1.1 Preliminaries

The Theatre of the Absurd is one of the most prominent movements in literature and in philosophy in the middle of the twentieth century. It is the term used for particular plays written by a number of European and American playwrights in the late 1940s, 1950s, and 1960s. It is also the description that is assigned to the style which has evolved from the work of those playwrights. The absurd playwrights have constantly been associated with that group of philosophers and thinkers, such as Martin Heidegger, Simone de Beauvoir, Albert Camus and Jean-Paul Sartre, who lived at the beginning of the twentieth century and witnessed World War II and who came to be known as 'existentialists'. This is because of the view of the human conditions presented in their works, their nature, ideas and thoughts which possess the main characters. "If basic aspects of social structure remained remarkably stable, the same could not be said for the culture and values of the fifties and sixties" (Ford, 1983: 39).

The term 'Le Theatre de l' Absurde' was coined by the Hungarian critic Martin Esslin, who made it the title of his book published in 1961, a book that describes and comments on these plays. Esslin saw the work of these playwrights as giving artistic form to Albert Camus' philosophy illustrated in his work 'The Myth of Sisyphus' in 1942, that man is in continuous search for meaning, unity, clarity in a world of mysterious and indecipherable nature, a world that is devoid of God and eternal truths and values. This recognition is usually associated with feelings of failure, loss, worthlessness, and bafflement. For Camus, life is inherently without meaning. When everything that gave meaning and purpose to life and to existence turned out to be illusionary, the old and familiar world became alien in which man felt lost and 'exile' as Camus (1955: 5) says:
A world that can be explained by reasoning, however faulty, is a familiar world. But in a universe that is suddenly deprived of illusions and light, man feels a stranger. His is an irremediable exile, because he is deprived of memories of a lost homeland as much as he lacks the hope of a promised land to come. The divorce between man and his life, the actor and his setting, truly constitutes the feeling of Absurdity.

The absurdity of life is an existential component of all literature. Therefore, it is not new. The awareness of the absurdity is probably a recent phenomenon. The absurdity seems to have emerged as a reaction to the preceding movements in literature, and as a consequence of radical social changes in the life of the western communities. The World War II played a vital role in the emergence of the absurd as a new literary movement or a new theatre. "There is no doubt that in the mid-1950s British drama, which had been relatively stagnant and backward-looking for a number of years, was revitalized by the appearance of several new young dramatists" (Stephen, 1981: 11). That is why some writers have criticized the expression 'Theatre of Absurd' proposing other expressions like 'New Theatre' or 'Anti-Theatre'. Drabble (2000: 3) points out that:

the theatre of the Absurd gives ample expressions, often leaving the observer baffled in the face of disjointed, meaningless, or repetitious dialogues, incomprehensible behavior, and plots which deny all notion of logical or realistic development. But the recognition of the absurd
nature of human existence also provided dramatists with a rich source of comedy".

"The Theatre of the Absurd" looms large as a movement in contemporary theatre not merely because it has been in fashion recently but because it reflects a shared state of mind" (Gassner, 1956: 327). The world had undergone many traumatic events and changes which are without doubt represented in the literature of that period. This is because literature is the mirror of the world in which man lives. As Esslin (1961: 23) opines that "the decline of religious faith was masked until the end of the Second World War by the substitute of a religious faith in progress, nationalism, and various totalitarian fallacies. All this was shattered by the war."

The upshot of the World War II shattered all the beliefs, morals, principles and values of the pre-war Western World in the sense that "the certitudes and unshakable basic assumptions of former ages have been swept away, they have been tested and found wanting . . . discredited as cheap and somewhat childish illusions" (Ibid: 23). Thus, the philosophy definitely was affected by these upshots. For Camus, life is like a routine and the absurd man is determined to live his life as best as he can, and the only way of doing this is to live the present moment, knowing that life is short. Man has to have resolution to go on in spite of all his anguish and helplessness. This is indicated in Camus' work 'Le Mythe de Sisyphe'. The origin of the character of 'Sisyphus' in Camus' work is from Greek 'Sisyphos'. In Merriam-Webster's 11th Collegiate Dictionary, 'Sisyphos' is about:

a legendary king of Corinth condemned eternally to repeat the cycle of rolling a heavy rock up a hill in Hades only to
have it roll down as it nears the top. This story is of a tremendous importance because many Absurd playwrights try to implicate that life is worthless and it is like a useless cycle that Man should experience; it is a matter of wasting time.

