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USE OF COHESION AND COHERENCE FOR ANALYZING EUGENE IONESCO'S ABSURD PLAYS



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ABSTRACT

The notion of absurd became topical largely because of an essay entitled, *The Myth of Sisyphus* [1942] by Albert Camus. It describes an illness of the spirit and furthermore focuses on a sensibility of the absurd. The name of absurd is especially associated with the drama. The leading writers of the absurd drama are Samuel Beckett, Jean Genet, Edward Elbee, Harold Pinter and Eugene Ionesco. These dramatists represent man's life both anguished and absurd. Eugene Ionesco in his essay on Kafka claims:

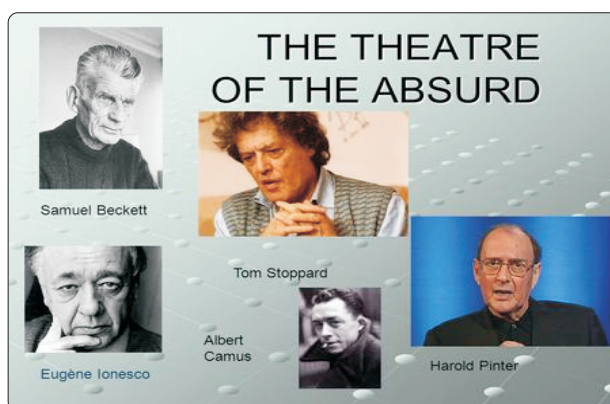
KEYWORDS: *Cohesion and Coherence , metaphysical and transcendental roots.*

INTRODUCTION

Cut off from his religious, metaphysical and transcendental roots, man is lost, all his actions become senseless, absurd, useless.

(Abrams: 1999: 86)

An irrational theatre of this group is meant to be genuine expression of whatever is absurd. In fact, the genuine display of absurdity is effectively exposed through the best verbal and non verbal communicative activities which are explicitly felt eccentric, incohesive and incoherent. Hence, conversation in the absurd plays is found to be complex, difficult to understand, and different from the normal dramatic conversation. The normal dramatic conversation has its own structure. It has full, long and complete sentences. Moreover , it is well ordered and organized. However, the ordered and logical organization of communicative activities can not be claimed in case of the absurd dramas are chaotic and difficult to comprehend. At this juncture, the devices of cohesion, and coherence may help a great deal to understand the absurd dramas in a far



more better way.

Halliday and Hassan have long been the first and most active in the study of cohesion. They say:

Cohesion is a semantic relation between an element in the text and some other element in the text and some other element that is crucial to the interpretation of it."

According to them a text as a semantic unit that uses sentences to express its meaning. Since cohesion, information structure and theme are coexisting systems, they relate mutually to one another. In other words, one presupposes the other.

As devices of cohesion are explicit, they are visible grammatical markers occurring between utterances and sentences, sometimes across the paragraphs. There are various types of devices of cohesion such as tense sequence, substitution, omission, ellipsis, deixis, additives, summatives, explanatives, adverbials, articles, and so on. According to Halliday and Hassan these relations/ties displayed by various devices of cohesion in the text can be very carefully defines in terms of five systems/; the referential system, substitution, ellipsis, conjunction and lexical cohesion.

Apart from five different types of cohesion as specified by Halliday and Hassan, there are some other distinctions which are important to know. Micro and Macro Cohesion is one of these. Montgomery puts forward a distinction between 'micro' and 'macro' cohesion.

A tentative distinction between, 'micro' and 'macro' cohesion as a way of representing that cohesive devices can have varying domains. (1978)

He takes devices as 'reflexes' in the lexico-grammatical systems of the language discourse patterning. They are considered as representations of the surface markers of discourse structure.

Let us illustrate some of the devices of cohesion as follows:

Past tense is generally used for describing past events in sequence. There is no tense blend. Therefore, the sequence of tense is a significant device of cohesion, for example; E.M.Forster says; "The king died and then the Queen died."

(1973:93)

If there is a tense blend in the sequence of tense, it is charged with certain implicatures. In the following example, " You" , the doer of action is hidden," Lend me your book,please" , but it is recoverable easily from the utterance structure. This is an example of structural ellipsis which is another important device of cohesion.

Since coherence is an implicit connective device, it is defined rather vaguely. In addition, it is most often discussed in relation to the paragraphs. A well constructed paragraph is said to be characterized by 'unity' and 'coherence'. According to James Mac Crimmon[1967] literally, the word cohere means to hold together. Therefore, a paragraph is said to have coherence when its sentences are woven together or flow into each other. Mac Crimmon then goes on to say that coherence is achieved through sentences following each other in a logical order and are linked together by transition. The transition is created by two means: by filling a small gap in the thought to provide a better continuity and by connective words and phrases which tie sentences together. In short, coherence has, implicit semantic connection between/across, utterances, sentences, paragraphs or even chapters.

