than is said and the expression of relative distance.

**R. Tim**

Tim has given the following definition of pragmatics:

Pragmatics is generally the study of natural language understanding, and specifically the study of how context influences the interpretation of meaning

(2007:128)

**Rudolf Carnap**

Carnap calls pragmatics as:

The field of all those investigations which takes into consideration … the action, state, and environment of a man who speaks or hears

(1939:4)

**Adrian Akmajian et al.**

Akmajian, Demers, Farmer and Harnish define pragmatics in the following way:

Pragmatics must identify central usage of language, it must specify the conditions for linguistics expressions (words, phrases, sentences, discourse) to be used in those ways, and it must seek to uncover general principles of language

(2003:343)

**1.1.3 Pragmatics and Semantics**

**Introduction**

Pragmatics and semantics are the two levels of linguistic analysis which study meaning from distinct points of view. These concepts have been discussed in the following pages.

**Two Approaches to Meaning**

The term ‘Pragmatics’ is very familiar in linguistics today. The nature of language cannot be understood unless one studies pragmatics. Before the emergence of pragmatics,
linguistics meant phonemics, phonetics and morphophonemics. According to Levinson (1983:2), in 1950’s, Katz and his associates began to find out how to incorporate meaning into a formal linguistic theory. As a result, pragmatics came on the linguistic map in 1960’s and further developed especially in 1970’s. Semantics is the meaning of language as a product of the meaning of words. In other words, it is the study of meaning of linguistic items such as words, phrases and sentences. It generally focuses on what the words conventionally mean rather than on what a speaker might want the words to mean in a context. Semantics is less concerned with the associative meaning of the words. On the other hand, pragmatics deals with other aspects of meaning which are not derived from the literal meaning of the words. It is a kind of investigation of invisible meaning of language.

**Pragmatics takes up where Semantics leaves off**

According to *International Encyclopedia of Linguistics* (2003:379) pragmatics takes up where contextual semantics leaven off. Pragmatics is concerned with whatever aspects of meaning that are not included in semantics. It was Grice (1957) who distinguished between what he calls natural meanings and non-natural meaning or meaning-NN. Grice’s theory explains how there can be interesting discrepancies between speaker meaning, that is, meaning\(^{\text{NN}}\) and sentence meaning.

**Utterance and Sentence**

Semantics is the study of the meaning of words and sentences. It is concerned with the context-free meaning that is associated with linguistic items. Pragmatics is the study of language use, taking into consideration the structure and context of the utterance. It studies how interlocutors try to interpret the utterances and communicate their meanings. Semantics studies utterance meaning. Levinson defined both these terms in the following way:

> A sentence is an abstract theoretical entity defined within a theory of grammar, while an utterance is the issuance of a sentence, a sentence analogue or sentence fragment, in an actual context (1983:18).

The distinction between sentence and utterance is of fundamental importance in semantics and pragmatics. Utterance is a natural unit of speech, bounded by breathes or pauses. It may be called as a complete unit of talk bounded by the speaker’s silence. In dialogic communication, each turn by a speaker may be considered as utterance.
Contextual versus Truth-conditional Content

Levinson states that semantics should be concerned with meaning out of context or non-context dependent meaning and pragmatics with meaning in context. Katz (1977) assumes that there has been a natural level of context independent meaning and the sentence meaning can be described independently and prior to utterance meaning. In other words, pragmatics is more context dependent compared to semantics. Pragmatics is concerned with - i) what a speaker, who utters a sentence, says or asserts over and above what the sentence ‘says’ in the context and with ii) what additional information is conveyed by the utterance, over and above what the speaker says or asserts by makings. The aim of pragmatics is to explain how language is used by speaker to do more than mere exchange of information. It is basically concerned with the analysis of what speaker means by his utterance than what the words or phrases in this utterance might mean. It involves the interpretation of what people mean in a particular context and how the context influences what is said. It also explores how inferences can be made by the listeners about what is said in order to interpret the speaker’s intended meaning. It investigates a great deal of what is unsaid and yet communicated. Pragmatics studies intended meanings of people, their assumptions, their purposes or goals and the kinds of actions that they perform, when they speak.

1.1.4 Prominent Pragmatists

Introduction

Pragmatics, as one of the branches of linguistics, has a rich tradition of contributors. Following is a brief record of the contribution of prominent pragmatists and philosophers to the field of pragmatics:

John Langshaw Austin

Austin (1911 - 1960) was a British philosopher and linguist. He refuted the traditional attitudes towards languages in posthumously published lecture series ‘How to Do Things with Words’ (1962). Initially, he distinguished between constative and performative utterances. Constatives are used to make statements, whereas performatives are special kinds of utterances used to perform actions that could be stated explicitly by using performative verbs which name the acts. Then, he moved towards the distinction between explicit performatives and implicit performatives. He defined explicit performatives as utterances that do something and implicit performatives as utterances that merely say
something. Then, he realized that stating is doing in itself. For instance, one who utters ‘I promise to help clean up after the party’ does more than simply describe one’s post party activity; such a person performs an act of promising. Austin suggests that unlike constatives, performative utterances can’t be true or false, yet they can go wrong. He listed such ways in which performatives go wrong and termed it as infelicitous. For instances, if A says:

    I declare the conference inaugurated.

A may not succeed in inaugurating the conference if it is already inaugurated or if A is not the chief guest. Based on such possibilities in which performatives may go wrong, Austin formulated a set of conditions which performatives must accomplish. He calls such conditions as ‘felicity conditions’. Austin, as cited in Levinson, distinguishes three main categories of felicity conditions:

A:  i) There must be a conventional procedure having a conventional effect.
     ii) The circumstances and persons must be appropriate as specified in the procedure.

B:  The procedure must be executed i) correctly and ii) completely.

C:  Often, i) the person must have the requisite thoughts, feelings and intentions, as specified in the procedure and ii) if consequent conduct is specified, then the relevant parties must do so.


Gradually, Austin developed a comprehensive theory of speech acts. He proposed a preliminary characterization of the notion of language use in terms of Locutionary acts, Illocutionary acts and Perlocutionary acts. Locutionary act is the utterance of the sentence with determinate sense and reference, illocutionary act is the making of a statement, offer, promise etc. in uttering a sentence, by virtue of the conventional force associated with it; and perlocutionary act is the bringing about of effect on the audience by means of uttering a sentence, such effects being special to the circumstances utterance. Then, he classified speech acts into five classes:

1. Verdictives: an exercise of judgment
2. Exercitives: an assertion of influence or exercising of power.
3. Commissives: an assuming of an obligation, or declaring of an intention.
4. Behavititves: the adopting of an attitude
5. Expositives: the clarifying of reasons, arguments and communications.


Thus, Austin, with his theories, remained one of the most significant contributors of pragmatics.

**John Rogers Searle**

Searle (1932) is an American philosopher who is currently working as a professor at University of California. He came up with a systematic theory of use of language in terms of speech acts. In his book ‘Speech Acts’ (1969), his analysis of an utterance into speech acts closely resembles the theory proposed by Austin. He followed up the suggestions made by Austin in speech acts. As Levinson (1983:237) states, out of the two developments worth singling out, one is the very influential systemization of Austin’s work by Searle. Through the writings of Searle, speech act theory has had most of its impact on pragmatics. His theory is based on the idea that speaking a language is an intentional activity governed by some rules which can be stated precisely and related to language. He mentioned that a speech act consists of an utterance act, a propositional act, an illocutionary act and a perlocutionary act. An utterance consists of a proposition and the devices that are indicative that utterance acts, propositional acts and illocutionary acts are separate acts which are performed alongside each other. These are the things that speakers do at the same time. To modify Austin’s theory of speech acts, Searle proposed a different classification of speech acts. According to Searle, people perform five basic kinds of actions by means of the five types of utterance such as representatives or assertives, directives, commissives, expressives and declarations. Moreover, Searle suggests that felicity conditions are not merely dimensions on which utterances can go wrong. Felicity conditions are actually jointly constitutive of the various illocutionary forces.