The Theatre of the Absurd seems to depart from the natural and logical norms of language, realistic characters, situations, and all other theatrical conventions. Language has been described as meaningless, purposeless, and equivocal. It is full of clichés, pointless plots, repetitive and nonsensical dialogues among the characters. There are also dramatic non sequiturs that are used to describe the moods of the characters who utter statements that do not seem to follow what has just been said in any natural or logical way, i.e. there is irrelevance and a state of complete confusion and disorder in the context of the plays. So, the important questions: 'Are these plays really worthless in the sense that they do not implicate any meaning?' 'Was the chaos used in a tricky artistic manner to conceal a significant idea in the plays?' and 'What is that idea?' Ousby (1992: 3) states:

Certain of the techniques used by absurdist writers have nevertheless established themselves in the contemporary theatre. . . The carrying of logical ad absurdum, the dissolution of language, the bizarre relationship of stage properties to dramatic situation, the diminution of sense by repetition or unexplained intensification, the rejection of narrative continuity and the refusal to allow characters or even scenery to be self-defining have become acceptable stage conventions . . . The techniques are of the disruptive kind associated with farce.
Esslin (1961: 26) states that the moments when characters resort to nonsense language and clichés or when words appear to have lost their denotative function, thus creating misunderstanding among the characters, make Theatre of the Absurd distinctive. Language frequently gains a certain phonetic, rhythmical, almost musical quality, opening up a wide range of often comic playfulness.

Distinctively Absurdist language ranges from meaningless clichés to non-non-sequiturs style of word play. 'The Bald Soprano', for example, was inspired by a language book in which characters exchange vacant clichés that are ultimately never valued as a true connection. Likewise, the characters in 'Waiting for Godot', like many other absurd characters, go through routine dialogues. 'Waiting for Godot', a play by Samuel Beckett, is briefly about two tramps: Estragon and Vladimir who call each other by two diminutive names 'Gogo' and 'Didi'. They are waiting for the promised arrival of a mysterious being called Godot on a country road where there is nothing but a bare tree. Godot is the one who can solve their problems and hence they keep waiting for him. To alleviate the boredom, they try to recall their past, eat, tell jokes, etc. Two passers-by, Pozzo, who is obviously a bourgeois master and Lucky who is his slave, appear briefly. Tied by a piece of rope around his neck, Lucky is pulled by Pozzo. Godot sends his message through a boy saying that he will not come tonight but certainly tomorrow. This waiting pushes them to do different types of activities to pass the time. They even try to commit suicide. Beckett's characters' dialogues are full of clichés that actually do not communicate anything serious or make a human connection, as in the following example:

ESTRAGON: Then adieu.
POZZO: Adieu.
VLADIMIR: Adieu.
POZZO: Adieu.
Silence. No one moves.
VLADIMIR: Adieu.
POZZO: Adieu.
ESTRAGON: Adieu.
Silence.
POZZO: And thank you.
VLADIMIR: Thank you.
POZZO: Not at all.
ESTRAGON: Yes yes.
POZZO: No no.
VLADIMIR: Yes yes.
ESTRAGON: No no.
Silence. (P. 50).

In other cases, the dialogue is purposefully elliptical. Many absurd plays devalue the logical form of the language for the sake of giving a new world picture. Harold Pinter, who is famous for his pause that is called "Pinter pause", presents more subtly elliptical dialogue; often the primary things characters should talk about are replaced by ellipsis or dashes. 'The Caretaker', a play by Harold Pinter, is about two brothers: Mick and Aston. The latter saves the life of a tramp 'Davies' and receives him in their house. Davies tries to play the two brothers against one another to dominate in the house. He praises Mick, the one who abuses him physically and verbally and creates a kind of hostility with Aston, the one who helps him. Finally, Davies' plan to control Mick fails and the two brothers show him the door. The following
The exchange between Aston and Davies in 'The Caretaker' is typical of Pinter:

ASTON: More or less exactly what you...
DAVIES: That's it... that's what I'm getting at is... I mean, what sort of jobs... (Pause.)
ASTON: Well, there's things like the stairs... and the...
the bells...
DAVIES: But it'd be a matter... wouldn't it... it'd be a matter of a broom... isn't it? (P. 43).

