Absurdity of language was a new form of drama for the people around 1950s in the reference of Eugene Ionesco’s play “The Future is in Eggs”

Haseen ur Rehman, Dr. Asadullah Larik
M.Phil Scholar, Department of English Benazir Bhutto Shaheed University Lyari, Karachi, Pakistan.
Professor Department of Business Administration, IQRA University, Karachi, Pakistan.

ABSTRACT: Eugene Ionesco (1909 to 1994) was Romanian-French playwright. He is considered one of the famous figures among absurd dramatists. He utilizes the absurdity in his drama ‘Future is in Eggs’ (1951). The play shows depression era and its phrases. It was the time immediately after WWII. Surely people were suffering from many problems. Samuel Beckett and Ionesco belonged to the same era and they had written plays characterizing theatre of absurd. Many critics and researchers have written about absurdity of language which means the language is ambiguous and unclear, senseless, meaningless and full of repetitions. This study critically analyzes the content of the play and presents various research articles in the support of the topic. This study also offers various answers which prove that Eugene Ionesco definitely uses absurd language in his play ‘Future is in Eggs’ and endorses that it was surely a new form of drama for the people of 1950s. The conclusion of the article shows the positive indication towards the topic that absurdity was a new form of drama for the people of that time.

Keywords: Eugene Ionesco, absurd dramatist, Future is in Eggs, depression era, absurdity of language.

I. INTRODUCTION

The generations before the war throughout America were familiar with the dreadful upset of depression. The world was in a position of disorder and dissolution. It was such an airless environment that several labels in the field of drama came into being. The Theatre of the Absurd is one of the perfect examples in this regard. The cynicism, irritation and essence of disaffection spread all over the place.

Absurdity is not at all very remote from early 20th century movements such as Surrealism and Expressionism both integrated in all acceptance statement of Modernism. Absurdity means the state or condition in which human beings exist in an irrational and meaningless universe and in which human life has no ultimate meaning. (merriam-webster) At that time absurdity prevailed in everything such as action, manners, living and language. That particular era was influenced a lot by absurdity of language. Absurdity of language shows triviality of people at that time. Absurdity of language means that the language is not clear for understanding or a language that does not make any sense. It was very common in dramas around 1950s. May be dramatists adopted absurdity of language as a way of catharsis. Because of many reasons such as age of depression, War, miseries of life, destruction of human being, etc. these are the dominant catastrophes of that time. Brooks explains about the inner recesses of mind as follows:

“Joyce's Finnegans anticipates the preoccupation of the Theatre of the Absurd with language and the attempt to reach the inner recesses of the mind”. (Brooks. p.26)

There are a lot of criticisms on absurdity but still everyone knows about the importance of absurdity whether it is action or language. Language must convey something to listener as well as to speaker. If it does not convey anything then it will be futile for everyone. Communication is achievable when listener and speaker have clear concept regarding the language which they are using.

Oteiwy elaborates the importance of language that it is essential for living a comfort life. He believes that language motivates people for living that language deals not only with the impossibility of knowing the motivation of human beings in their actions; it also presents the problem of communication between human beings, which occupies Beckett, Adamov and Ionesco. Like waiting, talking is part of their habitual life. Without them, they cannot live. They talk in order to be able to live. Their talking, in fact, alleviates the agonizing waiting which in turn is used as a painkiller to comfort the impossible life they live. The conversations between the characters of these writers are essentially an attempt to achieve contact. At the end they recognize the impossibility of such contact, even through the conflict. (Oteiwy., p.17)

One of the most significant uniqueness of absurdity is its mistrust of language as a means of communication. According to the Absurdists, language has changed into nothing more than senseless and meaningless connections. Language does not state the human understanding. In the Theatre of the Absurd, language is an unpredictable instrument of communication. Eugene Ionesco describes in an article on Franz
Kafka as something which is “devoid of purpose” cut off from his sacred and transcendental family, man is mislaid; all his events befall senseless, ridiculous and useless.” Denotative purpose of the language finds damaged as words mainly become free and devoid of any sense, creating bewilderment and misinterpretation among the characters. Ionesco persists upon the emptiness and irrationality of life.