**Herbert Paul Grice**

Grice (1913 - 1988) was a British philosopher of language who spent most if his life in United States. He proposed the concept of Co-operative Principle in his essay ‘Logic and Conversation’ (1975). Grice, in his theory, assumed that interlocutors in linguistic exchange work on the basis of a tacit agreement that both of them should be co-operative to each other. He suggests that there is a set of assumptions functioning as guidelines in conversation. He formulated the four basic maxims of conversation underlying an
efficient and co-operative use of language: the Maxim of Quality, Quantity, Relevance
and Manner. He formulated a general principle which interlocutors are expected to
follow:

Make your conversational contribution such as is required at the stage at
which it occurs, by the accepted purpose or direction of the talk exchange
in which you are engaged

(1989:26).

Grice’s Theory of Implicature is of vital importance in pragmatics. He introduced the
term Implicature as a special, non-conventional inference which is intended by the
speaker. He illustrated that the basic idea behind the theory of Implicature is Cooperative
Principle. The observance and non-observance of the maxims of Cooperative Principle is
a great source of Implicature. Grice states, with the following example quoted in
Levinson, that speaker is said to be observing maxim and implicating more than what is
said:

A: (to passerby) I’ve just run out of petrol.
B: Oh; there’s a garage just around the corner.

(1983:104)

Here, B implicates that A may get some petrol at the garage. Grice also probed the
concept of the meaning-NN as speaker’s intended meaning. He distinguished between
natural meaning and non-natural meaning or meaning-NN. As quoted in Levinson, Grice
gives the following characterization of the meaning-NN:

S meant-nn z by uttering U if and only if:
  i) S intended U to cause some effect z in recipient H
  ii) S intended i) to be achieved simply by H recognizing that intention i).

(1983:16)

Geoffrey Neil Leech

Leech (1936) is an emeritus professor of Linguistics and Modern English Language in
Lancaster University. He emphasized the aspect of politeness in communicative process.
He agrees that Grice’s Cooperative Principle is necessary and helps to account for the
relation between what an utterance means in a particular context and what a speaker
intends to mean a in particular conversation. However, he claims that Grice’s Cooperative
Principle has some problems. He pointed out that while speakers need to observe the
maxim of quality, it is not in conflict with Grice’s other maxims but it conflicts with the need to be polite. According to Leech:

The CP in itself can not explain a) why people are often so indirect in conveying what they mean and b) what is the relation between sense and force when non-declarative types of sentence are being considered (1983:80).

In order to solve such problems, Leech proposed a theory which has been labeled as Politeness Principle. It is defined as: Minimize the expression of impolite beliefs and maximize the expression of polite beliefs. In conversation, one could be polite with the use of maxims suggested by Leech which comprise the Politeness Principle.

Stephen C. Levinson

Stephen Levinson (1947) is a linguistic anthropologist, currently working as professor of Comparative Linguistics at Radbound University. In 1978, Levinson, with Brown, developed a framework to deal with the concept of Politeness. As per his analysis, politeness involves showing an awareness of other people’s face wants. Face refers to our ‘public self image’. Brown and Levinson claim that Face is constantly attended to in interaction. Every competent person in the society wishes to have a face for himself. They explain the idea of ‘Model Person’ as a very general and idealized image of a rational human being. Such a model person is ‘a competent adult member of the society i.e. a willful fluent speaker of a natural language’ (Brown & Levinson 1978:63). They also developed the notion of Rationality as the application of the specific mode of reasoning which guarantees inferences from ends or goals to means that will satisfy those ends.

Levinson, in his book ‘Pragmatics’ published in 1983, deals with various crucial concepts in the field. He provides a number of definitions of pragmatics from his own points of view. He adds the categories of social deixis and discourse deixis to the traditional categories. Discourse deixis is concerned with the encoding of reference to portion of the unfolding discourse in which the utterance is located. Levinson gives the following example of discourse deixis with the use of ‘this’ and ‘that’:

Puff, puff, puff: that is what it sounded like.
This is what phoneticians call creaky voice.

(1983:63)

Social deixis concerns the encoding of social distinctions that are relative to participant roles. It focuses the aspect of social relationship between speaker and addressee. He
treated implicature as a paradigmatic example of the nature and power of pragmatic explanations of linguistic phenomena (1983:97). Implicature promises to bridge the gap by giving some account of how at least large portion of the unsaid message in the conversation is conveyed. He also developed the concept of presupposition and found out various presupposition triggers.

Peter Frederick Strawson

Peter Frederick Strawson (1919 - 2006) was an English philosopher and professor of Metaphysical Philosophy at University of Oxford. In the book *On Referring* (1950), Strawson developed his views on reference. He criticized Russell’s famous article ‘On Denoting’. Strawson’s conception is that Russell offered his theory of descriptions as a complete account of the role of definite descriptions in English. However, the truth is that the role of the word ‘the’ when embedded in definite descriptions can’t be captured in a single account. In fact, Strawson is picking out the use for which Russell’s theory fails. Russell claimed that a sentence of the form ‘The F is G’ means that ‘there is one and only one F and it is G’. Strawson argued that Russell’s theory of definite description is unsupported. He claimed that Russill’s main support for his theory is that the sentence such as ‘The king of France is bald’ remains meaningful even though there is no king of France. He made an important point that a sentence of the form ‘The F is G’ must count as false when used in circumstances where there is no F. The role of ‘the F’ in such declarative sentence is to say that there is an F. Strawson states that we would not always regard a saying of ‘The F is G’ as false in such circumstances. The use amounts neither to saying true nor to saying something false. It exhibits what is called a ‘truth-value gap’. His idea is that the definite description is sometimes chosen to enable the audience to fix on or pick out an item which they already know. Strawson (1950) proposed a quite different approach towards presupposition. Russell’s analysis of Presupposition remained unchallenged until Strawson’s approach. He called presupposition as a special kind of pragmatic inference, distinct from logical implication or entailment. He states that presuppositions are derived from the conventions about the use of referring expressions. He held that a statement A presupposes a statement B iff B is a precondition of the truth or falsity of A (Strawson 1952:175). In his views, a negative sentence, when uttered, will preserve its presuppositions. According to Levinson (1983), when Strawson’s notion of presupposition came to the attention of linguistics, it seemed to open up a new and interesting possibility. While commenting on speech acts theory, Strawson claims that by
selecting institutionally based paradigm cases, Austin was misled about the nature of illocutionary force.

**Gerald Gazdar**

Gerald Gazdar (1950) was a professor of Computational Linguistics at University of Sussex. It is due to Gazdar (1979) that presupposition acquired once again the status of a non-truth conditional aspect of the meaning of linguistic expressions. Gazdar deals with the instances of overt presupposition denial, where a presupposition is cancelled simply by background knowledge. The significance of his theory lies in the fact that, while handling the cases of contextual defeasibility, it predicts correctly the solutions to the projection problem for sentences of arbitrary complexity. While commenting on Morris’ tricotomy, Gazdar points out that natural languages would have no semantics but only syntax and pragmatics (1979:2). He also sets up a projection (or cancellation) mechanism designed to model implicature cancellation. On his account, defeasibility is captured by making implicatures acceptable only if they are consistent with entailments and other implications.

