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A PRAGMATIC APPROACH TO

PINTERESQUE DRAMA

ABSTRACT

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A B S T R A C T

The central aim of the present paper is to use the concrete words and utterances for a deeper study into the pragmatic 'unsaid', the 'whatness' lying at the bottom of every discussion. Offering *a* personal interpretation to Pinteresque drama, the current study is not a literary approach, literature being merely the background against which the *pragmatic* analysis develops. Related to the field of pragmatics, this *approach*, the first in what concerns the scope, will tangentially refer to semiotics and semantics, discourse and text analysis, communication theories and sociolinguistics. The reason for a communicative approach, too, is the primary function of literature – to establish a relation between the text and the reader or between the author and the reader, thus to communicate within and by fiction, but also to set relations among the characters, who communicate similarly to real-life individuals. In fact, it will be shaped as an inter-disciplinary approach whose basis remains pragmatics, because nothing can be dealt with in isolation; a rather complex and complete analysis could not ignore the multiple facets of pragmatics, subtly contoured by the interplay between it and other domains.

Moreover, postmodernist, contemporary literature – namely drama, written by the British playwright, Harold Pinter, the 2005-Nobel-prize winner, has been chosen. A controversial, straightforward personality, "a permanent public nuisance" (Billington, 1996), obsessed by cricket and actively implied in the politics of the world, at the same time an actor, playwright, novelist, poet, screenwriter and director, Harold Pinter created the so-called 'Pinteresque language', ostensibly very simple, clear-cut and comprehensible, yet most often leading to ambiguity, breach of communication and silence. The reason for such a choice is the similarity between the utterances occurring in the selected plays – *The Room* (1957), *The Birthday Party* (1957), *The Dumb Waiter* (1957), *A Slight Ache* (1958), *The Hothouse* (1958), *The Caretaker* (1959), *A Night Out* (1959), *Night School* (1960), *The Collection* (1961), *The Lover* (1962), *Tea Party* (1964), *The Homecoming* (1964), *The Basement* (1966), *Silence*

(1968), *Old Times* (1970), *No Man's Land* (1974), *Betrayal* (1978), and the 21st-century everyday dialogues, since "the linguistic resourcefulness which typifies much literary discourse creates a valuable nexus for exploring forms, structures and concepts in English language" (Simpson, 1997: 2).

My intention has been to draw a pragmatically monographic study on Harold Pinter's plays from 1957 to 1980, published in the four volumes of *Complete Works*; the selection criterion was a conversational structure that is the closest to authentic discourses in real life. Due to this principle, I have eliminated *Landscape* (1967), where there is no real interaction between the two characters, even if at times they appear to address somebody and obey a turn-taking structure. The next plays not considered here are *Monologue* (1972), which, as the title suggests, pictures only one character, who speaks to an absent interlocutor, *Family Voices* (1980), which resembles three monologues (mother, father and son) and which conveys a letter-structure, not a dramatic pattern, and *The Dwarfs* (1960), perceived as "almost pure dream-distortion" (Paquet Gabbard, 1976: 126), with little "logical overlay" (ibid.).

The rationale for choosing drama is that the dramatic genre is the closest of all the literary genres to reality – due to its performative character, a genre emerged from the boundaries of the written page (and hence, called *drama*, within the domain of literature) and concretely en-livened in the flesh and blood of the actors (comprised in the term *play*, signifying the microcosm of theatre: stage props, lighting and actors). Additional differentiations can also be made, as Schechner does, among *drama*, *script*, *theatre* and *performance*: "The drama is the domain of the author, the composer, scenarist, shaman; the script is the domain of the teacher, guru, master; the theater is the domain of the performers; the performance is the domain of the audience" (2007: 70). In drama, "we do not have to find out what is significant; the selection has been made – whatever is there is significant" (Langer, in Kane, 1984: 17). Moreover, "the dramatic dialogue provides excellent source material for explaining the basic patterns of everyday conversation" (Simpson, 1997: 130).

