

The Linguistics of Humour in Harold Pinter

Hoda Ahamed Hamdy

Department of English Language and Literature, College of Arts and Letters,
University of Bisha, Saudi Arabia
hahahmed@ub.edu.sa , hhamdy2016@gmail.com

Abstract

This paper is an extract from a PhD dissertation on the language of humour in literary texts. The study belongs to the domain of linguistics of literary humour, a domain that has long been unrecognized due to focus on jokes as the form of humour (e.g. Raskin 1985, Zhao 1988, Zadjman 1993, Norrick 2003, Veale et al 2006 ...etc.). The study deals with the linguistic analysis of humour in selected extracts from *The Birthday Party* (1958), and *No Man's Land* (1974) by the British Nobel Prize dramatist, Harold Pinter (1930 – 2008). Incongruity has been consistently cited in the literature as the major cause of humour. It describes the cognitive basis of humour, which has its origin in the cognition of both speaker and hearer. The present research used a Complementary Pragmatic approach, with a kit of five Pragma-linguistic tools, to detect humorous incongruity in the extracts analysed. Generally, the results prove that linguistic humour in the data analysed tends to be pragmatic in that Pinter uses ordinary language extraordinarily. There is no play on words, nor breakdown of linguistic structures. Humour in the extracts analysed comes from the mismatch between the linguistic communicative strategy and the discourse context rather than from breakdown of linguistic structures.

Keywords: Linguistics, Pragmatics, Humour, (Tragic) Comedy, Harold Pinter, *The Birthday Party*, *No Man's Land*.

1. Introduction

The present research deals with the linguistic analysis of humour in selected extracts from Pinter's *The Birthday Party* and *No Man's Land*. The linguistic approach used employs linguistic tools to analyse the language used to create humorous effects in literary works. It is informed, on the one hand, by humour theory and the linguistics of humour, subsuming non-literary humour—jokes, and on the other hand it is informed by the literary theory and the linguistics of literature. (See Figure 1, Appendix A) Dealing with the interdisciplinary phenomenon of humour, the approach used had to be also interdisciplinary. The approach used is, therefore complementary pragmatics, subsuming five linguistic tools. This multiplicity of analytic perspectives allows for multiple meanings and ensures that the analysis takes into consideration both the small entities such as words and phrases and the larger more abstract entities such as implicature and presupposition.

1.1. Objectives of the Study:

The general objective of this study is to explore how humour is linguistically achieved in the data analysed from Pinter's comedies, in order to understand the effects, it has on Pinter's overall dramatic technique. The specific objectives are:

1. To objectively identify humorous exchange sequences in the target plays by reviewing the literary critiques on Pinter's comedy.
2. To determine the cognitive and the linguistic characteristics of humorous language by reviewing linguistic study and research on (literary) humour.
3. To collect an integrated kit of linguistic tools to diagnose the language of humour by resort to the theory of Pragmatics and to previous studies on the linguistics of humour.
4. To measure the cognitive and linguistic characteristics of humorous language against Pinter's linguistic choices by means of the linguistic kit collected to this end.

5. To identify the general cognitive and the linguistic causes of menacing humour. This has been achieved by reviewing the major reasons of menace from the theory of humour.
6. To explore how far the cognitive and linguistic characteristics of menacing humour are also present in Pinter's comedies.
7. To specify the particulars of Pinter's comic technique so as to explore how his language of humour so identified can contribute to effectuate the different components of this technique.
8. To evaluate the kit and the analysis by assessing how far the findings confirm, disconfirm or add to intuitive observations.

1.2. Statement of the Research Questions:

1. What are the linguistic features of Pinter's language of humour?
2. How does the humour of language contribute to Pinter's overall dramatic technique?
3. Does an integrated approach of pragmatic tools pertain to a better understanding of the humour used by Pinter in the extracts analysed from The Birthday Party and No Man's Land?

2. Linguistic Approaches to the Language of Humour

This section is aimed to present the theoretical bases from the literature of humour research of the of two main points that are adopted for the present study:

1. A brief review of “incongruity” that has been considered the main cause of humour in language.
2. A brief review of the linguistic tools that are collected to analyse the extracts selected for the present research.

Raskin 1985 Presents the Script – Opposition Semantic Theory of Humour (SSTH), which is considered: "The first ever application of modern linguistic theory to the

study of humour." (Raskin 1985) The theory tries to specify the conditions necessary for a text to be funny, i.e. to be a joke. In his theory, Raskin applies a semantic approach where the linguistic analysis focuses primarily on the word level, with the sentence level occupying a secondary status.

The main hypothesis of the SSTH is that a text can be a joke if it fulfils two conditions:

1. The text is compatible with two different scripts,
2. These two scripts are opposites. (Raskin 1985: 140 – 147) The present research followed the idea of opposite scripts as the main cause of humour in language. The difference, however, is that Raskin uses his theory to analyse sexual, ethnic and political jokes, but the present study uses the idea of oppositeness, or “incongruity” as used here, to analyse the language of literary humour. (See Figure 2, Appendix A).