**Dan Sperber and Deirdre Wilson**

Sperber and Wilson (1986) have most influentially contributed to the fields of cognitive anthropology and linguistic pragmatics. With the British linguist and philosopher Deirdre Wilson, Sperber has developed pioneering approach to linguistic explanation known as relevance theory which has become main stream in the area of pragmatics, linguistics, artificial intelligence and cognitive psychology. It is an inferential approach to pragmatics. Relevance theory is based on a definition of relevance and two principles of relevance: Cognitive Principle (that human cognition is geared to the maximisation of relevance), and Communicative Principle (that utterances create expectations of optimal relevance). They describe communication as a different type of social process. They state that verbal communication typically communicates much more than linguistically encoded. They argue that cognitive processes are geared toward the maximisation of relevance, that is, a search for an optimal balance between cognitive efforts and cognitive effects. They state that all utterances are encountered in some context and that utterances convey a number of implicatures. The core of the theory is ‘the communicative principle of relevance’, which states that by the act of making an utterance the speaker is conveying that what he has said is worth listening to. For Sperber and Wilson, relevance is
conceived as relative or subjective, as it depends upon the state of knowledge of hearers when they encounter an utterance.

**George Yule**

Yule (1996) has thrown a new light on concepts such as reference, deixis, presupposition, entailment, co-operation, implicature, speech acts and politeness. According to Yule, reference is an act in which a speaker or writer uses linguistic forms so as to enable a listener or reader to identify something. These linguistic forms are called by Yule as referring expressions such as proper nouns, noun phrases and pronouns. He also distinguished presupposition from entailment (1996:25) stating that presupposition is something the speaker assumes to be the case prior to making an utterance, on the other hand entailment is something that logically follows from what is asserted in the utterance. Presupposition is treated by him as a relationship between two propositions. As he states, entailments follow from the sentence, regardless of whether the speaker’s beliefs are right or wrong. Entailments are communicated without being said. He tackles the issue of speech acts as actions performed with the help of utterances. He emphasizes the nature of speech event which determines the interpretation of an utterance as performing a particular speech act.

**1.2 THEATRE OF THE ABSURD [LE THÉÂTRE DE L’ABSURDE]**

**1.2.0 Introduction**

Theatre of the Absurd is one of the most influential movements in the world literature. Though it has its roots in Europe, it has spread all over the world in the second half of the twentieth century. The central theme of the writers in Theatre of the Absurd is the lack of purpose, most notably in the plays by Samuel Beckett, Eugene Ionesco, Arthur Adamov, Jean Genet, Harold Pinter, Edward Albee and Fernando Arrabal.

**1.2.1 Emergence**

‘Theatre of the Absurd’ was originated in France [Le Théâtre de l’Absurde] and gradually reached in other parts of the world. According to The Reader’s Encyclopedia of World Drama (1970:843) the term ‘Absurd’ applies to certain European and American dramatists, belonging to the period of 1950’s and early 1960’s who were not part of any self proclaimed movement, but who held in common, a sense of metaphysical anguish at the absurdity of human condition. According to ‘Longman Companion to Twentieth Century Literature’ (1970:843), the origin of the absurd movement lay probably in Kafka,
most specifically, in a dramatization of *The Trial* in Paris in 1947. Though the roots of Absurd drama can be traced as far back as Euripides and Aristophanes, Theatre of the Absurd is very much a product of our own times. The late-nineteenth century French playwright and poet Alfred Jarry is often considered as the Father of Absurd drama. Writers such as Anton Chekhov, Luigi Pirandello, Franz Kafka, and Bertolt Brecht used absurdism to express their rage against the planned utility ordered by the conspiracy of civilization. According to John Russell Taylor (1966), the absurd dramatists share certain attitudes towards the predicament of man in the universe. They state plight of humanity as purposelessness in an existence out of harmony with its surroundings. The word ‘absurd’ literally means out of harmony. The Chambers Dictionary defines it as:

The origin of the word ‘absurd’ is in Latin and it means ‘absurdus – ab – from, surdus – deaf, inaudible, indistinct, harsh, out of fashion, not to the purpose. Adj. – opposed to reason, ridiculous

(1977:6)

The term ‘absurd’ was used by Albert Camus in the essay entitled *The Myth of Sisyphus* (1942). The term is especially associated with drama. A study of contemporary drama under this title by Martin Esslin, published in 1962, surveys the writings of Samuel Beckett, Eugene Ionesco, Harold Pinter and other playwrights. The foremost argument of these absurd playwrights is that human life is without meaning or coherence, therefore it seems essentially chaotic. As a result, human beings have no channel of meaningful communication. Absurd drama aims at giving a genuine reflection of life through the medium which suggests a full range of absurdity. It reflects various aspects of absurdity such as meaninglessness, non-sense, non-communication and so on. Like realistic plays, the absurd plays do not have logically synthetic plot. It is not altogether new as most of the scholars, including Martin Esslin, are of the opinion that some of the qualities of the traditional drama are imported in absurd drama. Esslin states:

Theatre of the Absurd is part of a rich and varied tradition. If there is anything really new in it, it is the unusual way in which various familiar attitudes of mind and literary idioms are interwoven


Theatre of the Absurd is a blanket term for all those dramatists who rebelled against the constrictive conditions of their environment. It is a new chapter added after theatre of Sartre and Camus in the dramatic tradition of Europe. Singh (1973:15) states that the foundation of this movement was laid by Antonin Artaud. For his imaginative direction
and revolutionary dramatic theories, Artaud has been accepted as a connecting link between Surrealism and Theatre of the Absurd. The absurd playwrights like Beckett, Ionesco, Pinter, Genet and others have used new theatrics to depict the incongruities, anguish and the sense of futility. Since Theatre of the Absurd is not a planned movement, as Singh (1973:2) points out, absurd playwrights were all separately engaged in dramatizing their sense of futility using their own techniques. However, they were all in support of opposing bourgeois realism and naturalistic techniques. Franz Kafka and James Joyce have exerted tremendous influence on the setting and technique of Theatre of the Absurd. Almost all the significant dramatists of Theatre of the Absurd shared the feeling that drama of the post World War II period required a new mode of expression. Thus, absurd movement is a part of that spontaneous universal feeling.

1.2.2 The Theatre of Situation

In traditional drama, importance is given to characters and incidents, but the absurd dramatists give more significance to the situation. They consider characters and incidents as secondary aspects. The absurd theatre does not seem to carry any ideology as such. It is simply the theatre of situation as against a theatre of events in sequence. The action in an absurd drama presents a pattern of images designed to communicate the perplexity and anxiety that springs from the recognition that man is surrounded by an indecipherable cosmos. It does not tell a story in usual sense. The plays neither contain plots nor any real characters in conflict. As a result, most absurd drama is not dramatic in the usual sense of the term. Though there is much physical activity, it does not really constitute action. Nothing actually happens in an absurd drama and all the activities are pseudo-activities.

1.2.3 Influence of the World War II

The basic values of humanity were challenged due to the destruction caused by The World War II. It also generated a sense of insecurity the minds of common people. It was undoubtedly instrumental in orienting the minds of the dramatists towards a serious re-evaluation of man’s role as a social animal and as an inhabitant of the universe, whose meaning and structure are rapidly disintegrating. The absurd dramatists started to depict the human life as meaningless and without any purpose. This situation affected the dramatists like Pinter to a great extent.