Much of the dialogue in absurd drama, especially in Beckett's, for example, reflects a kind of evasiveness and inability to make a direct connection between the characters. When an nonsensical language is used it also demonstrates the disconnection through comic effects, as in Lucky's long speech (P. 45-7) when Pozzo says "He can't think without his hat" (P. 43), as it is stated in the following quotation from Lucky's speech:

LUCKY: Given the existence as uttered forth in the public works of Puncher and Wattmann of a personal God quaquaquaqua with white beard quaquaquaqua outside time without extension who from the heights of divine apathia divine athambia divine aphasia loves us dearly with some exceptions for reasons unknown but time will tell and suffers like the divine Miranda with those who for reasons unknown but time will tell are plunged in torment plunged in fire whose fire flames if that continues and who can doubt it will fire the firmament that is to say blast hell to heaven so blue still and calm so calm with a calm which
even though intermittent is better than nothing but not so fast and considering what is more that as a result of the labors left unfinished crowned by the Acacacademy of Anthropopopometry of Essy-in-Possy of Testew and Cunard it is established beyond all doubt all other doubt than that which clings to the labors of men that as a result of the labors unfinished of Testew and Cunnard. (P. 45).

Nonsense may also be used abusively, as in Pinter's 'The Birthday Party' when Goldberg and McCann torture Stanley with apparently nonsensical questions and non-sequiturs:

   GOLDBERG: What do you use for pyjamas?
   STANLEY: Nothing.
   GOLDBERG: You verminate the sheet of your birth.
   MCCANN: What about the Albigensenist heresy?
   GOLDBERG: Who watered the wicket in Melbourne?
   MCCANN: What about the blessed Oliver Plunkett?
   GOLDBERG: Speak up, Webber. Why did the chicken cross the road? (P. 51).

The above examples demonstrate the limits of language while questioning or parodying the determinism of science. Beckett's duo Estragon and Vladimir bother Pozzo with their consequent questions:

   VLADIMIR: Before you go tell him to sing.
   POZZO: Who?
   VLADIMIR: Lucky.
   POZZO: To sing?
   VLADIMIR: Yes. Or to think. Or to recite.
POZZO: But he is dumb.
VLADIMIR: Dumb!
POZZO: Dumb. He can't even groan.
VLADIMIR: Dumb! Since when?
POZZO: *(suddenly furious.)* Have you not done tormenting me with your accursed time! It's abominable! When! When! One day, is that not enough for you, one day he went dumb, one day I went blind, one day we'll go deaf, one day we were born, one day we shall die, the same day, the same second, is that not enough for you? *(Calmer.)* They give birth astride of a grave, the light gleams an instant, then it's night once more. *(He jerks the rope.)* On!

(P. 102-3).

In Ionesco's 'The Lesson', a professor tries to force a pupil to understand his nonsensical philology lesson:

PROF: In Spanish: the roses of my grandmother are as yellow as my grandfather who is Asiatic; in Latin: the roses of my grandmother are as yellow as my grandfather who is Asiatic. Do you detect the difference? Translate this into ...

Romanian

PUPIL: The ... how do you say "roses" in Romanian?

PROF: But "roses", what else? ... "roses" is a translation in Oriental of the French word "roses", in Spanish "roses", do you get it? In Sardanapali, "roses". (P. 53).

In 'Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead', one can see many situations where the characters complain about the failure in communication, as in the following:
PLAYER: For an audience, disappointing. For voyeurs, about average.

ROS: What's the difference?

PLAYER: Ten guilders.

ROS (horrified): Ten guilders!

PLAYER: I mean eight.

ROS: Together?

PLAYER: Each. I don't think you understand—

ROS: What are you saying?

PLAYER: What am I saying—seven. (P. 24)

'Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead', a play by Tom Stoppard, is about two friends of Hamlet: Rosencrantz and Guildenstern who are summoned to come from hometown to Danish royal court to perform the King Claudius' scheme of finding the cause of Hamlet's melancholy and then sending him to England to be executed. The play is simply a duplication of Shakespeare's Hamlet but with evident differences, such as Shakespeare's minor characters Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are the main characters in Stoppard's text. The very title of the play is quoted from Shakespeare's text, where the First Ambassador of England declares, 'Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead' (Hamlet: 304).

1.2 Equivocation of the Absurd Theatre

The language of the Theatre of the Absurd echoes a kind of indirectness, evasiveness, equivocation and sometimes inability to make a connection. The equivocation of the language emerges from the type of scripts written by the playwrights and spoken by the characters
on the stage. This equivocal language may look peculiar to some audience and interesting to others. One may ask 'What is equivocation?' and 'What are the limits of this term?' The term 'equivocation' is itself confusing unless it is defined and its relations to other terms, that could have the same meaning, should be illustrated.