Disintegration or dissolution of language is attained through various techniques in Absurd Drama. The utilization of meaningless and pointless words expressed perfunctorily with no rational and logical relations or grammatical arrangements take place in absurdists’ plays. These playwrights generate little use of language as revenue of influence. Language that searches for to convey a meaning or description is barely achieved. Moreover, the absurdists generally demonstrate their distrust in language as a tool of communication or statement in the employment of simply dramatic possessions. Language is a figure of comfort, but not actual relationship occurs, as a substitute language is a sound to fill up the emptiness produced by the absence of important and meaningful human contact.

Absurd Dramas discard pragmatism and realism in their settings and consequently deconstruct reality by a constant employment of nonsense, ambiguous and absurd language, which fits all current environment of irrational and illogical reasoning that motivates the entire agreement of stage, plot and characters setting. Ionesco reveals upon man’s evacuating from his conventional values and beliefs in faith and supremacy to clarify his desperate wisdom of hammering in the modern world, while Kafka illustrates man nearly as an abnormal creation in the center of a dull and soulless universe. Samuel Beckett, possibly the most prominent of all playwrights of the Absurd, conveys his dramas as satires of all pointlessness and uselessness of human events and opinions in a world that has forgotten to query them. Absurd dramatists use absurdity in language to make people laugh. Rational language and balanced action in Absurd Theatre is outdated to nonsense dialogue and illogical method in order to make the spectators laugh. (Sadreddini. p 307 and 308)

Beckett utilizes language not as a godly device but as simple senseless and absurd bustling. In the reality, around 1950s, language became a serious buzzing. Beckett believes that the language is always a fundamental of deception which shows absurd. Language becomes a buzzing sound, empty and meaningless. Oteiwy also points out that the language is devoid from content as follows: “Samuel Beckett has chosen to write in a language that always points out that the world is absurd and chaotic, that man is alone and in despair. He demonstrates that language is the fundamental means of deception. But his language is used as a system devoid of content which moves only with itself”. (Oteiwy p.13)

Madan also expresses the same idea of meaningless buzzing in her research article that in a world that has lost its meaning, language also becomes a meaningless buzzing. In a meaningless universe, a positive statement cannot be made. (Madan . p. 20)

Language is a part of culture. When a language becomes nonsensical then there is no more culture and tradition. Pure language is the only way of communication if people start absurdity in language then it will be very hard to communicate with people. Oteiwy criticizes and explains that language is a sort of heritage for man as follows:

“Language is what determines the regulated world, the signification of which provides the foundation of our culture, our activities and our relations. It defines our identity as a form of reassurance. It deals not only with the impossibilities of knowing the motivation of human beings, but also presents the problem of communication between human beings. Speech is, undoubtedly, the proof of existence as well as a manner of contending silence, solitude and death, and it is man’s unique heritage”. (Oteiwy. p.11)

Ionesco uses absurdity of language in the play “The Future is in Eggs”. There are certain words or sentences which do not have meaning or they are nonsensical. Perhaps this absurdity is used in order to release intense feelings and emotions. Similar to this play, ‘The Bald Soprano by Ionesco’ does not have plot, constant characters and deceivingly naturalistic setting. It has nonsense dialogue and unexplainable appearances.

II. REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Theatre of Absurd was a new taste for the people of 1950s. Absurdity prevailed in everything. People wanted different things which could remove their intense feelings and help them to forget regarding war and other issues. Theatre of absurd gave them a nonsensical and meaningless phrases and dialogues which helped them to laugh and also forget about their current situation. As Vasconcelos expresses regarding the absurdity of language as a new taste as follows:

“Absurd Drama and Theatre remained somehow more attached to traditional codes of art and literature in the way language – abused, perverted or almost annihilated though – as well as the closed restricted area of a theatre, separating stage and audience, prevented the ultimate fusion and remix of art and real common life, of art and market laws, of art and mass consumers’ demands and tastes. Nevertheless, both of them in their own way were nonsensical and absurd languages and expressions in 20th century aesthetics, that faced the same world and the same urban post-war societies while they tried to mirror them, to denounced them and in the end to cherish them with no higher sublime or ethical ideals than those their deepest scepticism and irony, their sadness.
or their tenderness allowed’. (Vasconcelos . p.445) Eugene Ionesco’s play ‘THE FUTURE IS IN EGGS’ also shows nonsensical and meaningless phrases and dialogues. Whenever the readers read these nonsensical dialogues, they do not understand the meaning. For this reason they go deep in these dialogues to find out a desire meaning for their understanding.