The war has greatly influenced the absurd movement in Europe. The absurd dramatists made their characters to talk about the absurdity of life and alienation in society. Most of
the characters in absurd plays experience certain unknown fear caused by the destruction in the War. Pinter’s comedy of menace was directly influenced by the effects of war on common people. Before the World War II, there were two prominent groups in British absurd theatre. The first group was interested in depicting and experiencing the conflict and the second was a group of escapists, who wrote simple and familiar comedies. The World War II influenced both these groups of dramatists in various modes of expression.

### 1.2.4 Reflects Lower Strata of Society

In the mid-twentieth century, most of the dramatists concentrated on the themes related to the bourgeois society. The middle and lower classes of the society were neglected. Therefore, the life and problems of lower and middle classes were not represented on the stage. For them, it wasn’t a mirror of life. To give a face to the working class audience, a new group of dramatists preferred to represent the lower strata of society. As a result, after 1950, the theatre did not remain the property of the precious few. The characters were picked up from the common man. In most of the plays written by Pinter have characters taken from lower classes of society. For instance, Davies in *The Caretaker* is a tramp and Ruth in *The Homecoming* is a prostitute. In addition, characters in *Waiting for Godot* belong to the lower and working class society. They used common language and discussed day to day problems on the stage. Such plays were innovative in their peculiar plot, realistic setting and a kind of colloquial language never used before in literature. Absurd theatre represents all these peculiarities at perfection.

### 1.2.5 Turning Point in Modern Drama

Absurd drama was revolutionary in setting a new trend in literature. For absurd playwrights, life is like a house made up of glass; where the shadows of reality invisibly get mixed up and confuse the viewers. For them, reality is vague and absurd like dreams. They put a heavy accent on parody and exploits, even cheap scenes to bring out the peculiar absurdity of human experiences. The aim of all the absurd playwrights is to understand why man, self-centered and alienated, is unable to communicate with others. There is a queer combination of tragedy, farce, pathos and brutal humor. Esslin points out that Theatre of the Absurd provided

> a new language, new ideas, new approaches, and a new, vitalized philosophy to transform the modes of thought and feeling of the public at large

(1961: 13)
Thus, Theatre of the Absurd established itself as a new dimension to the conventional drama. It influenced the younger generation of the playwrights and proved turning point in modern drama.

1.2.6 Prominent Absurd Dramatists

**Introduction**

There are a few dramatists who treat the theme of absurd in their peculiar ways. Most of the absurd dramatists present the plight of modern civilization with the fundamental question of human existence. Following are some of the prominent absurd dramatists, who gave birth to and elevated Theatre of the Absurd to the status of one of the prominent literary movements in the world literature.

**Samuel Beckett**

Samuel Beckett, an Anglo-Irish, born in 1906, spent most of his time in Paris and wrote initially in French. He got education at Portora Royal and Trinity College. In 1938, he shifted to Paris. As a student, he published verse, short stories and criticism in various magazines. After the World War II, Beckett shifted to French as his writing language. During his stay in Paris, as Singh (1973:28) states, he came in contact with James Joyce and was influenced by his fictional techniques. Theatre of the Absurd attracted worldwide attention with Beckett’s *Waiting for Godot* in 1953. With the performance of *Waiting for Godot*, Beckett came to occupy an significant place among the post-World War II dramatists. The play explores a static situation that the subject is not ‘Godot’ but ‘Waiting’. Godot quite simply represents the object of our waiting that could be a person, a thing or even death. It tries neither to portray a character nor to narrate a story. It depicts a static condition and, through it, explores the central truth of life. Through a few characters and their short meetings, Beckett tries to show how time matters. Nobody can escape the process of change. Everybody hopes to realize something unknown and indefinable. All are obsessed and tortured by the same thought and the same anguish, that is, the question of living out their existence.

His next play *Endgame* (1957) is performed within a room, which is symbolic of the decadent universe. It presents a cryptic view of human condition. The characters Hamm and Clov are at once master-servant, father-son and friends. The play begins with the word ‘Finished’ but it depicts the process of finishing. Here, Beckett is not concerned with the details but with the fundamental question of human existence. He tries to focus
the very essence of life. Cruelty is used as a symbol of power and the characters torture each other. But they are not always dominated by cruel feelings. They also want to live peacefully and happily.

In *Krapp’s Last Tape* (1958), the major theme is the feeling of loneliness. *Happy Days* (1961) is haunted by the formidable shadow of death. In both of these plays, the basis is non-action. The first play is a dialogue between old Krapp and a tape-recording of his voice thirty years earlier. In *Happy Days*, Winnie is buried in the earth, first to her waist and then to her neck. She is engaged in a dialogue with her almost silent and invisible husband. Besides these plays, *All That Fall* (1957), *Embers* (1959), *Words and Music* (1962), *Play* (1963), *Film* (1965) *Come and Go* (1966) and *Eh Joe* (1966) reveal many other aspects of Beckett’s genius.

**Eugene Ionesco**

Eugene Ionesco, born in Rumania, is half French-half Rumanian French language dramatist. He is not only writer of hilarious nonsense plays but also a serious artist dedicated to strenuous exploration of realities of human situation. He looks at the mundane reality far more receptively and understandably than the others. He uses unrealism to dramatize much of its fictiveness and absurdity. The form of Ionesco’s plays emerges from his conception of absurdity that really tortures man, psychologically and emotionally. According to *The Reader’s Encyclopedia of World Drama* (1970:843), Theatre of the Absurd was first fully represented by Ionesco’s play *Bald Soprano* written in 1948 and performed in 1950. The action of the play consists of characters sitting and talking about what appears to be non-sense. Every sentence in the play is a complete statement made for its own sake and nothing is intended to be conveyed through it. Conversation in the play is so arranged as to destroy the sense. He used meaningless dialogues and senseless sounds for entertainment of the spectators.

His next play *Jacques or The Submission* (1950) reveals the conflicts between the individual and the system. The play puts heavy emphasis on the fact that man is slave to the codes of his society and animal instinct. The same theme has been developed in *The Future is in Eggs* (1951), in which the culmination of love is shown in the proliferation of eggs. Proliferation of things is used as a recurrent device in the plays of Ionesco. In *The Chair* (1951), this technique has been given prominence. In *Victims of Duty* (1952), playwright’s own circumstances and its various manifestations are depicted. *Amedee or
How to Get Rid of it (1953) is a full play in three acts. Here, the husband and wife live in constant fear, anxiety and despair. In New Tenant (1953), the proliferation of matter is used as a dramatic technique to highlight the inability of laborers and tenants to maintain their identity against matter. In The Picture (1955) failure of communication is the root cause of the protagonist’s misery. Besides these, The Killer (1957), Rhinoceros (1959) The Motor Show (1953), The Maid to Marry (1951) and The Leader (1953) are some of his plays that placed him among the prominent dramatists in twentieth century.

Jean Genet

Jean Genet, French, born in 1910 in Paris was an illegitimate child who was abandoned and was brought up by peasants in Paris. He wandered as a tramp for many years in most of the countries in Africa and Europe. As a thief and smuggler, he spent most of the years in various prisons. As a result, he felt betrayed by the world and alienated from free and open society. This feeling pervades most of his writing. He is basically concerned with the relation of identity and being. His writing shows the influence of Pirandello. The relation between reality and illusion and the blurring of the boundaries between them is a favorite theme of Genet. He is a profound moralist and created his own identity and objectification of his experience. He never intend to capture the superficial reality of life, rather, he wanted to give a peep into the very essence of things. That’s why; Genet’s reality is different from the realist, surrealist and naturalist playwrights.