Coherence is the state of cohering, i.e. logical, orderly and consistent relation of parts [of a paragraph]. Coherence refers to relation between an element in the text and an element either inside it [title, topic sentence] or outside it [extra textual or extra linguistic]. Coherence has implicit semantic connections between and across sentences, utterances, paragraphs or even chapters. Coherence within a paragraph is close coherence while coherence found across the chapters may be termed

distant coherence. Briefly coherence is a relation determined by the situation, connecting with the interpretative contexts of texts.

Elam Keri (1980: 182-84) has discussed different types of coherence, for example, Proairetic coherence, Referential coherence, Discourse coherence, Logical coherence, Rhetorical coherence, Stylistic coherence, and Semantic coherence. As coherence has a hidden semantic agenda, it is marginally visible like a tip of the iceberg. Let us illustrate one of the types of coherence, i.e. Proairetic coherence occurring in the following text extracted from Eugene Ionesco's play "Hunger and Thirst";

Jean: Then you should realize you've no business to be here, sitting on that sofa.

Adelaide: I have come to pay you a visit. Is this how you welcome me? Like this? The family never appreciated me. No one's a prophet in his own family. Strangers respect me. They kiss my hand and say, "Please don't go. Do stay to dinner." But I always say no. I don't upset them, I only bother you.

(1968: 17)

In Proairetic coherence various speech acts are accomplished along with non verbal behaviours. In the above conversation, Jean's turn, "Then ...sofa: and especially his objection about Adelaide's "sitting on that sofa" i.e. nonverbal behaviors makes Adelaide very much uneasy, consequently, she comes out with a torrent of her turn, "I have come....bother you." Which is interwoven skillfully as a turn within turns, i.e. "Please....go" and "Do...dinner." Furthermore, we can easily observe that Jean's 'speech' has perlocutionary effect because Adelaide is too much angry and tries to defend herself with concrete illustrations, which are sequentially interwoven such as paying a visit, objection on welcoming, no appreciation, prophet comment, stranger's respect, polite way of receiving, her more polite way of declining offer and so on.

Eugene Ionesco has been one of the leading writers of absurd drama. Applying the techniques of cohesion and coherence to his plays, can help us understand the absurd drama in a better light. He is a very popular Romanian born French dramatist whose one act, anti-play, *La Contatrice Chauve* inspired a revolution in dramatic techniques and helped inaugurate the "Theatre of the Absurd". He is known for the varieties of linguistic experiments, and especially in the composition of "turns". We have to read Ionesco only in English translation. Although translation has its own limitations, the world over it has become the 'in' thing. A popular trend and, is being read by an increasing number of people. One current example is that of the ancient Persian poet Rumi (1183-1251). Whose Persian poetry has been translated into English and is so popular in USA, that it has become a craze over there.

The language of peace and humanity that Ionesco speaks in his plays, is universal and the most urgent need of today of today's chaotic world. Ionesco's wish to present the evil makes his plays experimental, especially in the communicative activities. As Ionesco himself says, *Why Do I Write?*

I simply want to say that as a writer I personally and intimately concerned with this universal scourge. I have to pass through evil to reach what lies beyond it, not happiness but a fleeting vision of joy. My writings are naively and clumsily inspired by anguish and by evil. It has crushed our joy. It is all around me. Evil astounds me, as much as light does. I did not want to discuss it in my plays. I wanted to 'present' it. (1979: 123)

So, "turns" occurring in his plays are very interesting and crucial for study. However, most people think that organization of 'turns' in Ionesco's plays seems to be incoherent and incohesive at the superficial level, nevertheless, they are much more coherent and cohesive at the deeper level. Therefore, the present research work focuses on the organization of turns and attempts to arrive at the contextual meaning conveyed by Ionesco through his plays.

Now I wish to make a brief review of literature, to help grasp the importance of studying the linguistic concepts of cohesion and coherence, to help students have a grasp on the literary genre of absurd drama.

Different linguists have studied the concepts of cohesion and coherence from various points of view. Pierce and Saussure were the founders of modern semiotics, which helps us to know various devices of cohesion and coherence. Meyer B.J.F. (1975) claims that coherence is usually studied in the form of paragraphs. Gutwinski (1976) talks about cohesion in literary texts. However, Halliday was the first linguist to use the term cohesion. To refer to the semantic relations that occur between sentences. Lyons (1977) writes more about semantics. Elam Keir (1980: 182-183) deals with textual coherence along with different types. De Beaugrande and Dressler (1981: 48-112) use the term coherence to include global factors that give a text unity, such as the unifying function of a backbone. H.Lakshmi's (1986: 183-186) thesis deals with a comparative study of Telugu and English in the context of cohesion and coherence. Benn (1987) discusses discourse approaches to cohesion in central Bontoc (a Philippines minority language) with a comparison of English language. Geoffrey Leech (1965: 66-75) uses the term "Cohesion of foregrounding" for the relation of individual foregrounded features in a given text to one another and to the entire text. K.N.Nwogu in a recent work tells us about cohesion in medical texts. A detailed study of turns and utterances found in the absurd drama needs more research into the techniques of cohesion and coherence. This is one of the ways of comprehending absurd dramas, supposed to be difficult to understand and analyze by the common readers.

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