Attardo 1988 was probably the first to present a survey of language – based humour research in Europe. The studies he presents are translated from different European languages. ECO (1981 & 1986), (in Attardo: 357 & 358) proposes that humour may be elicited as a result of obscurities and ambiguities resulting when in a coded situation the expected order of facts is acted against. ECO builds his examples on humour resulting from violations of Grice's 1975 Cooperative Principle (CP) conversational maxims as in e.g. 1:

<i>E.g.1</i>	<i>A: Excuse me: Do you know what time it is?</i>
	<i>B: Yes.</i>
	<i>(ECO 1986: 273, in Attardo 1988a: 357)</i>

In this example, humour comes from violation of Cooperative Principle (henceforth, CP) maxim of Quantity. Attardo concludes that the inclusion of contextual factors and pragmatic parameters is indispensable to any exhaustive theory of humour.

Marino 1988 analyses pun, holding that "contextual, semantic, and script – based

discussions seem particularly apposite for the analysis and description of pun – bearing discourses" (Marino 1988:42). He specifies four levels for analyzing puns,

1. Script – opposition.
2. encyclopedic knowledge.
3. CP, and 4- Speech Act Theory. He, accordingly classifies puns into three types – The Bad: if the scripts are not connected in some sufficient way; The Good: when the pun is the result of an evocative script opposition; and The Beautiful: when the pun is extended and is found essential for the reading of the text.

Goldstein, L. 1990 divides linguistic humour into simple and complex. Simple "phonetic humour" is explainable in terms simple phonic repetition and spoonerism, as exemplified in:

E.g.2 | Red lorry, yellow lorry (Goldstein 1990:40)

The complex type is used in adult humour and addresses and sometimes violates the different aspects of our world knowledge, like the following example:

E.g.3 | Boy wanted to kill the Queen. (Goldstein 1990:42)

The word "wanted" in this context can be interpreted as "a boy tried to kill the queen", with 'wanted' a verb in the past tense occupying the position of the head of a VP. The sentence can also be interpreted as: "A boy is required for the job of killing the queen", with "wanted" a past participle of the verb occupying the position of the head of an ADJ Phrase. Again, the idea of ambiguity, a familiar humorous device is used in the analysis of the extracts in the present research.

Attardo, and Raskin, 1991 develop the general theory of verbal humor, GTVH. In the GTVH, Attardo and Raskin assign the joke six lineary- ordered components, called knowledge resources (KR):

1. Script opposition (SO) which is similar to Raskin's 1985 script opposition.
2. Logical mechanism (LM) which is the mechanism of joke telling mode and could be achieved by strategies like false analogy, false priming or faulty logic.

3. Situation that involves participants, objects, and activities practiced.
4. Target, which means the "butt" of the joke.
5. Narrative strategy that has to do with brevity, since the language used for a joke has to be non-redundant.
6. Language that gives the speaker choices at the phonologic, lexical, syntactic ...etc. levels of language structure. Again, the idea of "script opposition" or "incongruity" is basic to linguistic researches of humour.

Oaks 1994 suggests that jokes can be caused by ambiguity resulting from concord in the English sentence. This can be fulfilled through many linguistic tricks like absence of articles with plural and non-count nouns: This often creates confusion about the location of constituent boundary, like in the following joke:

E.g. 3	Girl: Are you fond of moving pictures?
	Boy: Oh, yes, very.
	Girl: Then you won't mind moving some down out of the attic for mother. (Kohl and Young 1963:113, in Oaks 1994:382)

The use of the plural "pictures" here is essential for the ambiguity to work. If we take the singular form, there is a difference between "a moving picture" and "moving a picture", which disambiguates the meaning. Oaks also give examples to ambiguity enablers like causative and perception verbs, verb particles, idioms and modals. He concludes his insightful study remarking that jokes, which rely on structural ambiguity, are rare in relation to other types because analysis of such jokes often involves complex integration of grammatical features.

Zajdman 1995 explains self-ridicule in terms of Politeness Theory (henceforth, PP) in that self-ridicule is the indirect polite way of expressing strength. When self-ridicule occurs, this is interpreted as humorous, because it is assumed that nobody in his/her right mind is hostile towards him/herself. There is, then, an implied.

Russell 1996 distinguished two types of humour-bearing ambiguity. The First is the simple "punning", that is located in one word, e.g. the word "matchless" in the

following example: as in the following example:

E.g.4	"A husband gives his wife a cigarette land a cigarette lighter and inscribed: "To my matchless wife". (Russell 1996:50)
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The second type of ambiguity, as proposed by Russell, lies in the difference between speaker and hearer in the interpretations of a group of words. This is illustrated by the following:

E.g.5	<i>Patient: Doctor, will I be able to play the piano when my hands have healed?</i>
	<i>Doctor: Certainly.</i>
	<i>Patient: That's amazing! I never could before.</i> (Russell 1996:50&51)

Pragmatic interpretation, as applied in the present study, if also applied to the analysis of (5) will interpret the humour in terms of violation of Quantity maxim by the patient's not telling the whole truth to the doctor. (That he never could play the piano before)

Okada 2001 presents a kit of tools to analyse Modern English dramatic comedy. The analysis starts with addressing small lexical units, then turns to humour at the level of discourse as a whole. The methodology applied makes use of foregrounding theory from the field of stylistics and incongruity theories from the field of humour. From linguistics, the analysis applies tools from four major linguistic approaches: the traditional approach, the pragmatic approach, the conversational approach, and the cognitive approach. The study analyses *Clouds* by Michael Frayn and proves that a kit of linguistic tools is a useful approach for studying the linguistics of literary humour.