His comment on the absurdity of human life is very ruthless and he rejects the traditional idea of theatre. He presents a structure of rituals which expresses and clarifies the human urges to overcome the alienation. He presents the unceasing absurdity in human lives and the destructiveness that is part of the absurdity. According to The Reader’s Encyclopedia of World Drama (1970:844) his plays contain absurd qualities like the abandonment of conventional motivation, focus on states of mind and basic human situations as opposed to the development of narrative plot. In his plays, The Maids and Death Watch (1946), Genet emphasizes the impossibility of living out the real self. The Balcony (1956) shows Genet as the playwright at his best. As a reaction to the sophisticated attitudes and the feelings of superiority of actors, Genet wrote this play as if to dramatize the very idea of acting (1973:93). In The Blacks (1960), he intends to portray angry man’s inferiority to unknown forces that keep challenging his ingenuity. His last play The Screens (1961) records a definite advance over the earlier plays. He pleads for complete identification of man and society, so that he may stand face to face with truth.
Arthur Adamov

Arthur Adamov, a Russian, born in 1908, got education in French and spent his youth in Germany and Switzerland. At the age of sixteen, he went to Paris and was impressed indelibly by Antonin Artaud. His early writings contain neurotic self-revelation, in which he bares all-encompassing, existentialist anguish. In his first play 

La Parodie (1947), life has been projected as a meaningless, inescapable vertigo of pseudo activity. His plays deal with desensitized human relationships, incommunicability and modern man’s submergence by invading objects. Adamov shares these qualities with the writings of the leading absurd playwrights such as Beckett and Ionesco. He uses almost incoherent dramatic forms and oblique, bare and mysterious style.

Adamov’s form and style becomes more comprehensible in Professor Taranne (1960). Through this play Adamov suggests the individual’s annihilation by ruthless mechanisms of society and inner probing of the ego. In his masterpiece Ping-pong (1955), he uses a pinball machine to symbolize organizational inhumanity and senseless. It reveals the meaninglessness of ordinary life. Life is projected in terms of an endless, aimless contest. It traces the careers of two young men while they move on to old age. The conclusion is a frightening ping-pong game in which the pair becomes ever more and more excited until one of the pair collapses in death. Adamov projected his oppression and anxieties on the stage as a result of his inability to face the reality of the outside world. Through his writing, he became able to face and control the objective world. Therefore, Adamov’s absurd plays are more fascinating and more successful than his other ones. According to Encyclopedia of World Literature in 20th Century (1975:15), Adamov’s terrifying dramas, especially those of his pre-1956 metaphysical mode, are significant in having paved the way for avant-grade ‘Theatre of the Absurd’ themes and techniques, which radically transformed European and American concepts of theatre during 1950’s. With Arthur Adamov, Theatre of the Absurd received further extension.

Fernando Arrabal

Fernando Arrabal, Spanish, born in 1932, wrote is an absurd style. Though he got educated in Catholic Schools and studied Law, his main interest was in theatre. In 1955, he left Spain and took up residence in France and started writing dramas. According to Encyclopedia of World Literature in 20th Century (1975:26), Arrabal’s early dramas of anguish and suffering provoke comparisons with Theatre of the Absurd. His
nightmarish vision of the difficulties of living is largely the expression of his personal
dreams, fears and obsessions, especially derived from the events of his childhood in Spain
during the Civil War (1936-39). As a result, he tries to express life’s outer chaos and
confusion. He came into the light with his play Picnic on the Battlefield (1967). The play
is about a soldier isolated in the frontline of battle. Arrabal acknowledges a deep
admiration for Beckett whose influence is clearly seen in most of his works.

His characters are often a couple, loosely bound to each other in a relationship in which
each plays alternatively the role of master and slave. In The Architect and The Emperor of
Assyria (1969), two men play out make-believe situation that often involves death.
Another prominent work The Two Executioners (1960) represents betraying, oppressive,
sensual mother and a child, who blends innocence, cruelty and animal sensuality.
Arrabal’s female characters are more lucid than male characters. His hero is frequently a
man who is basically a victim of society. His characters search for an escape from misery,
oppression and ignorance. They suffer from the meaningless cruelty of the world to
follow their impulses. They are confused by their failures and wounds, yet they persist in
their questMost of his plays are produced and translated in various languages all over the
world. Consequently, he is recognized as a talented dramatist who has a great sense of
spectacle and imagination. Arrabal’s contribution to the absurd spectrum is highly
original. He is mainly concerned with the absurdity of ethical and moral rules. In The
Automobile Graveyard, protagonist is a prostitute who follows her profession simply
because religion tells to be kind to one’s neighbors. Through such situations, Arrabal
exposes the absurdity of the value system that accommodates the moral laws.

**Edward Albee**

The American playwright Edward Albee, born in 1928 and adopted by Reed and Frances
Albee, became popular because of his affiliation with absurd movement. As his father
was owner of a chain of theatres, Edward Albee spent his childhood in their house often
full of theatrical personalities. As a student, he was not very bright. Surrounded with
material goods but deprived of love, he turned into an educational rebel. He attracted
attention with his play Who’s Afraid of Virginia Wolf? (1962). Effect of this play was
miraculous. According to Nicoll, it turned to stone the hearts of the middle class, who
flocked to it and gleefully identified the characters with their neighbors (1976:800). In
1964, Albee presented his most complex and mysterious play Tiny Alice. The play has the
theme of sacred and profane love gone mad. A woman conspires with her lawyer and
butcher to corrupt a middle aged man. *The Zoo Story* (1958) is a clinically accurate study of schizophrenia. The play presents an image of man’s loneliness and inability to communicate. Albee deals with disillusioned, harsh and stark picture of the world. He depicts the realities of the human mind with its despair, fear and loneliness in an alien and hostile universe. His two one act plays, *The Sandbox* (1960) and *The American Dream* (1961), link him to the absurd group. In The Sandbox, Mommy and Daddy abandon grandma to a sandbox grave. The same type of characters appears in the American Dream forcing the irrepressible grandma out of the house. Both these plays present domestic clichés, symbolic characters and grotesquely exaggerated action that provide better comment on American family life. He appears to be the first dramatist to perceive the change that was negative in spirit and the essence of the modern American existence.

The image of absurd human condition is precisely projected in *A Delicate Balance* (1967). The play deals with man’s tortured vacillation between illusion and reality, success and failure, love and hate, and even life and death. The play concerns a seemingly ordinary suburban family whose domestic stability and individual equilibrium are upset by the invasion of old friends. He has a great control of dramatic mood and situation, idiomatic speech and artistry that placed him in the front rank of contemporary playwrights.

1.3 HAROLD PINTER: AN ABSURD PLAYWRIGHT

1.3.0 Introduction

Harold Pinter is a prominent absurd dramatist who wrote absurd plays with spectacular blend of menace and absurdity. Characters in his plays are haunted by unknown threats which make their lives absurd. One of the significant features of Pinter’s plays is that he makes use of colloquial speech which distinguishes him from other absurd dramatists.

1.3.1 Biographical Sketch

Harold Pinter, a Nobel Laureate, is a world-renowned English playwright, screen writer, actor, director, and political activist. Pinter was born on 10th October, 1930 in the London Borough of Hackney, to Jewish, lower middle class, native English parents of Eastern European ancestry. His father was a tailor. Pinter spent first nine years of his life at the Clapton side of Hackney Downs. In the view of economic insecurity which the family felt, his father worked very hard but eventually lost his business and had to work for
somebody else. This situation affected Pinter’s later life. As a result, the qualities like the combination of calm and unrest, beauty and ugliness pervade his work.

