

The significance of Deictic Expressions in completing meaning of Absurd Theater: The Case of Pinter's *Birthday Party*

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Abstract:

The study discusses the significance of deixis in completing the meaning of Absurd theatre in one of prominent absurd plays which is Pinter's *Birthday Party*. It is noticed that deictic expressions play very vital role in the language of drama by allowing dramatic context to be manifested as an actual and dynamic world. The paper focuses on proximal deixis which is very important in characterizing the dramatic world because drama is performed on stage and becomes very close to reality by the virtue of proximal deixis. The work aims to show how deictic expressions participate to complete the idea of the message conveyed by the author. The paper consists of three sections; the first is an introduction about Pinter's *Birthday Party* as absurd play. The second section gives an insight about the concept of deixis and how it is important in creating dramatic context. The third section delineates types of deictic expressions and analyzing extracts selected from Pinter's *Birthdays Party* on light of types of deixis. The research will use stylistic method as a mode of analysis in order to explore how deictic expressions establish interpersonal rapport among characters. In broader sense, the significance of the paper is attempt to clarify how deictic expressions add an essential effect to literary product. Finally, the paper ends up with conclusion and suggested recommendations for further researches.

1.1. Introduction

Birthday Party is one of great plays by the British dramatist Harold Pinter (1930). Its title is ironical but suitable to the content of the play. The central character of *Birthday Party* is Stanley a former pianist who lives in Mr. Petey and Mrs. Meg's boarding house which is seemingly a suitable place for him. Bennet (2011) argues that Stanley is a former pianist who prefers Meg and Petey's boarding house as a safe place. Two sinister outsiders Goldenberg and MacCann come to the place where Stanley lives. A birthday party is celebrated in the boarding house. However, the birthday party is rather unpleasant and full of menace and fear instead of being full of joy and happiness. That reflects the nature of the world in which the characters live due to the status quo. It is theorized that the characters prefer to live in a world of contradiction rather than a world of reality because the latter cannot fulfill their desires and the former alludes such desires (ibid). The central idea of the play focuses on the lack of love and affection which are characterized as ingredients of human nature. All characters long for love and affection they experienced in the past but the current situation force them to live lonely. It is noticed that Meg treats Stanley as a son she goes to his room to wake him up for breakfast. Lulu likes to go with Stanley for a picnic. Stanley recollects in pain the love and affection of his previous life in the past. Also, Petey lacks of love from his wife Meg. Thus, these characters suffer and in search of love and affection. The two sinister outsiders McCann and Goldenberg come to this house to destroy their attempt to regain what they have experienced. The atmosphere of the play shows no communication of human qualities. That might be manifested via the way of how deictic expressions are utilized to render a world characterized as evasive and void of meaning.

2.1.1 Deixis as a General Concept

The term is taken from Greek word which means pointing via language. Deixis is very important term pragmatics to avoid repetition in language in text or discourse. Levinson states "Deixis concerns the ways in which languages encode or grammaticalize features of the context of utterance or speech event," (1983:54). In the other words, it concerns with the interpretation of the utterances by the help of the contextual analysis. Deixis belongs to the scope of pragmatics because simply it deals with the relationship between language structure and its context. If we look at the term Deixis from philosophical point of view, we should take into the consideration the background of the speaker and the addressee. It is not acceptable to say that deictic

expression is context- independent, because sentences which have deictic expressions should depend on certain facts within context. Yule argues "... people via person deixis ('me' and 'you'), or location via special deixis('here' and 'there'), or time via temporal ... All these expressions depend on the speaker and hearer sharing the same context" (1996: 9). For that reason, we should say that deictic expressions are context dependent. The paper sheds light on the significance of the types of deixis and which type is more appropriate to dramatic text rather than the other. By discussing the term deixis, the research would give an insight on the difference between the mode drama in Greek tragedies and the modern mode of writing. The research aims to clarify the importance of deixis in language and how it is employed by playwrights to literary work can be articulated on the stage within a certain context by exploiting various types of deictic expressions. Verdonok (2002) states that deictic expression can help to enhance the awareness of literary effect and gives importance to other linguistic characteristics used to create contexts in the reality of the fictional world. The work is going to tackle the effect of the term in dramatic production and show how context is important in relation with the deictic orientation of the utterance. Also, the research is going to throw light various types of deictic expressions in drama and how they are utilized in a way to make context of drama presented as an actual and dynamic world. The term Deixis will be tackled from the following angles.