Absurd dramatists implement a language in their writings which is devoid of meaning and sense. They use language without principles; even their dialogues give no idea to the audience. Oteiwy explains about the absurdity of language that dramatists adopt a language which has no content and no definite meaning as follows: “Absurd dramatists’ use of language probes the limitations of language both as a means of communication and as an instrument of thought as there can be no definite meanings in a world deprived of values, principles and virtues. They have chosen to write in a language devoid of content to become the adequate representation of stagnant life; they present language as an inefficient tool to express one’s thought, to comprehend the world, or to define one’s self”. (Oteiwy . p.12) Eugene Ionesco uses several words which are devoid of meaning and sense. The word ‘puss and purr’ are the best example in this regard. The audience is not able to take any meaning out from such meaningless words.

In absurdity of language the conversation becomes meaningless. Distorted language cannot be understood by normal people. Oteiwy illustrates the proposal of baffling dialogue as follows: “The dialogue, between the characters, is studded with words that have no meaning for normal ears. They (words) reconcile themselves with reason that makes the dialogue often baffling”. (Oteiwy, p.14) At some places in the play, the conversations become meaningless. Even Ionesco distorted the principles’ of language to create more absurdity in his play ‘THE FUTURE IS IN EGGS’. Absurdity means nothingness regarding everything. This statement refers to actions as well as language. Repetitions of words and sentences are one of the basic structures of absurd dramas. Oteiwy demonstrates the repetition of senseless words and phrases in his writing as follows: “Repeated phrases, lines, words and the fact that the second act repeats the first act are used to signify the senseless repetition and relentless flow of time inherent to human existence. Right from the beginning, the characters repeat what they themselves have already said or each other's utterances and actions in quite a circular way. They keep on repeating things for many deadly times as if to signify that man's life does not exceed anywhere beyond a certain number of endlessly-repeated habitual deeds”. (Oteiwy .p.17) Absurdity affects the language as well as the actions. Ionesco’s language in the play along with the actions in play is absurd. The audience and readers are not able to get any idea from the language and actions of the play. Absurdity of language does not provide any truth or knowledge. In this case, all the aspects are nonsensical and ridiculous. Oteiwy demonstrates regarding ridiculous language in Beckett’s writings as follows: “Beckett’s language is totally separate from knowledge or truth. This meaninglessness can be expanded to all Beckett’s language. His characters engage in ridiculous language to pass the time and to give them the impression that they exist”. (Oteiwy .p.19)

The theatre of Absurd represents a strange way of presenting a drama. This might be a disadvantage of Absurd plays that a new person joins the drama in the middle or season; it might be difficult for him to understand the plot as well as the language. Esslin points out this disadvantage as follows: “The Theatre of the Absurd shows the world as an incomprehensible place. The spectators see the happenings on the stage entirely from the outside, without ever understanding the full meaning of these strange patterns of events, as newly arrived visitors might watch life in a country of which they have not yet mastered the language. The confrontation of the audience with characters and happenings which they are not quite able to comprehend makes it impossible for them to share the aspirations and emotions depicted in the play”. (Esslin . p.5) The play ‘THE FUTURE IS IN EGGS’ is a kind of drama where people cannot get any idea about the drama if they join the play in the middle. People don’t get the theme and plot.

Eugene Ionesco illustrates in his first drama ‘The Bald Soprano’ about the senseless and ridiculous language. Esslin demonstrates the emptiness of language in absurd drama in his article as follows: “Ionesco composed his first play, The Bald Soprano. The absurdity of its dialogue and its fantastic quality springs directly from its basic ordinariness. It exposes the emptiness of stereotyped language; ‘what is sometimes labeled the absurd,’ Ionesco says, ‘is only the denunciation of the ridiculous nature of a language which is empty of substance, made up of cliches and slogans’. (Esslin . p.10 and 11)