Personal history has a great influence on Pinter’s works. His childhood and youthful experiences have left a deep mark on him. Hackney has provided various characters in his plays with their ambitions, hope, desires, occupations and the cockney intermingled with ordinary speech. After publishing poetry as a teenager and acting in school plays, Pinter began his theatrical career using the stage name David Baron.

1.3.2 Harold Pinter and Absurdity

Harold Pinter is the major exponent of Theatre of the Absurd in England and throughout the world, so to say. Characters in his plays are humorously but chillingly menaced by the outsiders. They are frequently engaged in poetically ambiguous conversation and action which leads to ambiguous interpretation. It was in 1957, that Pinter started writing his plays. He wrote not only full-length plays but also one act plays, screen plays, Radio plays, Television plays and poems.

Pinter began as an uncompromising minor author and become successful to create the taste by which he is appreciated. At first, viewers were baffled by his plays in which characters are not obliged to explain their motives or biographies. According to The Reader’s Encyclopedia of World Drama (1970:657), his early writing career was influenced by three forces: Franz Kafka, American gangster films and Samuel Beckett. The term ‘Comedy of Menace’ was coined about his plays. The Birthday Party is the finest example of comedy of menace. Pinter’s dialogue is a single mainly responsible factor for his success. His dialogue amounts simply to the contrast between cockney and sudden. Generally, his dialogue establishes a network of internal echoes that place the drama in a world of its own. The greatness of Pinter’s plays lies in his way of using language of common man. Moreover, his plays are full of mystification, suspense and ambiguity. His style is marked with grammatical deviation, ellipsis, contracted forms and incomplete utterances. Because of his peculiar way of writing, he is one of the most widely performed and best known dramatists of the contemporary world. He has also become an academic subject. There is an annual Pinter Record, Pinter Conferences and an increasingly formidable body of Pinter Studies.

His first play The Room (1951) was produced at the University of Bristol. The play represents a basic Pinter situation with a room, two characters and an undefined fear of
the outside world. The action of the play constitutes a situation that stems for an absurd world in which motive is unclear, logic is inoperable and everything is uncertain. An old woman, Rose is confined in the tenuous security in her room. Then a mysterious, blind Negro enters in the room, with a message from her father. Her husband kills that Negro and consequently, Rose becomes blind.

Pinter became successful to create a powerful poetic image capable of evoking fear and nameless dread, out of the puzzling and bizarre elements. He intensifies the mood with the realistic dialogue that skillfully captures the inane repetitiveness and essential non-communication in conversation. His early works were labeled as ‘Comedy of Menace’ because of the elements of farce and low comedy dialogue that operate on the surface of the tensions that permeate the plays. According to *Encyclopedia of World Literature in the 20th Century* (1971:78), Pinter has been highly praised for his use of language, for his accurate reproduction of patterns and rhythms of colloquial English, for his awareness and his ability to mimic the ways in which language is conventionally used as a barrier to communication. His dialogue does not convey information directly. It is used as one of the many surface elements in the construction of the total, highly evocative image. It cannot be reduced to any single message or abstract concept.

Harold Pinter has been described as an existentialist dramatist par excellence. Most of the times, he is called as a playwright of the ambiguous and a member of Angry Young Men. His contribution to modern theatre clearly establishes him as one of the major dramatists of his time. Since his emergence, he has not only produced a series of undoubted masterpieces but he has also consistently developed and grown. As the circumstances of his life changed, so also the setting and some of the subject matters of his plays changed. Among English language playwrights of his generation, Pinter has undoubtedly attained the status of a contemporary classic. Pinter’s drama often depicts strong conflicts among ambivalent characters fighting for verbal or physical dominance. His plays are marked by the theatrical pauses, silences, imagery, witty dialogues, ambiguity, irony and menace. Moreover, his language is marked with devices such as grammatical deviation, ellipsis, contracted forms and incomplete utterances. He is one of the versatile writers as he has tried nearly all the genres of literature as well as audio-visual media. He is best known for three of his plays that are selected for the present study.
1.3.3 Plays Selected for the Study

Introduction

The plays selected for the present study include ‘The Birthday Party’, ‘The Caretaker’ and ‘The Homecoming’. A brief summary of these selected plays have been given below.

The Birthday Party

His first full length play The Birthday Party (1958) contains elements those appear in some of his other plays: a guesthouse menaced by an intrusion from the cold outside world. It is a seedy brooding house in a seaside resort, where Stanley Webber, the protagonist, has found refuge. Stanley is a young man in his late thirties. Meg, a landlady, is a simple, elderly woman. She looks after Stanley is an exaggerated anxiety and treats him as a son and also as a kind of lover. The two mysterious and brutal characters who come to take Stanley away are Goldberg - a Jew, and McCann - an Irishman. Petey - Meg’s husband is almost a silent observer and Lulu is a good looking young girl from the next door. All of them are treated with complete realism by Pinter. Stanley is a pianist and tells story of an occasion when he gave a concert on his own in London. But now he has been idle for months and hardly goes out of the house. He hates Meg, who stifles him with her motherliness, yet seems totally dependent on her. She wants to surprise Stanley with a gift. To motivate the present, she maintains that it is his birthday, although it isn’t. Meg probably might not even know the actual date of his birthday. When Goldberg and McCann arrive, Meg blurts out that it is Stanley’s birthday.

Goldberg and McCann had obviously looking for Stanley all over the town. Goldberg suggests that they should give Stanley a party, to which Lulu is also to be invited. At the party, Meg unveils her present - a drum. Lulu also arrives with a big parcel containing Stanley’s present. Stanley puts the drum round his neck and begins to beat it. At first, he beats it in rhythm and then more and more wildly and in uncontrolled manner. His savaged drumming concludes the first act. The second act beings with the birthday party itself. Stanley tries to escape before the party but forced to stay there by the two strangers - Goldberg and McCann. Petey will not be present at the party as he has to go to his chess club. Stanley, who has been subjected to the cross-examination by the two, sits silent and apathetic in a corner. A game of blind man’s buff forms the climax of the party. Stanley has his eyes bandaged and McCann breaks his glasses. As a result, Stanley steps into the drum and catches Meg. At this point, the lights go out and Lulu is heard screaming. When
McCann finds a torch, they come to know that Stanley has tried to strangle Meg and to rape Lulu in the darkness. As Goldberg and McCann move menacingly towards him, he begins to giggle and seems to have gone out of his mind. Finally, both of them capture him.

The next morning, Meg asks Petey whether Stanley is feeling better. Petey, who witnessed the torture to which Stanley was being subjected in his room during the night, tries to keep her in the dark. Goldberg and McCann refuse to enter Stanley’s room now and Goldberg looks tired and deprived of his vitality. Lulu comes and accuses Goldberg of having exploited and seduced her. Petey tries to protect Stanley from being taken away but fails. Goldberg says he knows a doctor who can look after Stanley properly. Stanley can only produce inarticulate gargles. They took him away to Monty, where he is supposed to get treatment. Meg, unaware of what has happened, returns from her shopping and asks whether Stanley has come down yet. Petey hasn’t the heart to tell her the truth, and Meg muses over the wonderful party they have had.

The Caretaker

Pinter achieved breakthrough in the theatre with ‘The Caretaker’ (1982). The central characters, Mick and Aston are brothers and live together. Aston is in early thirties and Mick in early twenties. Mick is a slow, awkward man who is good-natured and ready to help his fellow human beings. The play opens with the inspection of the house by Mick. Aston brings an old man, whom he has saved from being beaten up in a café. The old man, Davies, informs him that he had been working as a cleaner in that café. He tells Aston that he is not really called Davies but his name is Jenkins. He has to go to Sidcup to get his papers but he needs good shoes and is waiting for good weather. Aston is sorry for the old man and invites him to stay in the house for a few days. Davies is very happy to stay there. The next morning Aston complains that Davies has been talking in sleep, but he denies it. When Aston wants to go out, allowing Davies to remain alone in the home, he can hardly believe that he is trusted not to steal anything. He is astonished when Aston gives him the second key of the house. When Davies remains alone in the house, Mick enters and frightens him out of his wits by threatening him as though he was a burglar.