1.2.1 Definition of Equivocation

Equivocation is generally defined as the misleading use of a word, phrase or sentence with multiple meanings. McArthur (1992: 378) points out that equivocation is:

from Latin aequivovatio/aequivocationis having equal voices or meanings, roughly translating Greek hómo-numia the same name . . . Ambiguity and uncertainty that arise from unclear meaning. An equivocal usage can be interpreted, according to context, in two or more ways: for example, the ethnic name Brit may be pejorative (Brits out! In Northern Ireland), casual and neutral (Lots of Brits do this), or amiable (Nice to see so many Brits in the States this year).

When language is capable of being understood in two or more ways, one can say that equivocation exists. There are many equivocal expressions in natural languages because their meanings are sometimes indefinable. Some people may confuse the term 'equivoque' with 'equivocation'. The former is a word, expression, , etc. that seems equivocal in the sense that it is understood in more than one way, whereas the latter is "The phenomenon of two words being exactly alike in written and spoken form, but having different meanings, e.g.
meal 'repast' and meal 'powered grain'" (Hartmann and Stork, 1972: 78). 'Equivoque' has other variants 'equivoke' and 'equivocality that have the same meaning. According to Merriam-Webster's 11th Collegiate Dictionary, 'equivoque' is from the French équivoque meaning 'equivocal', originally from late Latin aequivocus, that can also stand for double meaning or wordplay. McArthur's definition (1992: 116) of 'equivoque' corresponds with Hartmann and Stork's "An ambiguous statement or passage, often intentionally evasive or phrased to have two possible interpretations, double meaning, word play or pun".

Many linguists use the word 'ambiguity' to refer to equivocation. Therefore, one may raise a question: 'Is equivocation the same as ambiguity?' From one point of view, they are synonymous because both refer to the situation where there is a sort of language that has more than one interpretation. McAthur (1992) and Grambs (1989) support the view that they are synonyms. The question now is 'What is ambiguity?' Ambiguity is the state of an expression or term liable to more than one interpretation. From the etymological point of view, ambiguity is

from Latin ambiguitas acting both ways, shifting, from ambi- both ways, agree/actum to drive, act]. Actual or potential uncertainty of meaning, especially if a word, phrase, or sentence can be understood in two ways: for example, the written statement They can fish, which could mean They may or are able to fish and They put fish in cans. (McAthur, 1992: 32-3).
The prefix 'ambi-' of the term 'ambiguity' means two and as a whole it means the case in which a form has two or more senses. "Ambiguity is when a word, phrase, or sentence has distinct meanings" (Hudson, 2000: 96). Grambs (1989: 12) states that it is "The state or quality of having more than one possible meaning; unclear or unresolved sense; a double meaning or equivocal word or expression. Adj. ambiguous; adv. ambiguously; n. ambiguousness." Trask (1993: 13-14) supports that it is the phenomenon in which a single string of words receives two or more distinct meanings...An ambiguous string is loosely referred to as an 'ambiguous sentence' more precisely; such a string corresponds to two or more distinct sentences.

In English, there are many examples of ambiguity. The traditional example is that of the word 'bank', which either means 'financial institution' or 'side of the river'. In this case, the equivocation "exists when a form has two or more meanings" (Hudson, 2000: 313). This is because the word 'bank' is homonymous. 'Homonymy' is generally defined as a sense relation that holds between two or more lexical items which have identical form, and correspond with separate entries in the dictionary. The term 'homonymy' is traditionally illustrated through the different meanings of the above example. There has been considerable confusion in using the term 'homonymy' as to whether it denotes identity of pronunciation, of spelling, of both, or some syntactic issue. The distinction is explained in Chapter II of this dissertation.
One of the important issues that have to be addressed here is the difference between ambiguity and vagueness. Ambiguity is not the same as vagueness. Words, phrases, or sentences are vague if they do not have well defined boundaries. With vagueness, the number of possible meanings is open. For example, there is vagueness when one says 'She had a vehicle'. This is because this vehicle may be a car, truck, van, bus, etc. It can be red, white, black, etc. It may be Mercedes, Ford, Chevrolet, etc. Most importantly is 'Who is she?' It is related to the uncertainty of the meanings of the expressions that need to be interpreted. Hudson (2000: 313) differentiates:

Ambiguity exists when a form has two or more meanings. Ambiguity is different from vagueness. With vagueness, the number of possible meanings is quite open. For example, there is vagueness when I say 'I bought a dog.' The dog could be male or female, brown or white, big or small, St Bernard or Chihuahua, etc. But in 'Can you see the [bič]?' two meanings contrast quite crisply: 'Can you see the beech?', and 'Can you see the beach?'