1.1.2 How Old Drama differs from Modern one.

During the old times of Plato and Aristotle Drama was very popular and its mode of writing is different from the one of modern time. In Old mode of writing drama, the role of chorus was very important, that means drama was written in descriptive mode. Haamer (2007) comments " the chorus would provide commentary on actions and events that were taking place before the audience. By doing this, the chorus would create a deeper and more meaningful connection between the characters and the audience". In which drama of classical age was told as narratives by chorus who try to put the audience into the context of the drama. Therefore, the process of writings used to be presented as *histoire* that means drama merely narration of a story in which distal deixis are used. Kier states "... *histoire*, the ' objective' mode dedication to the narration of events in the past," (1980: 88). That means the scenario use in construction of dramatic text same as narrative for that reason the existing of chorus very important to complete the meaning otherwise it was merely series of abstract *enonces*. However, the modern drama is written in

dialogic mode in which proximal deixis are employed because there is no chorus. Elam states "..., the drama is invariably presented in the form of *discourse*, a network of 'pragmatic' utterances or *enunciation*.." (ibid). The research tackles the significance of using deictic expression via language and it is applied in case of Pinter's *Birthday Party* which is classified as an absurd play shows how the central character Stanley suffers under the pressure of these two sinister outsiders Goldenberg and McCann. The play shows how these two characters interchanging speech using the deictic expressions 'I' and 'you' and spacio- temporal 'here' and 'there' in order to refer to a context at which their speech events occurs. Putting differently, deixis is used to refer to various situations at the time of speaking. Elam comment " .. a new 'you' , indicates a different object, enters into different relationship with his situation or his fellows, a new semiotic unit is set up.". (ibid:89). Speakers refer to the situation at the time of speaking that can be obtained from the linguistic tools of reference or indexical any change in their directions results anew shift in the situation. Then, the study would discuss types of deixis: *Person Deixis; Time Deixis; Discours Deixis; and Center Deixis*. Finally it would give an insight on the term Indexicality and its uses in language.

2.1.3 Deixis and Drama

Deixis means pointing via language, or by using deictic expressions a speaker refers to himself or to some entities through language. The process of reference gives a tie between a piece of a language and the context in which the term deixis is a process where the words in language rely on context; it refers to the ability of speaker and listener to work on each other point of view to the same reference. If the term deixis belongs to semantic domain, it would be ambiguous; that leads us to say that deictic expressions are incomplete unless provided by an appropriate contextual element. Deixis belongs within the domain pragmatics, because it directly concerns the relationship between the structure of languages and the contexts in which they are used. (Levinson. 1983:55) Deixis establishes inter personal relation and in it we don't have description but we find references by speakers to themselves, to other characters or to other things. All grammatical words are created through deictic expression. (I) addresses (You) within (here) and (now). Dramatic text is a mode of discourse which is dense in such indexical expressions which are disambiguated or acquire clear sense only when they are conceptualized in a proper way. Deixis cannot be produced in symbolic level, but in contextual and situational

level. Kier clarifies that in the following statement: “Deixis, as Francesco Antinucci put it, creates the possibility of exchanging information operating on sensori- motor rather than the symbolic level” (1980:129).

It is important to take into consideration the movement of actors’ body to complete the meaning of deixis. The spoken words give clear sense and accomplish their meaning with movement of actor’s body. Kier (2002: 30) states “the language of drama calls for the intervention of the actors’ body in the completion of its meaning. Words as spoken are inseparable from the movement of the actor’s body who speak them”. That is crucial to add meaning to dramatic text. The following extract between Stanley and Meg is about the coming of the two gentlemen to the boarding house. The extract shows movement of the actor or actress is important via deictic expressions to reinforce the process of the meaning:

Stanley. Who are they?

Meg. I don't know.

Stanley. Didn't he tell you their names?

Meg. No.

Stanley (pacing the room). Here? They wanted to come here?

Meg. Yes, they did. (she takes the curlers out of her hair.). (P. 20)

In this dialogue, we see intervention of actors body play very important role to complete the meaning. Stanley movements give more detail to audience to understand deeper. He expresses the nervousness and the anxiety because of the coming of these two gentlemen it is noticed that (*here*) is conceptualized in proper way by context and involvement of the movement of the actor’s body.