The second act begins with Mick cross-examining Davies. He seizes Davies’ trousers and becomes very threatening. At this moment, Aston returns and tells Davies that he has got his bag from the café. Then Mick goes out once again. Aston gives Davies a number of
things he has bought for him. In addition, he offers him job as a Caretaker. Davies can hardly believe his good fortune but his acceptance is vague and half-hearted. The same evening, Mick, who was cleaning the room, complains about his brother laziness and he too offers Davies the position of caretaker- The next morning, tension grows between Aston and Davies when they argue about opening and closing the window. In the course of their conversation, Aston tells Davies about his hallucinations and treatment is mental hospital. He has undergone electric shock treatment, that’s why he has become slow and unable to work. The act three opens two weeks later, with Davies complaining Mick about Aston. Aston has got a good pair of shoes for Davies but he finds faults with them. At night, when Aston once again complains about Davies’ talking in sleep and making noises, he becomes angry and even threatens him with a knife. Consequently, Aston suggests Davies that he should try to find somewhere else to live, puts his things in the bag and hands it to him. Davies returns the same evening and denounces Aston to Mick in his absence. He suggests that Mick should send Aston to the mental hospital. At this moment, Mick’s attitude towards Davies changes and he calls Davies an imposter, who has pretended to know about interior decoration. In anger, Mick smashes the figure of Buddha, which was Aston’s favorite. Davies becomes speechless. When Aston returns Davies makes humble attempt to regain his favor, but Aston remains adamant. The play ends with Davies requesting earnestly for a shelter, which he has now lost.

The Homecoming

‘The Homecoming’ created sensation and shocked the audiences by the way in which sex and prostitution are discussed. The action in the play is simple as well as shocking. Max is a butcher of about seventy years old. He lives in a large old house with two of his three sons - Lenny and Joey, and a brother Sam. Lenny’s occupation is not stated clearly throughout the play whereas Joey - the youngest one is a boxer. Sam is a car driver. Teddy is the eldest son of Max and Ruth is Teddy’s wife. Teddy is a teacher of Philosophy and stays in America with his family. The play opens with Max talking about his late wife Jessie and late friend MacGregor. Though Max works as a housekeeper as well as a cook, his sons, especially Lenny, treats him very badly. As a result, Max is extremely rude to Sam. Their relation with each other is very mysterious. Very often, they quarrel about their house.

At night, Teddy and Ruth enter the house. They have been on a trip to Italy. Teddy does not want to wake up anyone and goes upstairs to his old room. Ruth goes out for a walk.
While going upstairs, Teddy meets Lenny. Though the two brothers met after six years, their meeting is very casual. After some time, Ruth comes back from outside. The meeting between Ruth and Lenny also is strangely casual, though Lenny doesn’t know who she is. Only after Lenny’s inquiry, she tells him that she is Teddy’s wife. During their conversation, Lenny asks her whether he could touch her and explains his request by telling her a story of a lady who was making certain prostitutions to him, whom he could have killed, but merely beaten up. When Lenny comes to know about Teddy’s intelligence and sensitivity, he begins with another long and equally strange narrative about his own sensitivity. But when he found that the mangle was very heavy and the lady did not give him a hand, he became extremely angry and gave her, a short arm-job to the belly. Ruth is not sure whether these stories are true or merely invented by Lenny. However, Ruth has certainly understood something and a battle of wits develops between them. Lenny is surprised by Ruth’s aggressiveness when she offers him a sip from her own glass of water and goes upstairs. Lenny shouts after her, asking whether she has been making him some sort of proposal. The noise of shouting has woken Max, who comes down scolding Lenny and asking what the matter is. Lenny does not disclose the presence of Teddy and Ruth but tells that he had been thinking aloud. At the same time, Lenny asks Max about the moment of his conception. Max becomes speechless with anger, spits at Lenny and goes back upstairs.

Next morning, Max and Joey are discussing about the first day of the football season. Disturbed with the noise in kitchen, Max resents Sam’s presence there. At this moment, Teddy and Ruth come downstairs. Max becomes very angry. Without listening to Teddy’s explanation that Ruth is his wife, Max orders Joey to chuck them out and hits him viciously. When Sam tries to intervene, Max hits him over his head with a stick. After some time, Max’s mood is changed. He speaks very affectionately to Ruth and offers Teddy a cuddle and a kiss. Second act opens in the afternoon. The family have enjoyed the lunch prepared by Max. When Ruth Praises Max for his cooking, he remembers his late wife, Jessie. But almost at the next moment, he calls Jessie as a slut-bitch. Lenny starts to provoke Teddy by talking about philosophy and the issue of the nature of reality. Teddy refuses to comment but Ruth tries to explain the idea in such a way that Lenny is startled. Ruth provides implication about her real background sayings that she was born in a particular area. After some time, as all of them leave, Teddy and Ruth remain alone. Teddy now wants to go to America but Ruth seems to be reluctant. Teddy goes upstairs to
pack their luggage and Lenny returns. Ruth tells Lenny that before she married Teddy, she was a model, not for clothes but for the body. Lenny understands the implications of being a model for the body. Teddy comes downstairs with luggage and asks Ruth to go. But before they leave, Lenny requests her for a dance and kisses her. Meanwhile Max and Joey return. When Joey sees what is going on, he is surprised and comes to know that Ruth is a prostitute. He takes her from Lenny’s arms, embraces and kisses her. Max too, praises her beauty and quality. Now Ruth becomes dominating and orders something to eat and drink. In the evening, Lenny quarrels with Teddy about a cheese-roll made by Lenny for himself, which has been eaten by Teddy; intentionally. Joey comes down from upstairs spending the afternoon with Ruth. Out of curiosity, Lenny asks him about his experience, in fact of sex, with Ruth. Lenny and Max become very angry when Joey informs that he didn’t get all the way. Max suggests that Ruth should stay with all of them in the house. Then arises a question - how could they bear the additional expenditure for Ruth? To solve the problem, they thought of contribution from their wages. But Lenny suggests that she could earn money as a prostitute, not more than four hours a night. Teddy does not object to the decision taken by his family. Ruth seems to be happy to receive the invitation. Lenny tells her that she would have to spend certain number of hours in a flat every night. Ruth instantly understands the implications of a flat and lays down her conditions. She wants at least three rooms with a bathroom, a personal maid, furniture and an extra allowance for clothes. Lenny agrees all the conditions. At this moment, Sam, who remained a silent observer, reveals the fact about the illicit relations between Jessie and MacGregor and suddenly becomes unconscious. Now Teddy wants to return to America. Max gives him a photograph of himself for his grandsons in America. Teddy leaves and Ruth sits relaxed in her chair. Max becomes very agitated and moves to and fro. He says again and again that he is not too old. He falls to his knees and crawls up to Ruth saying that he is not too old and begs for a kiss. The play ends with Ruth sitting silently, Joey on her lap and Lenny watching the scene.