This means that ambiguity presents a choice between a definite number of known interpretations, while vagueness presents a choice between a number of possible interpretations, none of which has a well-defined or agreed-upon meaning. So, with vagueness the options of meanings are wider and indefinable. Löbnor (2002: 45) exemplifies

Vagueness can be observed with all concepts that depend on properties varying on a continuous scale. Colour terms like red have a vague meaning, because we conceive the range of colours as a continuum with fuzzy transitions.
Whether something is 'big' or not, 'good' or not is a matter of degree. In general, all gradable adjectives (i.e. adjectives with a comparative and superlative form) are vague.

However, the term 'equivocation' is used in the sense of ambiguity as well as in the sense of vagueness. It is very evident in the definition stated by Grambs (1989: 116) which says that "To use deliberately confusing language to mislead or deceive, or ambiguity through choice of words; make an evasive statement or double meaning. Adj. equivocal; adv. equivocally; n. equivocalness, equivocation." It is illustrated by McArthur's definition (1992: 378) which says "Ambiguity and uncertainty that arise from unclear meaning", etc. 'Equivocation' is the term that fits the type of language used in the Theatre of the Absurd because there are many cases that can be regarded as examples for of equivocation in its two senses.

In formal logic, equivocation is known as a type of formal fallacy which is the use of a word several times, but presenting the word with a different meaning each time. It is an argument known as syllogism used to dispute about certain issues. In Merriam-Webster's 11th Collegiate Dictionary, it is defined as "a deductive scheme of a formal argument consisting of a major and a minor premise and a conclusion (as in "every virtue is laudable; kindness is a virtue; therefore kindness is laudable")." So, the fallacy of equivocation is to use a word or phrase in two different senses. Copi (1968: 77) confirms that "when we confuse the different meanings a single word or phrase may have, using it in different sense in the same context, we are using it equivocally. If the context happens to be an argument, we commit fallacy of equivocation."
The following is an example of an argument which is a set of propositions, the first two are premises and the last one is obviously the conclusion of the argument:

He has a right;
What is right can not be wrong;
Therefore, he can not be wrong.

In this use of equivocation, the word 'right' in the first premise is used as a noun meaning 'a proper or legal claim to have or get something or to behave in a particular way', but in the second premise it is used as an adjective, synonym of the word of 'correct'. The fallacy of equivocation is often used with words that are of homonymous nature, i.e., have many meanings which often overlap within a proper context. In this case, the fallacy usually becomes apparent if one translates this argument into another language. In Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary, 'syllogism' is defined as "a way of arguing in which two statements are used to prove that a third statement is true, for example: 'All humans must die; I am a human; therefore I must die.'"

An important questions is that 'Can we use metaphor for syllogism?' There are cases where a separate case of equivocation is metaphor:

A Jackass is a male member of the species;
All Jackasses have long ears;
Karl is a jackass;
Therefore, Karl has long ears.
In this example, the equivocation is apparently the metaphorical use of 'jackass' to imply 'a stupid or obnoxious person' instead of 'a male ass'. The fallacies of arguer does a semantic shift, slowly changing the context as they go in such a way to achieve equivocation by treating distinct meanings of the word as equivalent. (See Wikipedia Encyclopaedia).

1.2.2 Uses of Equivocation

Basically, there are two purposes of equivocation. The first one is to conceal something internally. The second one is to play on the meanings of a word, phrase, etc. for rhetorical effects either humorous or serious. However, one may ask questions, such as 'What are the uses of equivocation?', 'How equivocation is used in the Absurd Theatre?' and 'Why do some writers try to equivocate the language?'