From philosophical point of view, there has been interest in expressions that have context- dependent property, like demonstratives, first and second person pronouns, and morphemes indicating tense. To understand an article, we should understand the background of speaker and addressee.

Deixis allows the dialogue to create interpersonal dialectic within time and location of the discourse. We have reference by the speaker to themselves as speaker, to their interlocutor as listener addressees and to spatio-temporal coordinates (now-here) of the utterance itself by means of such deictic element as demonstrative pronouns and spatial and temporal adverbs. For example, Aeschylean Tragedy introduced an epic in which indexicals are presented as a semiotic filters that enable the dramatist to produce out of language an image of the world. Thus, deixis plays very significant role in formulating dramatic text because it allows language to obtain an active function rather descriptive and choric role and to show the imaginative world created by the dramatist as actual world (Levinson, 1983).

There is distinction between two modes or level of utterances, first is *histoire*, the objective mode which is used for narration of events in the past, we see the elimination of speaking subject and his addressee with all deictic reference from narration. The second mode is discourse- subjective mode which indicates the interlocutors and their speech situation. *Histoire* is abstract enonce from context while discourse gives priority to the enunciation which is an act of producing the utterance within context, in the other words drama is presented in the form of discourse, a network of pragmatic utterances ‘ enunciation rather than a series of abstracted enonces (Kier, 1983).

Data Analysis

3.1.1 Introduction

In this section, the researcher analyzes the absurd text stylistically to observe the effect or the impact of proximal deictic expression in completing the meaning of the dramatic text and how effective it is in conducting interpersonal relationships among the characters of the plays. Wales in his *Dictionary of Stylistics* argues that deictic expression can involve metaphorical displacement in terms of nearness and distance on emotional levels" (1989, 113). It will be noticed that deictic expressions are employed in a way to show distance in emotional levels rather than nearness. In addition, they plays very significant role in shaping the weird setting which is one of the salient features of absurd theater. The research is going to apply type of deixis on Pinter's *Birthday Party*. Possibly the most common categories of contextual

information referred to by deixis are those of person, place, and time that is what Fillmore calls the prime grammaticalized kinds of deictic expressions.

3.1.2 The Effect of various types of deictic expressions in creating Absurd Context:

Person deixis concerns itself with the grammatical persons involved in an utterance, both those directly involved. (Levinson. 1983: 62). (e.g. the speaker, the addressee), not directly involved (e.g. over hearers those who hear the utterance but who are not directly addressed) and those mentioned in the utterance. In the other words, deixis deals with encoding of the role of the participants in speech event in which the utterance in question is delivered. In English, this is generally accomplished with the pronouns (I & You). The following examples demonstrate this; the person deictic terms are shown clearly, selected from a conversation between Stanley and Meg clarifying how *I* and *You* are interchangeable

Meg. (entering) Well, I bet you don't know what it is?

Stanley. Oh yes I do.

Meg. What

Stanley. Fried bread.

Meg. He knew.

Stanley. What a wonderful surprise.

Meg. You didn't expect that, did you?

Petey. (rising) Well, I'm off.

Meg. You going back to work?

Petey. Yes. (P. 16)

We notice that the use of pronouns, *I* and *you* as deictic expressions to refer to the role of the participants in the play. First person deixis encodes the speaker's reference to himself and the second one encodes the speaker's reference to an addressee. Generally, first and second person

represent dynamic role in the play. In traditional sense, there is reference to context without which the meaning will be ambiguous. In dramatic dialogue, when characters converse by referring to themselves or others, the deictic expressions should be conceptualized the fictional world otherwise the dramatic world will not acquire meaning. However, in absurd plays, deictic expressions shows fragmentation in the context and evasiveness. Hashim (2011) theorizes that evasion is used by absurd characters perhaps, to avoid the unpleasant truth or leading to multi-leveled to interpretation. In broader sense, deictic expressions of absurd plays show evasive and vague context because the linguistic units are employed to cause lack of communication instead of conceptualizing the world in which the characters converse.

In the following extract, we notice the speaker gramaticalizes the second person (you) within the context. It shows that the speaker refers to an entity, in dramatic discourse we notice the first and the second persons pronouns have active role. The third person is passive because it doesn't exist explicitly. However, It is noticed from the following extract that *you* is targeted by *I* to evade from the context which is characterized as meaningless and making no sense of the world in which they live.