In Absurd dramas, language becomes minor and meaningless. Esslin describes the language in these dramas as anti-language and literature as follows: “Here the movement of objects alone carries the dramatic action, the language has become purely incidental, less important than the contribution of the property department. In this, the Theatre of the Absurd also reveals its anti-literary character, its endeavor to link up with the pre-literary strata of stage history”. (Esslin . p.12)

Zhu also gives the same idea in his article about anti-language that “In the Theater of the Absurd, multiple artistic features are used to express tragic theme with a comic form. The features include anti-character, anti-language, anti-drama and anti-plot”. (Zhu .p.1462) In dramas, the language is the essence and soul. Exception in the theatre of Absurd, there is no proper language. Characters talk meaningless. Characters ask
Absurdity of language was a new form of drama for the people around 1950s in the reference of...

questions and give the irrelevant answers. Zhu also gives the same views in his work that in traditional dramas, language is usually used in a logical order. When someone asks some questions, other people will give their answers. No matter whether the answers are true or false, they must obey certain logical order. But in the Theater of the Absurd, language has no fixed or settled form and regularities. The protagonists usually speak or talk in disorder. What the character has said sometimes is not the words that his partner has asked or wanted to get. Sometimes a character asks his partner something, but the partner says another thing that is irrelevant to what they are talking about. That is to say, language has no regularity to infer or obey. What they have said cannot be understood by the audience. Just several minutes ago, the characters argue on the question of who will come. A moment later, they change to another irrelevant subject, and finally you cannot follow their thoughts, which will lead you to misunderstand their mind”. (Zhu p.1463) Zhu represents in his article regarding the sense and logic in absurd dramas that there is no order for the language. The language is irregular and nonsensical. “If you ever read a drama that belongs to the Theater of the Absurd, you must realize that the language in this kind of drama is obscure and disorderly. Meanwhile, it has no regular rules to follow. You cannot guess what the character will speak in his next statement because their language is irregular and unpredictable. The most important thing is that it never obeys ordinary sense and thoughts. It seems that sometimes people who are speaking in their own points are difficult to understand by others with common sense”. (Zhu p.1463) ‘THE FUTURE IS IN EGGS’ Contains no proper characterization, no proper and regular language, no plot and no logic.

In Absurd dramas everything becomes unpredictable. Language becomes meaningless and unclear which show the surface of everything. Azizmohammadi also points regarding the senseless language that in drama, everything eventually becomes unreliable, even the language. Language, as a means of communication, becomes a vehicle of conventionalized, stereotyped meaningless exchange. Words fail to express the essence of human experiences, not being able to penetrate beyond its surface. The Theatre of the Absurd shows language as a very unreliable and insufficient tool of communication. (Azizmohammadi and Kohzadi.p.2059) Absurd dramatists represent a language which has no meaning or devoid of sense. Azizmohammadi presents the idea of meaningless language as states: “As such the Theatre of the Absurd is a critique, and an attack on fossilized forms of language. devoid of meaning. People use language to fill the emptiness, to conceal the fact that they have no desire to tell each other anything at all”. (Azizmohammadi and Kohzadi.p.2060)

Harold Pinter’s play ‘The Birthday Party’ also shows the absurdity of language. The characters give nonsensical dialogues and repetitions of phrases and sentences. Sadreddini expresses about the absurdity of language in ‘The Birthday Party’ that The Birthday party’s language openly conveys the sense of absurdity to human beings’ life. The repetitious sentences and dialogues in Meg and Pete’s speech, philosophical odd and unusual questions by Goldberg and McCann in interrogation scene, and finally the piteous status of Lulu in her confrontation with her opposite sex, all are inevitable real matters which indicate the absurd situation of man in this universe. (Sadreddini. p.308) Ionesco uses meaningless dialogues, repetition of words and phrases. Irregular language is the key element of this play ‘THE FUTURE IS IN EGGS’.