1.2.2.1 Evasion

Evasion seems to be a serious reason for equivocating the addresser's message. It is simply a statement used by someone to avoid dealing with something or talking about something directly and frankly. So, it is used as a means of equivocation in some contexts to avoid the unpleasant truth. To equivocate is to "make an evasive statement or double meaning" (Grambs, 1989: 116). Many of the euphemisms, for example, are used in this way to avoid mentioning something directly. Because the phenomenon of taboo incorporates many subjects such as sex, excretion, death, human body, reproduction, etc. speakers are constantly compelled to substitute the words that refer to the distasteful thing, mainly by using euphemisms. In order to communicate smoothly and mildly, euphemisms are continually, and often subconsciously, made so as to evade the taboo speech that may be conducted between
people about the matters of contravention, as in 'terminate' for 'kill', 'given notice' for 'fired', 'kick the bucket' for 'die', etc. Akmajian et al (1995: 429) state that "one of the main reasons for indirection is either to be polite, to avoid being rude, or to show deference and respect."

It is not, for example, so appropriate to refer to the people who do not have money as 'poor'. Many expressions are employed to avoid hurting people's feelings. Such expressions can be 'under-privileged', 'disadvantaged' or 'culturally deprived'. Phrases such as 'developing countries', 'less developed countries' and 'emergent nations' are used to refer to economically less favoured parts of the world that are no longer referred to as 'backwards', 'undeveloped' or 'third world', respectively. Bolinger and Sears (1981: 149) mention that the phrase 'taking out a city' is used for 'destroying a city', an innocent expression is substituted for a wicked one.

It seems that euphemism is found not only as a way to avoid but also as a reaction to 'double entendre. 'Double entendre' is a particular type of equivocation, similar to the pun. It is generally a figure of speech in which a spoken language can be understood in either of two ways. In Merriam-Webster's 11th Collegiate Dictionary, it is defined as "ambiguity of meaning arising from language that lends itself to more than one interpretation . . . a word or expression capable of two interpretations with one usually risqué". It is usually used to display something in a sneaky manner. Thus, it may or may not be understood by the addressee(s), because

When innuendo is used in a sentence, it could go completely undetected by someone who was not familiar with the hidden meaning, and he or she would find nothing odd about the sentence (aside from other people finding it
humorous for seemingly no reason). Perhaps, because an
innuendo is not considered offensive to those who do not
"get" the hidden implication, it is often prevalent in sitcoms
and other comedy which would in fact be considered
suitable for children. (See Wikipedia Encyclopaedia).

Equivocation in the form of double-entendre has now become
popular in modern films and television, as a way to conceal adult
humour in a work aimed at general audience, such as the James Bond
films which are rife with double entendre, as in 'Tomorrow Never Dies'
(1997), when Bond is disturbed by a telephone while in bed with a
Danish girl, he explains that he is busy brushing up on his Danish, to
which the caller Moneypenny replies, "You always were a cunning
linguist, James". The phrase cunning linguist sounds like cunnilingus
which has taboo connotations related to sex, i.e., one of the meanings is
presumed to be more innocent while the other one is risqué. (Ibid). This
is a type of compound pun that depends on the structure of several
words.

Fromkin et al (2003: 479) indicate that in many societies because
death is feared, there has arisen many euphemisms related to this
subject, which equivocate the common meaning of the phrases, and
thus misunderstanding may occur. For instance, those who take care of
the dead bodies of the loved people are more likely to be 'funeral
directors' than 'morticians' or 'undertakers'. Brook (1958: 183)
exemplifies, "Initials are sometimes used, as in M.D. for mentally
deficient and T.B. for tuberculosis." He also adds others like 'untruthful'
for a 'liar', 'unwise' for 'stupid', and 'intemperate' for 'blunt'. (Ibid).

McArthur (1992: 1020) states that since the late 20th century
combinations of a capital letter such as L with –word are commonly
used, as in the $L$-word (for liberal), and the $N$-word (for nigger) on the analogy of the $F$-word (for f*ck). These combinations are the informal use of language. Akmajian et al (1995: 289) and Crystal (2003 b: 174) affirm this view by stating that during the recession of the early 1990s newspapers would talk about 'the F-word' that refers to federalism of the European Community. This may not be sufficient to mollify and prettify the picture of the word used. Despite the fact that Partridge in his 'Dictionary of Slang and Unconventional English' included the word 'f*ck' by the use of asterisks for the vowel, the result was a storm of complaints that represent people's high disapproval against this step. Hughes (1988: 212) provides many examples of military and political registers, such as 'war zones' are alluded to as 'operational areas', 'liquidation' for 'murder', and 'strategic weapons' for 'nuclear weapons'.