As a further remark, the scope of the present analysis is an approach to drama as a 'written discourse' (the mixture between 'written text' and 'oral discourse' is deliberate), because my interest is the *language* of drama, and not the drama itself, in all its aspects. Since dramatic fiction follows the same patterns as genuine communication, it seems to represent the ideal background for a 'genuinely' pragmatic analysis, to be more accurate, the ideal background for a literary pragmatic analysis. At the same time, the plays are not to be equally examined in my analysis, since some of them are more productive in illustrating one / more pragmatic concepts than others.

The second reason, for having chosen plays written by Harold Pinter, was found in one of Pinter's quotations about Tom Stoppard, yet applicable to himself: "He is his own man. He's gone his own way from the word go. He follows his nose. It's a pretty sharp one. Nobody pushes him around. He writes what he likes – not what others might like him to write." (in Smith, 2005: 9). Such a challenge could not be refused. Furthermore, Pinter is a Nobel laureate, praised for the fact that "in his plays [he] uncovers the precipice under everyday prattle and forces entry into oppression's closed rooms" (Horace Engdahl, Chairman of the Swedish Academy, on awarding him the Nobel Prize for Literature)[1]. In Kennedy's expressive account,

> Pinter […] has taken the linguistic Babel for granted […] at the level of everyday exchanges, talk, chat, verbal games – with an ear for local usage, or rather abusage and verbiage. He has created his dialogue out of the failures of language that might occur *as* English is spoken, by frightened or evasive or sadistically playful characters.
>
> (1975: 169)

After reading a play belonging to this playwright, "pretty well obsessed with words when they get going" (Pinter, in Hinchliffe, 1967: 42), one will surely realize that "there can be no hard distinctions between what is real and what is unreal, nor between what is true and what is false" (Pinter, 1989: 11). Even if the characters' discourses sometimes tend to sound artificial, due to the highly formal words and expressions, as well as to their metaphorical value (such as in *No Man's Land* or *The Birthday Party*), they mostly unfold in the most natural way possible, since the characters do not feel constrained to use only neat language, but they even use colloquial and taboo language. To be more specific, the playwright "made us realise that poetic drama could be mined out of real demotic speech" (Hall, in Billington 1996: 391).

At the same time, "Pinter's dialogue is precise enough to provide samples for a work on the Varieties of Contemporary English; and the conversational rhythms alone could be used to train 'aural perception' in foreign students of spoken English." (Kennedy, 1975: 166). Consequently, Pinter is believed to have "invented a drama of 'human relations at the level of language itself'" (Vannier, in Kennedy, 1975: 168), completely aware of the fact that "language in art remains a highly ambiguous transaction, a quicksand, a trampoline, a frozen pool which might give way under you, the author, at any time"[2].

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[1] http://www.haroldpinter.org/home/index.shtml.

[2] http://nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/literature/laureates/2005/pinter-lecture-e.html.

Even if the thesis has been structured into a theoretical (the first two chapters) and a practical (the last four chapters) section, it is impossible to delineate them strictly, since the approach is pragmatic, thus resulting from a purely practical attitude of "looking away from first things, principles, 'categories', supposed necessities; and of looking towards last things, fruits, consequences, facts" (James, 1987: 510) – theoretical considerations are in almost all cases complemented by examples.

The methods of analysis I have exploited are both micro-structural (deicticals, conventional implicatures, entailments, presuppositions) and macro-structural (speech acts, conversational implicatures, politeness devices and the apparatus of silence). The first method basically deals with mere words (*it*, *that*, *here*, *anyway*, *but*, *so*, *stop*, *when*, etc.), while the second is grounded in larger units of conversation, such as clauses, sentences, utterances and one or more conversational turns.