Meg. Is it good?

Petey. Not bad.

Meg. What does it say?

Petey. Nothing much

Meg. You read me out some nice bits yesterday.

Meg. Will you tell me when you come to something good?

Petey. Yes. (pause). (P. 10).

In this conversation, Petey reads a newspaper, Meg is sitting around asking him about the news whether good or not. In traditional level, starting a conversation is to make logical sense of the world but this conversation fails to do that or it leads to ambiguity.

Place deixis, also known as space deixis, concerns itself with the spatial locations relevant to an utterance or in relation to the location of a participant in speech event. (ibid:62) Similarly to person deixis, the locations can be those of the speaker and addressee, or those of persons or objects being referred to. The most salient English examples are the adverbs “here” and “there” and the demonstratives “this” and “that”, though they are far from the only deictic words. We see in the following extract the use of demonstratives to refer to the place where the character has come from and the place at which the discourse takes place or will take place. In ordinary sense, the deixis should be important to specify current place or location in dramatic discourse but the following conversation shows something else:

Goldenberg. Where did you come from?

Stanley. Somewhere else.

Goldenberg. Why did you come here?

Stanley. My feet hurt!

Goldenberg. Why did you stay?

Stanley. I had headache!

Ros: In where?

Guild: Out her.

Ros: In out here? (P. 48)

In drama, we see proximal place deixis (*here*) is used heavily more than distal deixis. The formal refers to the place at which the current utterance is produced also it should be conceptualize by context. When one of the outsider asks Stanley- from where did he come- he does not provide a clear answer as expected in ordinary sense. Putting it differently, place deixis should create coherence to make the conversation conceptualized; however, the characters in absurd plays are not cooperative to show that the world they live in is fragmented and evasive.

Time deixis concerns itself with the various times involved in and referred to an utterance. Yule states " 'now' as indicating both the time coinciding with the speaker's utterance and the time of the speaker's voice being heard.." (1996:14). This includes time adverbs like "now," "then," "soon," and so forth, and also different tenses. A good example is the word *tomorrow*, which denotes the consecutive next day after every day. The "tomorrow" of a day last year was a different day than the "tomorrow" of a day next week. Time adverbs can be relative to the time when an utterance is made (what Fillmore calls the "encoding time," or ET) or when the utterance is heard (Fillmore's "decoding time," or DT)

Using time deixis is very essential in drama, because temporal factor is very important aspect of the setting of the drama; it is also interwoven with context of the situation in it. (*Now and then*) are simply marks for the time of the speaker. *Now* is proximal deictic relating to the speaker present context and situation utterance and *then* as a distal deixis has less importance in the function of drama than *now*, the following dialogue shows the fact:

Goldenberg. Do you recognize an external force, responsible for you, suffering from you?

Stanley. It's late.

Goldenberg. Late! Late enough! When did you last pray?

McCann. He is sweating! (P.40)

The extract above contains expressions imply (Now) which refers to the time at which the discourse is produced. Drama mostly contains proximal rather than distal because drama is a network of pragmatic discourse. (Now) indicates to the time of conversation. In absurd play, time deixis are exploited in a way to show that even time is fragmented and it has no connection to the speech event which is expected differently in traditional plays.

Discourse deixis deals with encoding of reference to portions of unfolding discourse in which the utterance is located. In the other words, it refers to as text deixis, refers to the use of expressions within an utterance to refer to parts of the discourse that contains the utterance —

including the utterance itself. For example, in the following extract, we notice how discourse deixis functions:

Goldenberg. Are you the manager here?

Stanley that's right.

Goldenberg. Is it a good game?

Stanley. I run the haouse. ,... (P.44).

“*That*” refers to an upcoming portion of the discourse, it doesn’t refers to previous discourse but it refers to one or more steps back within discourse.

“*Well then*” refers to a prior portion of the discourse at which utterance produced.

Meg. Is Stanley up yet?

Petey. I don' know is he?

Meg. Well then, he can't be up.

Meg. Have you seen him?

Petey. I've only just come in. (P. 10).