However, most of the aforementioned examples for euphemisms are used to avoid saying or doing something by its direct or truthful manner. This avoidance or evasion is made by replacing the word or phrase of taboo connotations with another word or phrase that is free of these connotations. Thus, the use of the word or phrase that is free of taboo connotations can be unfamiliar to the addressees and thus equivocal, because it is used in a way that conceals the awful connotation of the denotation and the addressees may interpret the word or phrase encoded in the new form differently. Usually, it takes time for this word or phrase to be understood in its new evasive-equivocal sense, such as 'operational areas', 'the striped one', 'kick the bucket', etc. though these examples are common nowadays to the English speakers. In Oxford Advanced English Dictionary, equivocation is defined as "a way of behaving or speaking that is not clear or definite and is intended to avoid or hide the truth". So, equivocation can be used in the sense of evasion.
1.2.2.2 Rhetorical Effects

Playing with the various meanings of a word is a phenomenon generally known as 'pun', also known as 'paronomasia' in linguistics. It is a figure of speech which consists of an intentional perplexity of similar words within a phrase or a sentence for rhetorical effect. In Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary, it is defined as "the clever or humorous use of a word that has more than one meaning, or of words that have different meanings but sound the same". It is used for rhetorical effects either for humour or seriousness. Equivocation occurs simply because the addressee(s) may not be aware of either sense of the word or phrase used by the addressee. Many ordinary puns have a revitalizing effect accompanied by a surprise when the addressee realizes that the word has to be taken in its etymological sense, as against its customary acceptance. In some cases, the ambiguity may also be unintentional on the addressee's part and the oblique reference only exists in the imagination of the listener (Ullmann, 1957:180). The phenomenon of 'pun' is discussed in Chapter II.

1.2.2.3 Implication

Many plays are intentionally composed in an equivocal form, as in the plays of the Absurd Theatre, where it seems that equivocation is a sort of flavor that the playwrights put in the communication that takes place between the characters. That is, they equivocate their ideas, thoughts, plots, viewpoints, beliefs, etc. which have been interpreted differently. To equivocate is "To use deliberately confusing language to mislead or deceive, or ambiguity through choice of words" (Grambs, 1989: 116). Equivocation is used to intentionally equivocate, i.e., to hide certain things such as the true conditions about the human life. When someone reads the plays or watches them on the stage in a
theatre, he/she may perceive them in a meaningless manner, i.e., without any purpose and therefore not worth watching. On the other hand, other groups of people may understand them in a different manner.

Different viewers and critics perceive the plays of the Absurd Theatre in different manners. That is, the interpretations of the same message encoded by the writers in the plays are set differently. All these interpretations occur due to the playwrights' style, a style which cannot obviously be compared with styles of other literary movements. The plays of the Absurd Theatre are seen to be the artistic verbalization of the post-war philosophy of the middle of the twentieth century. The philosophy was inspired by many thinkers and philosophers, especially Albert Camus, who think that life is intrinsically without purpose and reason. Writers of the Absurd Theatre, as described by Martin Esslin, touch upon this philosophy in their plays in an equivocal manner. That is why these plays look meaningless and empty for many members of the audience/readers. They are not understood merely by their words spoken on the stage by the characters but they represent a group art or a combination of many linguistic and non-linguistic factors which should be examined carefully as a totality to understand the ideas implicated in them.

1.2.3 Types of Equivocation

Versatile people use language in different ways, on different occasions and for different purposes. English, like many other languages, contains numerous words, expressions, etc. with multiple meanings that are used in a way which creates confusion and equivocation for the audience/readers. Equivocation evidently varies from text to text and from one style to another. The manner of
presenting the text is usually affected by a number of elements, such as the writer, audience/readers, subject matter of what the writer is trying to bring in, type of communication used, etc.

Communication can generally be defined as the contact between living creatures. It takes many various forms, such as the spoken and written language, gestures, photography, dance, etc. Accordingly, this research deals with equivocation on three different levels. These are 'lexical equivocation', 'structural equivocation' and 'equivocation of non-verbal communication'. The first two types are concerned with the language used in the absurd plays. Hudson (2000: 313) confirms that there are two kinds of ambiguousness of language: lexical equivocation and structural equivocation. The third type of equivocation is concerned with the other types of communication that seem to be complementary to the language and beyond the language.