My foray into pragmatic analysis starts with a brief presentation of semiotics, namely European and American semiotics, and continues with what could be broadly called the womb, the birth and the growth stages of pragmatics, "modern pragmatics emerg[ing] from the confluence of two streams of thought: American pragmatism and English Ordinary Language Philosophy" (Nerlich and Clarke, 1996: 118). Chapter 1 thus discusses the most influential directions in semiotics, namely Ferdinand de Saussure, Louis Hjelmslev (from a linguistic point of view), Charles S. Peirce (from a logical-philosophical perspective), Charles Morris (from a behaviourist view) and tangentially, Umberto Eco; in other words, European 'semiotics' (semiology), represented here by Saussure's and Hjelmslev's dichotomic models, on the one hand, and American semiotics, on the other hand, with Peirce's and Morris's trichotomic models. I do not claim that semiotics owes its reputation exclusively to these semioticians, but they are considered the classics – further directions or branches of semiotics are to be found in their theories. At the same time, embracing some fundamental issues in semiotics and pragmatics, this chapter attempts to provide a coherent chart of the two domains, and thus to prepare the theoretical background of the practical analysis of the selected seventeen Pinteresque plays.

The next sub-chapter concentrates on the domain of pragmatics and its characteristics as opposed to pragmatism and pragmaticism, on the one hand, and to semantics, on the other. It also provides a concise survey of protopragmatics and early pragmatics, following Brigitte Nerlich and David C. Clarke's categorisation in *Language, Action and Context* (1996). The rather eclectic inventory drawn here, comprising names as Aristotle, Thomas Reid, Wilhelm von Humboldt (tangentially, Eugen Coşeriu), Victoria Lady Welby, George H. Mead and

Grace M. A. de Laguna, is meant to emphasise their individual efforts, yet with a common basis, to find a consistent name and especially a consistent scope for a domain which is more concerned with practice than with theory. Ultimately, they tried to place pragmatics, which seemed to be of great triviality, on a par with the already classical syntax and semantics.

The chapter naturally continues with theoretical considerations, yet illustrated with personal examples or taken from Harold Pinter's plays, on micro- and macro-pragmatics. Above all, it explains meaning and its difference from significance, as well as the relevance of context (the larger and the immediate context) and Émile Benveniste's delineation *histoire – discours*, since the way people talk is strictly conditioned by the extra-linguistic and linguistic contexts. Slama-Cazacu spoke about "the law of systematic determination"[3] (1980: 269), namely the significance of utterances is determined by certain contextual coordinates, such as "the communicative intention, the communicated meaning, [and] the recipient's ability of interpretation" (ibid., 271). Secondly, it highlights the differences among the major types of inference, as well as the essentials of inference theories.

Thirdly, within the gradual presentation of micro-pragmatics, deixis, with its five types – personal, spatial, temporal, social and discourse, comes first, as a lexical device of retrieving information in a certain utterance or 'chunk' of conversation. It emphasizes once again its dependency on the context, but also its 'subjective' character, reading in the fact that "language somehow presents 'empty' forms, which any speaker appropriates while speaking and relates to his / her 'person', thus setting up an *I* for himself / herself and a *you* for the interlocutor" (Benveniste, 2000: 249-250). Described as "the encoding of many different aspects of the circumstances surrounding the utterance" (Levinson, 1991: 55), deictical expressions are probably perceived as one of the purest pragmatic concepts.

Still tied to words, entailments, presuppositions and conventional implicatures end the topic of micro-pragmatics. Belonging entirely to sentences, entailments are contrasted to presuppositions, which are defined from the perspective of language users; last, but not least, the controversial status of conventional implicature makes it the link between the micro- and macro-levels of pragmatics. When examining them, I became aware that "language can be used to convey what it cannot say – by its interstices, by its emptiness and lapses, by the latticework of words, syntax, sound and meanings" (Hollis, 1970: 14). Such pragmatic concepts are, of course, still valid under fictional constraints. Ochs argues that there are two types of discourses, somehow corresponding to the difference between reality and drama: the

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[3] "*o lege a determinării prin ansamblu*".

unplanned discourse, which "lacks forethought and organization preparation" (in Verdonk and Weber 1995: 89), and the planned discourse, which "has been thought out and organized (designed) prior to its expression" (ibid.).