1.4. RESEARCH DESIGN

This section of the chapter focuses on justification, aims and objectives, scope and limitations of the study, hypothesis and research methodology for the purpose of the present research endeavor.
1.4.1 Justification

Pinter’s plays have fascinated many people all over the world. Since his style is the most distinctive, adjectives such as Pinterish and Pinteresque have been derived for it from his name. His plays are innovative in not necessarily revealing their meaning at first reading. His plays have been admired for their verbal artistry, use of idioms, rhythm, pauses, silences and timing. Moreover, Pinter’s plays offer multiple levels of meaning. The complexity of meaning rests mainly upon lexical items, thought and action. His peculiar style of conversation results in various complex suggestions and encourages diversity of interpretation. In a sense, readers are invited to solve certain puzzles inscribed by Pinter in his plays. Most of Pinter’s plays can be seen as structures of guessing games in which the readers find themselves lost with expectations confronting a varied body of tantalizing patterns, uncertain of the final interpretative key, but intensely aware of significant possibilities of meaning. Pinter has deployed various kinds of language instruments such as colloquial speech, poetic imagery, absurd babblings, contradictions and repetitions. To heighten the sense of drama, he has punctuated speech with silence, pauses and other non-verbal elements. His plays offer an elaborative study of non-communication, partial communication, failure of communication, distrust of communication and self-communication. Consequently, an apparently simple and naturalistic language becomes an effective medium of complex communication. The characters in Pinter’s plays, most of the times, fail to communicate as normal human beings.

Language used by the characters functions as a cover under which meaning of the play is concealed. Most striking quality of Pinteresque style is failure of communication among characters. Language in his plays is used to express absurd condition of modern man. He uses language as a medium of expression as well as a medium of evasion. At one place, Pinter says that under what is said, something other is being said. That’s why, most of the characters in his plays hide their feelings and identity. For instance, Davies in *The Caretaker* creates confusion regarding his real name, and identity of Goldberg and McCann in *The Birthday Party* remains mysteriously unknown. Therefore, pragmatic tools such as Presupposition and Conversational Implicature will prove to be helpful to arrive at the exact message, especially, the hidden agenda of the meanings conveyed through the absurd communicative activities in Pinter’s selected plays. Only a few amount of meaning is explained with the help of traditional thematic analysis. Semantics explains simply the propositional content of the utterance. Any utterance should be
analyzed at a deeper level so as to come across its communicational content. Every literary artist is very careful about language that he uses in his works of art. Especially, Pinter makes deliberate use of some conversational devices such as repetitions, pauses, false starts, silences, witty dialogues, irony, ambiguity, and so on. One can get the heart of such devices by applying the pragmatic concepts like Presupposition and Conversational Implicature. Since, conversation in absurd plays is different than normal dramatic conversation, a study of it in the light of Presupposition and Conversational Implicature can provide us with a refined view of the plays.

The present research activity is an attempt to probe the diversity of meanings in Harold Pinter’s selected plays. It can help better grasp, interpretation and enjoyment of absurd drama, especially Pinter’s plays. Without taking into consideration these aspects, the interpreters will not come across the actual message carried by an utterance and hence, it will hinder proper interpretation and comprehension of the given speech event. Comprehension of an utterance doesn’t simply mean to know the literal meaning of the words and phrases. For exact understanding, shared knowledge and basic assumptions are significant reference points that help us to draw relevant inferences and make comments upon the possible meanings. Most of the times, especially in absurd drama, it is possible that the characters ‘mean’ more than what is actually ‘said’. The present study focuses on this phenomenon of how it is possible to mean more than what is expressed by the characters. It aims at providing an explicit account of the possible diversity of meanings in Harold Pinter’s plays.

1.4.2 Aims and Objectives

The present research activity aims to discuss in detail the concepts of Presupposition and Conversational Implicature as special kinds of linguistic and pragmatic inferences respectively. Following are some of the aims and objectives of the present research: To bring out the significance of Conversational Implicature and Presupposition as the theories of language use. To study how the notion Conversational Implicature provide some explicit account of how it is possible to mean more than what is actually communicated by the characters through absurd communicative activities in Pinter’s Plays. To study how Presuppositions carry information shared by the interlocutors in conversation and how it facilitates proper interpretation of Pinter’s plays. To consider Metaphor as deriving from the flouting of the Maxim of Quality and to what extent the theory of Implicature actually contributes to the study of Metaphor. To show how the
The notion of Conversational Implicature helps substantial simplification in both, the structure and the content of semantic descriptions. To probe some of the problematic properties of Presupposition and Conversational Implicature. To devise the analytical models on the basis of the concepts of Presupposition and Conversational Implicature to apply to various speech events occurring in Harold Pinter’s selected plays. To trace out pedagogical implications of Presupposition and Conversational Implicature in interpretation of absurd plays in a more comprehensive way.

1.4.3 Scope and Limitations of the Study

The present study is a kind of conversation analysis that includes analysis and interpretation of selected conversational passages in the light of Presupposition and Conversational Implicature. Since presuppositions seem to be tied up to particular words and phrases, called ‘Presupposition Triggers,’ the present study deals with an analytical model built upon the theoretical framework established for the present purpose. Implicatures result from violating or observing the maxims of Conversational Principal. The present study discusses types of Conversational Implicature. However, as Levinson (1983:167) points out, there is more literature on these topics than almost any other topic in pragmatics. Consequently, every pronouncement will found to be contradicted somewhere in the literature. The present researcher has paid proper attention to such diversity and has taken care to make the research more precise and up to date. The deliberation here is to analyze dramatic conversational passages with reference to the theoretical framework. In addition, an effort is made to explain pedagogical implications of the present research work and future research possibilities. The researcher attempts here to study the communicative function of language in drama. Hence, the present research activity keeps itself restricted to the study of Presupposition and Conversational Implicature in dramatic conversational passages which are accompanied by several verbal and non-verbal features.

1.4.4 Hypothesis

It is a general supposition that language in Pinter’s plays has been often reduced to meaningless utterance at the extreme point of its use. However, the concepts of Presupposition and Conversational Implicature applied to Pinter’s plays may prove that it is possible to mean more than what is actually communicated by the characters through absurd communicative activities. Since Presupposition and Conversational Implicature
are special kinds of linguistic and pragmatic inferences respectively, varieties of communicative principles, maxims, mechanisms and strategies in Pinter’s plays can be brought within the scope of the pragmatic theory. Presupposition and Conversational Implicature could be powerful Linguistic and Pragmatic tools respectively which may help arrive at exact meanings conveyed through the absurd dramatic conversational activities.

1.4.5 Methodology

The conversational passages extracted from selected plays are investigated and analyzed with reference to various Presupposition Triggers and types of Presupposition as well as Conversational Implicature. The basic material comprises of varieties of potential conversational passages from the selected plays. It is not practicable to analyze each and every dialogue from the plays. So the selection of conversational pieces depends primarily upon the availability of Presupposition generating linguistic items and observance and violation of the maxims of Cooperative Principle by the characters involved in the conversation. The researcher makes use of analytical and interpretative method for the present study. The process of analysis involves certain steps which have been discussed elaborately in analytical models at the beginning of Chapters IV and V.

1.5 CONCLUSION

Thus, chapter I briefly surveys pragmatics with its emergence and developments over the period of time. It also investigates contributions of various prominent linguists and philosophers. It throws light on the differences between the two branches of linguistics which study language from distinct points of view, namely- semantics and pragmatics. A brief review of Theatre of the Absurd also has been taken with contributions of foremost absurd playwrights. It also highlights Harold Pinter as one of the most prominent absurd playwrights with a short biographical sketch. Finally, the chapter contains research design which includes justification, aims and objectives, scope and limitations, hypothesis and methodology adopted for the present research work.