This is the way of Absurd dramas that characters use irrelevant dialogues. Daram and Rahmani believe that Beckett uses deconstruction of language in his dramas. They express this idea in their article that this postmodern characteristic notion of language and the lack of shared meaning can be traced in Waiting for Godot’s dialogues, for instance, Vladimir asks something and Estragon replies something irrelevant. (Daram and Rahmani p.62) In absurd dramas, the language is irrational. There are gaps, repetitions and meaningless words. Daram and Rahmani represent that the language in absurd dramas is meaningless clichés. This provides the meaningless phrases as well the limitation of language. The inadequacy of language is reflected in the absurdists'oeuvres. Using babblings, irrational words and fragmentary speeches plus the silence and gaps they create in the conversations echo Derrida’s concept about language and its unreliability to represent the whole truth. (Daram and Rahmani p.62)

The languages used in absurd dramas are full of meaningless words and irregular phrases. The character usually followed useless dialogues. Balkaya says, “The language applied in the absurd theatre is corrupted and full of puns, repetitions and irrelevant speeches, that is to say, the characters in these works use informal language just as the useless dialogues between Vladimir and Estragon”. (Balkaya.p.1) Balkaya utters that Beckett uses meaningless language. Characters are not able to convey their expression. So there are a lot of repetitions in dialogue. The language becomes meaningless in Waiting for Godot; no one seems to be expressing himself, and as a result, they are not able to do anything apart from having meaningless dialogues which are composed of repetition, there seems to be no relationship between the answers and questions. (Balkaya.p.3)

Beckett’s language in his dramas is usually based on repetitions, meaningless words and phrases and senseless. These facts destroy the essence of language. Liao exemplifies in the article regarding the destruction of language that language in Beckett is repetitive. Words, phrases, and sentences recur endlessly. The technique of repetition not only shows the monotonous repetitiveness of human action, but also breaks the sense of linear progression, for everything ends the way it begins. Furthermore, the repetition suggests the characters’ inability
Absurdity of language was a new form of drama for the people around 1950s in the reference of...

to solve the problems, or even their unawareness of the problems. The repetition of words often destroys the power of words, and distances the words from the time of the event which the words try to describe. (Liao,p.391)

The language uses in absurd dramas are overloaded with meaningless dialogues and senseless communications. Characters do not want to talk but still they talk in the manner that no one can get its meaning easily. Bansal epitomizes the implication of overload of language in his writing as bellow:

“Language also becomes an instrument of mockery and meaninglessness when it is targeted in an offensive manner. The language we come across in the Theatre of the Absurd is loaded with such meaningless conversations that the characters do not really want to communicate with each other meaningfully”. (Bansal,p.139 and 140)

In absurd dramas, language becomes distorted therefore it never explains the expression of human situation. Expectation is far from acceptance. Language is not communicating in its real domain. Saraci demonstrates in his article that a language in absurd dramas is vehicle of conventionalized as forwards: “Language, as a means of communication, becomes a vehicle of conventionalized, meaningless exchange. Words fail to express the essence of human condition, not being able to penetrate beyond its surface. Words seem useless from this perspective and they cannot be used to their real function in this life, which is communication. If there is no communication there is no hope, no life and no new expectations”. (Saraci.p.385)

III. SCOPE

This research article focuses upon absurdity of language in Eugene Ionesco’s play ‘Future is in Eggs’. Absurdity of language means those words or sentences which are devoid of purpose. Sometimes the sentences and words are nonsensical. Ionesco used such adopted this new form of drama for his play ‘Future is in Eggs’.

IV. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The researcher implements qualitative content analysis methodology for this article. The researcher investigates the content of the play for absurdity of language and critically focuses on various research articles to prove his idea. This study tells about how much time the word and sentence have been used in the play. The research article offers the answers of the following questions:

i. What is absurdity of language?
ii. What is the purpose of this language?
iii. Is theatre of absurd a new form of drama?
iv. Has Eugene Ionesco used absurdity of language in his play “Future is in Eggs”?
v. What was the effect of the new form of drama?

V. CONTENT ANALYSIS

Eugene Ionesco uses absurdity of language in his play “THE FUTURE IS IN EGGS”. He shows repetition of words and sentences. Sometimes the words are useless and ridiculous. At some places Eugene Ionesco uses the wrong spelling of the word to create intense absurdity.