This is not the case with Harold Pinter, whose main focus is on his characters' resemblance to ordinary people and to the naturalness of their speech, thus sustaining "the illusion of mundane conversation" (Hollis, 1970: 52): "I am interested primarily in people: I want to present living people to the audience, worthy of their interest primarily because they *are,* they exist, not because of any moral the author may draw from them" (Pinter, in Hollis 1970: 122), hence his "rejection of all 'didactic or moralistic theatre' as 'sentimental and unconvincing'." (Innes, 2002: 330).

The sub-chapter on macro-pragmatics starts with a general perspective on the omnipresent process of communication, on language and its communicational functions, as the key-elements of any human society. Then, it narrows down to the structure of the exchange and the characteristics of conversations (adjacency pairs, conversational turns / moves and transition relevance places), as opposed to conversational activities, all preliminaries to the concrete analysis of the dialogues in the Pinteresque plays. At the same time, it focuses on implicature, a term coined by Paul Grice, which refers to "any meaning that is implied, i.e., conveyed indirectly or through hints, and understood implicitly without ever being explicitly stated" (Grundy, 2000: 73); consequently, conversational implicature is based on inferences drawn from beyond the mere words and is usually the result of exploiting the co-operative principle and of obeying or, more often, of breaking the four Gricean conversational maxims (quantity, quality, relevance and manner).

This mostly theoretical section continues with an examination of the "action-like properties of utterances" (Levinson, 1991: 259), the structure of performatives and the types of speech acts: "words and sentences when uttered are used to do things, to carry out socially significant acts, in addition to merely describing aspects of the world" (Hurford and Heasley, 1990: 239). Based on the very concept of action, speech acts were classified, according to John Austin, into constatives and performatives, the second being characterised by the so-called "performative formula: I (hereby) verb-present-active X …" (Sadock, 2007: 4).

Authoring the theory of locutionary, illocutionary and perlocutionary acts ("the locutionary aspect of speaking is what we attend to most in the case of constatives, while in the case of the standard examples of performative sentences, we attend as much as possible to the illocution" – Sadock, 2007: 2), Austin also categorizes speech acts into five classes: *verdictives*, "typified by the giving of a verdict, as the name implies, by a jury, arbitrator, or

umpire" (Austin, 1975: 151), ***exercitives***, "the exercising of powers, rights, or influence" (ibid.), ***commissives***, "typified by promising or otherwise undertaking; they *commit* you to doing" (ibid.), ***behabitives***, referring to "attitudes and *social behaviour*" (ibid., 152) and ***expositives***, which "make plain how our utterances fit into the course of an argument or conversation, how we are using words, or, in general, are expository." (ibid.). However, he is completely aware of the fact that "there are still wide possibilities of marginal or awkward cases, or of overlaps" (ibid.). Similarly, John Searle classifies them into five categories, such as representatives, directives, commisssives, expressives and declarations. Last, but not least, Anne Ubersfeld and Teun van Dijk view speech acts as part of the social interaction, thus as social acts.

The present chapter ends with some considerations on literary pragmatics, its definition and concepts (made by Roger D. Sell, Teun van Dijk, Dominique Maingueneau, Jacob Mey and Paul Simpson), and on the previous work on Harold Pinter. Seeing voice as "a *pragmatic* concept" (Mey, 2000: 126) and the language in use as 'heteroglossia', 'other-voicedness' (Bakhtin, in Mey, 2000: *passim*), Mey defined literary pragmatics as "the study of the effects that authors, as text producers, endeavor to achieve by a clever use of the available linguistic resources" (ibid., 368).