One of the objectives of this research is to investigate the various types of equivocation employed by the writers under consideration, i.e., to prove that equivocation exists on many linguistic levels: semantics, phonological, structural, etc. that can briefly be stated by the following diagram:
1.2.3.1 Lexical Equivocation

Lexical equivocation is the basic type of equivocation where morphemes and words are used equivocally either intentionally or unintentionally. This means that morphemes and words can be equivocal semantically, phonologically, phonetically, etc. A simple example can be 'It is light', where the equivocation of the sentence is attributed to the use of a single word (light) which has obviously two different interpretations: either it is 'the opposite of dark', or it is 'the opposite of heavy'. Akmajian et al (1995: 140) exemplify 'The sentence was a long one'. The equivocation of this sentence arises from the word 'sentence' that can either mean 'a punishment given to someone by the court of law', or 'a linguistic unit'.

1.2.3.2 Structural Equivocation

Structural equivocation is the type of equivocation that results from the structure of the phrase, sentence and consequently the whole
text. This is not the case where words have two different meanings but of a phrase or sentence that may have equivocal structure that purports to express two or more interpretations, as in 'Arabs like haunting hawks'. The phrase 'haunting hawks' is ambiguous due to its construction by the addressee. The equivocation is between the noun phrase 'haunting hawks' consisting of participial attributive adjective plus its head noun, and the embedded participle clause 'haunting hawks' consisting of a non-finite verb and its object. Brown and Miller (1980: 121) state that "part of the understanding of English sentence is understanding what goes with what." Thus, structural equivocation is analyzed through the use of two interrelated theories in Chapter III and IV.

1.2.3.3 Non-Verbal Equivocation

Theatre can simply be defined as a place, whether an outdoor structure or a large hall, of watching a literary artistic mode, such as narrative, lyric, and dramatic, which is constituted not only of words, but also by exclusively dramatic visual components such as signs, movements, physical gestures, clothes, music, and other man-made materials. Any artistic mode is intended for representation by actors impersonating the characters and performing the dialogue and action (See Answers Cooperation). So, the artistic mode performed on the stage is composed not only of verbal-communication but also non-verbal communication.

Therefore, the question is, 'Does equivocation exist in the non-verbal communication?' Chapter V is concerned with finding an answer to this question. The rationale behind this is that the dramatic visual components, some of which are mentioned above, are of significance as they play an important role in the production of drama on the stage.
before the audience and hence they are complementary components to the actors' verbal communication. Thus,

Meaning is created when a sign occurs in a specific context. This is as true of visual symbols as it is of language: a red flag on a lifeguard's pole on a beach has different signification from a red flag held by the supporters of a political party marching at a demonstration.

In conversation, gestures, such as pointing, and facial expressions, such as smiles and frowns, carry meaning (Bloor and Bloor, 2007:15).

Moreover, In Chambers English Dictionary (1988), 'word' is defined as "a unit of spoken language: written sign representing such an utterance." Thus, one may say that equivocation can occur in language as well as in other types of communications that are used to complete the dramatic performance and to carry out certain meanings to the readers/audience. This chapter of the study is an introduction to the following chapters that are concerned with the analysis of equivocation in the Theatre of the Absurd by different linguistic models to find out their implied meanings.

1.3 The Hypotheses

The study is an attempt to verify the following hypotheses:

1. The complexities of the use, choice and interpretation of the absurd language as well as the situations in which it is used create a certain type of equivocation.
2. Equivocation is used intentionally by the absurd playwrights to avoid revealing their ideas overtly to the public. That is, the plays of the Absurd Theatre have something to say but in an equivocal way.

3. To maintain their sense of existence and alleviate the void that they encounter regularly, repetitive dialogues and repetitive activities are constantly used by the absurd characters.

1.4 The Aims and Objectives of the Study

The objectives of the study are as follows:

1. To identify and analyze the equivocal ideas implicated in the language of the absurd plays.

2. To investigate the various types of equivocation used by the playwrights under consideration.

3. To examine the probable motives of using equivocation in the plays.

4. To highlight and find out the differences and similarities in the use of equivocation between the texts under the analysis of the study.

1.5 The Significance of the Study

Theatre or book is the instrument whereby the playwrights present their ideas comically, tragically or both. This presentation of ideas could either be in a plain manner that can be easily be perceived by the audience/readers or in an equivocal manner that requires models of analysis. Thus, the main purpose of this study is to find out how equivocation is used in the absurd plays and what ideas and thoughts could be implicated in them.