ROBERTAZ Puss . . . Puss . . .
JACQUES: Puss . . . Puss . . .
ROBERTA: Puss . . . Puss . . .
JACQUES: Puss . . . Puss . . .
ROBERTA: Puss . . . Puuuss . . .
JACQUESI Puuuuuuuuss. . .
JACQUES: Pusspusspussppuuuuuuss . . .
Pusspusspusspussppuuuuuuuss . . .
ROBERTA and JACQUES: Pusspusspussppussppuuuuuuuss . . . (p. 120)
Ionesco uses the word ‘puss’ forty-nine (49) times and the word ‘purr’ twenty seven (27) times just in four pages. These are meaningless words. These words do not create any sense and meaning. Using these ‘puss, puss’ words show the absurdity. While reading these words, the readers read these words without knowing any meaning. These are the words which do not convey any idea.

JACQUES: I’m hungry.
ROBERTA: I’m hungry. ............................
JACQUES: I’m cold. Brrr! I’m trempling!
ROBERTA: I’m cold. Brrr! I’m trempling! ..........................
JACQUELINE: Serves you right!
FATHER-JACQUES: Serves you right!
Absurdity of language was a new form of drama for the people around 1950s in the reference of...

Ionesco uses ‘I am hungry’ sentence six times in two pages repeated again and again. In the same page the word ‘potato’ has been used six times and the word ‘bacon’ five times. Eugene Ionesco uses similar sentences a lot in his play. These are the same sentences with same meaning in the whole play. This is the absurdity of language. Using same sentences again and again provide nothing except absurdity. It may help the readers to reduce the anxiety while reading the same sentences over and over.

Ionesco’s play ‘THE FUTURE IS IN EGGS’ explains the death of grandfather. Ionesco talks about the death of the grandfather fifteen (15) times just in four pages. Ionesco repeats of the same sentences again and again. Sometimes the meaning is same but the sentence is different. The word ‘thank you’ has been used fifteen times consecutively in two pages. Definitely it is called absurdity. Repeated dialogues are the part of absurdity. It is just for the usage (wasting) of timing. Repetition is the key element in Ionesco’s play ‘THE FUTURE IS IN EGGS’. While reading the play, this creates / provides relaxation to the people in the form of language. Distortion of the language is continued all over the play in various forms. Disturbed dialogues make the play difficult to comprehend the connectivity between conversations and circumstances.

Ionesco intentionally commits spelling mistakes just to produce the absurdity in the play from every aspect. ‘Cordolences’ is the perfect example for the spelling mistake. He used ‘cordolences’ instead of ‘condolences’.

All these lines and dialogues show only one word ‘condolences’.

Ionesco intentionally commits spelling mistakes just to produce the absurdity in the play from every aspect. ‘Cordolences’ is the perfect example for the spelling mistake. He used ‘cordolences’ instead of ‘condolences’. All these lines and dialogues show only one word ‘condolences’. On more than two pages the only dominant word is condolences. Ionesco used the word ‘condolences’ forty-one (41) times in just three pages. It shows pure absurdity because using one word again and again. It is illogical as well as nonsensical.
Absurdity of language was a new form of drama for the people around 1950s in the reference of Eugene Ionesco, a French playwright. He utilizes the word ‘production’ twenty-three (23) times in seven pages and the word ‘product’ just seven times. Most of the time continuously three words have been used. Like the word ‘eggs’ has been used fourteen (14) times in five pages. And the words ‘yes papa and yes mamma’ have been used around eight (8) times.

VI. CONCLUSION

Eugene Ionesco is one of the dominant absurdist playwrights. He uses the absurdity of language in his writings. Theatre of Absurd was a new form of drama for the people of 1950s. The war spread miseries around the world. People were facing numerous problems. Many researchers and critics have written about the Theatre of Absurd. Absurdity involved in everything such as language, manners, behaviours and living. Absurdity of language means the usage of meaningless words, repetition of words and sentences and using the same word again and again for the same purpose. Absurdity of language describes about unclear and nonsensical words and sentences which are devoid of purpose. Sometimes the dialogues give no idea to the audience. ‘THE FUTURE IS IN EGGS’ has the same principles as the absurd drama requires. It has meaningless words, repetition of words, phrases and sentences, spelling errors and irregular language. Absurd dramas threw out realism and rational reasoning. People started reading these dramas for their relaxation. This was the only way for them to convert their minds from miseries to happiness for a short time period.

REFERENCES

[3]. Oteiwy, Ghanim Obeyed. Language in Waiting for Godot. Lecturer University of Kufa/ college of Education.
Absurdity of language was a new form of drama for the people around 1950s in the reference of...