After the first, theoretical chapter, the longest of all, in which the theoretical considerations were constantly balanced with practical demonstrations, the second chapter represents the smooth passing from theory to practice. Starting with this chapter, all the chapters are 'Pinteresquely' marked, being significantly named after Pinter's plays, sketches or prose; they bear their identical titles, like *The New World Order*, *The Basement*, *Request Stop*, *God's District* or *That's All* (there is also a sub-chapter having the same name as the original work, *Voices in the Tunnel*) or they only begin with the title as such, but end with the topic of the sub-chapter: *One for the ... Deicticals* (instead of *One for the Road*). The title of the chapter on silence is a combination of more works, like in *The Land of Dumb Voices*, echoing *No Man's Land*, *The Dumb Waiter* and *Family Voices*.

The second chapter, *The New World Order of Pinteresque Drama*, revolves around the realm of fiction versus the tangible reality, discussing the fact that literature, in general, and the literary discourse, in particular, is widely regarded as a non-serious, counterfactual domain. In our contemporary sceptical society, where so many statements are held to be true and yet, have no empirical basis, the Dickensian "Facts, facts, facts" seems to characterise the common urge of searching nothing but the truth, what can be easily observable or scientifically proven. It thus focuses on the controversial issue of fiction and its legitimacy of

being considered a domain of study serious enough to represent the basis of a commonsensical pragmatic analysis. In spite of the fact that fiction, in all its aspects, is hardly considered reality, it creates a "real-seemingness" (Fiske and Hartley, 1992: 161), "encoding" reality (Fiske, in Curran and Gurevitch 1994: 56), rather than "recording" it. Thus, even if the dramatic discourse is "illocutionarily purer than 'real-life' exchanges" (Elam, 2002: 164) and it is "organized in an ordered and well-disciplined fashion" (ibid., 82), it is the closest possible "to verbal exchange in society" (ibid., 162).

In Humboldt's view, "on the one hand in a work of art, reality is transformed, yet, on the other hand, reality as the perceptible realm of experience forms the basis of the work of art, so that the work of art is simultaneously imitation (*Nachahmung*) and idealized transformation of nature (*Umwandlung der Natur*)" (Sebeok, 1986: 320). It is particularly with post-modernist drama, to which Harold Pinter belongs, that the boundary line between reality and fiction has become blurred. Moreover, "Pinter is often praised by drama critics for having 'an ear for conversation' " (*lancaster*, 2006) and "because of his ear for the cadences of English speech, Pinter can sustain the illusion of mundane conversation" (Hollis, 1970: 52). Although perceived under the 'spell' of a fictional world, the conversations present in the selected Pinteresque plays preserve the pattern of naturally occurring ones, since "the conventions of fiction don't change the meaning of words or other linguistic elements" (Searle, 1969: 79).

The chapter continues with the difference between drama and play, which lies in the fact that the first is literature, thus written text, whereas the second is a show, usually performed on a stage. Nevertheless, the text of the drama, together with the stage directions or didiscalia – signalling the indirect presence of the author, is not statical or merely imprinted in the pages of a book: "A true play is three-dimensional: it is literature that walks and talks before our eyes. […] the text of the play is meant to be translated into sights, sounds and actions which occur literally and physically on a stage." (Boulton, 1968: 3). Even if the focus of the entire thesis is on the first, my intention is not to postulate the superiority of the text over the play performed on the stage, but to show their complementarity and the impossibility to separate them completely: „the theatre institutionally relates to the process of uttering; it needs a pragmatic context; it has a temporal axis always based on the present; deixis represents its space." (Serpieri, in Vodă Căpuşan, 1987: 67). At the same time, it draws attention to the "*constitutive dialogism of the dramatic text*" (Ubersfeld, 1978: 142), namely to the "two subjects of uttering, the character and the I-writer (similarly, there are two addressees, the Other and the audience)" (ibid.).

The third sub-chapter delineates Pinter's style, language and dramatic world, thus the Pinteresque to be found "in the desultory conversation or the ludicrous anecdote, in pauses and silences, and in the displacement activities seen in ordinary human interaction. Each represents an assertion of individual autonomy or a jockeying for dominance." (Peacock, 1997: 162).