The expression (well then) is discourse deixis which concern with the use of the expressions within utterances to refer to some portions of the discourse. However, in absurd plays, discourse deixis unfolds how discourse is fragmented. It is noticed that Petey has just come in. Meg expects him to know about the context he has been part of it. Thus, discourse deixis may take part in presenting equivocal message which is one of the characteristics of absurdity.

3.6 The Use of Central Deictic in Creating an Absurd atmosphere

This term refers to the central person who is the speaker. Yule argues " ..understood as referring to some point or period in time that has the time of the speaker's utterance at its center". (ibid: 9). The central time is the time at which the speaker produces the utterance, central place is

the speaker's location at the utterance time and discourse center is the point which the speaker currently at in the production of his utterance. For example:

Goldenberg. Why do you pick up your nose?

McCann. I demand justice!

Goldenberg. What's Your trade?

McCann. What about your Ireland?

Goldenberg. What's your trade?

Stanley. I play the piano. (P. 51).

Goldenberg refers to himself by (I) as a central person in discourse; then Stanley takes the turn to be central person. However, in absurd plays, the hero has no right to talk unless asked to do so. It is noticed that the hero's speech must be predominant because he or she conveys the message of the writer but in *Birthday Party* the hero Stanley has to answer the questions to the outsiders whose their speech is predominant. In broader sense, Goldenberg and McCann's speech signify no sense of the world. Thus, their meaningless conversation create an absurd world by the virtue of using central deixis.

4.1.1 Deixis and indexicality

The terms deixis and indexicality are frequently used interchangeably, and both refer basically to the same idea; contextually-dependant references. However, both have different histories and traditions associated with them. In the past, deixis was associated specifically with spatio-temporal reference, while indexicality was used more broadly. More importantly, each is associated with a different field of study; deixis is associated with linguistics, while indexicality is associated with philosophy. Levinson states "... philosophers usually prefer, indexical expressions... by considering how truth-conditional semantics deals with certain natural language expressions" (1983:55). So in the play, the meaning of indexicals are composite function taking us from an element of context to an element of contextually restricted domain.

The following saying from the play shows the fact: "*Goldenberg. We're very pleased to meet you, too Meg. That's very nice*" (P. 30).

(*We*) is person (proximal) deixis denotes more likely the speaker and an element from quantifier context. Thus, the pronoun *we* give an insight that there is reference to the context of the characters who involve in the current conversation but nowhere else. That is used to as indication to fictional world as absurd and all the characters share the atmosphere of absurdity. Such atmosphere, from one hand, has a relationship with reality by opposition, and from other hand it anchors to the world of reality due to the sense of nausea gained from the blood shed resulted from II World War. Thus, various types of deictic units are employed to give a sort of spacio- temporal coordinates in Absurd plays such deixis are used to confirm the notion of equivocation, wandering and meaninglessness which are the prime themes of absurdity.

5.1 Conclusion

Thus, *Deixis* plays very significant role to give order to the articulation of speech act, rhetoric, syntax and grammar in the theatre. It creates a kind of unified meaning that is produced from various linguistic modes. Characters can produce them by the aid of using intonation, rhythm or proxemic relations. The speaker changes an indexical direction in every situation and each time to indicate to various directions, enter into different rapports with his/ her situation. In absurd theater deictic expressions are utilized to create a world that is characterized as weird out of logical reality. Perhaps, it is to convey the message of human loss and vulgarity of life that people experienced after WWI and WWII. It is noticed that in *Birthday Party* when a character initiates to talk, he/ she refers to new semiotic units creating a progress in the action and set up a world within a dramatic context seems to be as an actual and dynamic world. Unlike the ordinary drama, absurd drama exploits deictic expressions in order not to refer to spacio- temporal coordinates same as ordinary or traditional drama which reflects reality; but it is to confirm the theme of loss, fragmentation evasiveness; in other words, man is lost in this world and has thrown into being time place and reference to his or her identity has no significance in a world that silence is more meaningful and comprehensible than speech. That is patent in the play when minor characters have role to speak more than the hero Stanley who supposes to take most of the role by conveying less deictic expressions in comparison with the hero in traditional theater. That

occurs because his role should be shaped in such a way to embody the main message of the author that language deconstruct the principle of communication. Putting it differently, deictic expressions are language tools leading to evasive and loss. For further researches, the term deixis can be scrutinized in two plays as contrastive study, first is absurd and the second traditional for the sake of comparative study.

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