Taking things and humans the way they are, never trying to render them more or less interesting than they actually are, Harold Pinter (1930-2008) has always claimed to be a 'photographer' of reality rather than its 'painter':

> If I write about a lamp, I apply myself to the demands of that lamp. If I write about a flower, I apply myself to the demands of that flower. In most cases, the flower has singular properties as opposed to the lamp ... Flower, lamp, tin opener, tree … tend to take alteration from a different climate and circumstance and I must necessarily attend to that singular change with the same devotion and allowance. I do not intend to impose or distort for the sake of an ostensible "harmony" of approach[4].

Consequently, his characters appear to be as spontaneous as in real life, ignoring the conventions of literature in their speech – which is, in fact, a characteristic of the 20th-century writing. This chapter is thus intended to cast aside any doubts in what concerns the 'concreteness' of fiction (drama) and also any suspicion about a possible pragmatic approach to it. The real 'text' and the fictional 'text' share the same quality, of being "a permutation of texts, an intertextuality. In the space of a single text, several énoncés from other texts cross and neutralize each other." (Kristeva, in Elam, 2002: 84).

Chapter Three, *The Basement … of Inferencing*, resumes, in a practical manner, the theoretical issues of the first chapter, namely deixis, presuppositions, conventional and conversational implicatures, extensively discussed in concrete examples from Pinter's plays. Usually, like in all practical analyses present in this paper, the criterion of selecting the examples is relevance, only the most resourceful ones having been chosen and then examined contrastively. As suggested, inferencing, in general, the dynamic process that both speaker and addressee have to go through when taking part in a conversation, and conversational implicature, in particular, are of major significance in any pragmatic approach, even if in everyday speech "what can be generally inferred need not be marked" (Moeschler, 2008). In fact, "in the Gricean model, the bridge from what is said (the literal content of the uttered sentence, determined by its grammatical structure with the reference of indexicals resolved) to what is communicated is built through implicature." (Horn, 2007: 1).

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[4] See http://www.haroldpinter.org/poetry/poetry_ponp.shtml.

The first sub-chapter *points* to the importance of deixis, a purely pragmatic concept, which makes "ultimate reference to participant-roles" (Levinson, 1995: 73) and especially to the immediate environment they belong to. The dramatic discourse of the seventeen plays by Harold Pinter approached here in terms of discourse and conversation analysis elements is the background against which the analysis of deictic expressions is completed. Highly dependent on the context of utterance, the different types of deixis are grouped according to person, time, place, discourse and social identities. Due to them, the reader can better understand the relationships among characters and also their view to the past and the present, even to different points in space and time (also called 'empathetic deixis' – Lyons, in Levinson, 1995: 81). Moreover, this chapter mentions the "motion-verbs that have built-in deictic components" (Levinson, 1995: 83), whose best-known representative is the pair *to go – to come*, and examines special cases of deixis (personal deicticals with no concrete reference in the context of utterance, but whose reference is sometimes retrieved from the larger context, a case in point being *they*). The next sub-chapters concretely analyse the presupposition-triggers and presupposition types, conventional implicatures and especially conversational implicatures selected from Pinter's plays, the examples being chosen in accordance to their relevance.

Chapter 4, *The Land of Dumb Voices*, *keeps silent* only apparently, since it has a lot to say about the eloquent silence present in our discourses[5]; very often, "well-timed silence hath more eloquence than speech" (Martin Fraquhar Tupper).

I have chosen to analyse it immediately after the chapter on inferencing because I consider it a great part of this process, to such an extent that sometimes, more can be inferred from silence than from words: "there is meaningless speech and meaningful silence" (Reik, in Ephratt, 2008: 1918). "The counterpart of speaking" (Constantinescu, 2006: 9), silence is highly significant and complex, in everyday life being a natural reaction "to the multiform challenges of reality" (ibid., 8).

This chapter underlines the fact that there is a need for words, as well as for silence, the examples from Pinter's plays being actually "dramatic representations of silence as a presence" (Hollis, 1970: 17). Words can be luring by their multiple meanings, while silence can be polysemantic, too. In fact, uttering and speechlessness initiate extensive inferencing, they echo other utterances and non-utterances, and they interfere at all times. There are silences to invade the words; similarly, there are words that intrude into silences. In reality,

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[5] For an extensive bibliography on silence, see Ephratt, 2008.

language is always wrapped by more or less profound silences, which implicitly emphasise or contradict the explicit of the words.

Consequently, conversations become games of circles, in which no matter whether characters are silent or talkative, there is always silence in the background or even next to them. The characters' fears, their waiting for a Godot who will never come, their loneliness seen as a defensive strategy, will never be explained by the playwright or by the characters themselves. Words are hard to bear, so silence is preferred instead: "Communication is too alarming. To enter into someone else's life is too frightening. To disclose to others the poverty within us is too fearsome a possibility." (Pinter, 1989: 15).

The chapter sums up, in a graphic representation, all the instances of silence found in the seventeen Pinteresque plays, thus making silence 'visible' from a linguistic perspective and rendering it meaningful due to contextual elements. It also points to Pinter's "constant awareness of the 'other language' that can be locked underneath the spoken words … his writing has tension and climax, and is continually dynamic. Words run ahead or lag behind the thoughts of his characters; they surprise, digress, tantalize and, occasionally, seem to clinch the dramatic conflict." (Brown, 1972: 51).

As a matter of fact, the way we enter Pinter's world having no concrete invitation and not being 'welcomed' by the characters, in the sense of their not bothering to provide us with information from their past, is similar to our trivially entering a concrete public space:

> If, for example, we find ourselves overhearing a conversation on a subway, we expect that there will be numerous gaps or pauses, many sentences left hanging. Events may be described which we can only grasp in part and we find ourselves, almost apart from our will, trying to guess at motives and backgrounds. We do not assume that the characters have no motives, no backgrounds out of which they emerge, or have no good reason for being what they are – we simply are not told these things. […] our everyday existence is charged with just such mystery.
>
> (Hollis, 1970: 31)

Moreover, the plays discussed in this chapter (*Silence* included) reveal not only "a rhythmic exchange of sound and silence that communicated when communication was not supposed to be possible" (ibid., 123), but also "Pinter's special dramatic gift […], the gift of tongues, the capacity to hear and reproduce the sound of silence" (ibid.).

Chapter 5, a concrete doing things with words, *does* the portrait of a metaphorical *God's District*, where saying has implied doing, from the very beginning of the world – *Let there be light: and there was light*. It briefly considers the status of speech acts in literary works and focuses on the performative aspect of language (the types of performatives employed by Pinter's characters), starting with a comparison between what Austin firstly

called 'constatives', meant to describe, and 'performatives', whose role is to initiate certain types of action performed in and by uttering. Pinter's plays offer a wide range of examples of speech acts, which are very common in ordinary conversation, too. The characters' use of directives or commissives, for instance, reveals that "language itself becomes the arena for a kind of informational combat between the characters" (Gaggi, 1981: 505) and, at the same time, that there are powerful and powerless participants in the act of speaking. Moreover, it demonstrates that "the appropriateness conditions for speech acts are usually given in terms of properties of the speech participants, viz. of speaker and hearer. These properties are *cognitive* and *social* in nature: on the one hand they are specified in terms such as 'knowledge', 'belief, 'want', 'preference', etc. and on the other hand in terms such as 'authority', 'power', 'politeness', 'role', 'status', 'obligation', etc." (van Dijk, 1981: 244).

Chapter 6 *would like* to present a detailed analysis of politeness devices, applied to some Pinteresque plays, considering the three main strategies of politeness: "positive politeness, negative politeness and off-record politeness" (Brown and Levinson, 1996: *passim*) and examining them in terms of "power, social distance and imposition" (ibid.). It shows how politeness is highly influenced by different factors, such as "social distance, relative power and the absolute ranking of impositions in the particular culture" (Brown and Levinson, 1996: 74). This chapter will also draw attention to the fact that powerful and powerless participants may easily change roles, depending on the newly created circumstances, that strangers tend to be more polite towards each other, that love is the basis of a polite behaviour towards the participants and that sometimes, intimacy makes people more sincere and less polite. Because speaking implies co-operation, the participants involved prefer to violate the conversational maxims for the sake of talking in a polite manner. When they do not do it, they become rude or want their addressee to draw further inferences.

In what regards the visual aspect of the thesis, quotations are rendered both in the body of the paper (when they are shorter than three lines) and as distinct paragraphs (when their length exceeds three lines). Both the critical and the characters' quotations are signalled as such, but only the latter are italicised.

To conclude with, the present paper attempts to erase the artificial division between literature, seen as a compilation of 'frozen texts', and reality, the area of 'live discourses' (Sell, 1991: *passim*). In Pinter's opinion, "what happens in [his] plays could happen anywhere, at any time, in any place, although the events may seem unfamiliar at first glance." (Pinter, 1990 (II): 11).

As a matter of fact, "a fundamentally cooperative venture" (Herb Clark, in Horn and Ward, 2007: 4), language "*shows* rather than *tells*" (Gelven, in Birch, 1989: 6), and the Pinteresque drama demonstrates it to the utmost extent:

> By lowering language's informational potential Pinter makes the audience aware of the strategic employment of language as a mode of defense, but at the same time he also reveals its potential as a weapon. The words and rhythmic structures are contrived so that characters can strike with words or fence with phrases.
>
> (Peacock, 1997: 48)

The language of the seventeen Pinteresque plays '*shows* rather than *tells*' what relation exists among interlocutors (superiority, equality or inferiority), and consequently, how polite they are (the use of honorifics or addressing terms, the formulation of requests, etc.); what their intentions are (asking, accusing, criticising, praising, etc.); how correctly they speak (the use of words, grammar, etc.); how intelligent they are (the use of ideas, irony, puns, etc.) or what their level of education is (the choice of registers, style, etc.). In Birch's view,

> Language does more than say; it does more than pass on information or reflect an already existing reality 'out there' somewhere in the world. Language is about action and interaction; it is about performance, about showing, about doing. Language is not a neutral instrument: it is biased in a thousand different ways, and those ways are of course determined by any number of differing ideologies, knowledge and power systems, and institutions.   (1989: 42)

Furthermore, by the selection of the seventeen Pinteresque plays, the thesis aims to demonstrate the fact that it is "the social, interpersonal, executive power of language, the pragmatic 'doing things with words' which is dominant in the drama" (Elam, 2002: 145). Thirdly, it emphasizes the fact that words alone cannot mean, but the participants who use them in certain contexts make them significant and alive, throughout a complex process which speaking itself imposes.

Ultimately, the entire paper lays stress on the fact that "what can be communicated always exceeds the communicative power provided by the conventions of the language and its use" (Levinson, 1995: 112-113). To end with, paraphrasing Yule, pragmatics is indeed an appealing field of study (we can grasp the people's meanings and purposes, their assumptions and goals, the actions they participate at, while speaking), but at the same time, it is frustrating "because it requires us to make sense of people and what they have in mind" (Yule, 1996: 4).

Concluding, the present thesis aims, and hopefully manages, to be *a pragmatic approach to Pinteresque drama*. Concluding in a Pinteresque key, *that's all*, nothing more and nothing less, since

> A categorical statement, I find, will never stay where it is and be finite. It will immediately be subject to modification by the other twenty-three possibilities of it. No statement I make, therefore, should be interpreted as final and definitive; they may even be *almost* final and definitive; but I won't regard them as such tomorrow and I wouldn't like you to do so today.[6]   (Pinter, in Brown, 1972: 16).

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