Norrick, 2003 explains the humour of puns, ironies and allusions in terms of Grice's Cooperative Principle (CP). Norrick holds that recipients first process the literal meaning of an utterance, assuming that the speaker is adhering to the default conventional interpretation. If the interpretation does not fit the context, the recipient works out possible conversational implicatures corresponding to what the speaker

intended. The clash between the initial literal interpretation and the conversational implicatures serves the purpose of humour. Norrick holds that puns "rank high on the scale of aggression, because they disrupt topical talk by misconstruing and redirecting it". (pp. 1345& 1326) Norrick adds that humour based on violation of conversational maxims can be quite aggressive because it denies the butt response by resorting to the reconstruction "I was only joking."

"Trumping" or adversarial humour according to Veale et al 2006, is a form of multi-agent language game that generates its humorous effect through subversion of the linguistic forms of exchange." (P. 306) it is a form of aggressive humour on part of the respondent and is fulfilled by violating the Reality Principle (RP) that is explained in Lui 1995. In "trumping", the hearer gives a response parallel to that of the speaker, giving the opposite meaning. Trumping should always be secondary in position. In the following example, the hearer is using trumping to deny the implicature of insult and to answer the insult back to the speaker:

E.g.6	<i>Emperor Charles the bald: What separates an Irishman from a fool?</i>
	<i>Irish Philosopher, John Scott: Just this table.</i>
	<i>(Veale et al 2006:317)</i>

3. Methodology and Procedure

3.1 Methodology:

In humour, a humorist has a wide variety of stylistic resources available to him. Humour mechanisms, in turn, broaden their field to all linguistic levels. Nash 1985 holds that "jesting language is frequently layered, working its effect combinatively through sounds, vocabulary, grammar and syntax." (p. 124) Therefore, "there is a compelling need for a non-exclusive approach to the construction of humor, allowing functional boundaries to be blurred and viewing each component of meaning (lexical, syntactic and pragmatic) as re-entrant and available at every level of linguistic analysis" (Veale 2006: 332) Accordingly, The present study uses a complementary

Pragmatics approach in the analysis of Pinter's plays, where "pragmatics is a perspective on any aspect of language, at any level of structure." (Verschueren et al 1987: 5, original emphasis).

The methodology used for analysis therefore uses a kit of tools with several analytic perspectives to ensure that the analysis takes into consideration both the small entities such as words and phrases and the larger more abstract entities such as implicature and presupposition. The aim of the tools used is to detect the humorous "incongruity" in the selected texts.

3.2 Tools of Analysis:

Selection of the tools is determined by the fact that humour is inherently context-bound (La Fave and Haddad 1976; and Zillman and Cantor 1976), and is inherently interactional. (Palmer 1996, and Perlmutter 2002) The linguistic approach, therefore, makes use of a kit of linguistic tools that takes into consideration the linguistic, the pragmatic and the interactional contexts of the utterance. The aim of this kit is to consider the humour potential of the different aspects of linguistic items within and beyond the sentence. Accordingly, the following are the tools used for the analysis:

3.2.1 Context of Situation:

In almost all models of linguistics of humour, the humorous utterance necessitates the competent knowledge of the world as a basic component for its interpretation. We come across the notion of context under different labels:

- Lui: "reality Principle (1995).
- Nash: "generic reference" (1985).
- Raskin: "repository of world knowledge", (1985).

Strict definition of context is crucial for the appreciation of humour. "Context of situation" describes three parameters in the target extracts:

- A. Immediate context of situation.
- B. Background knowledge and presupposition.
- C. Co-textual context. Description of context of situation in the analysis follows the frameworks specified in Cutting's 2002, supplemented by Hymes 1972 and by Yule 1996.

3.2.2 Lexical and syntactic choices:

Humour could be produced as a result of jarring with deixis, terms of reference, entailment or presupposition. The following example illustrates humour arising from playing with the referent of the deictic "it":

E.g. 7	A: <i>The Mississippi is the longest river in the USA. Can you spell it?</i>
	B: <i>I T spell 'it'. (Ross, 1998: 24)</i>

Syntactic humour is exemplified in:

E.g. 8	A <i>stranger asks: 'Can you tell me how long cows should be milked?'</i>
	<i>The farmer answers: They should be milked in the same way as short ones, of course. (Cited in Shultz, 1976:13; and in Giora, 1991:466);</i>

Conventional implicature of linguistics choices and hence their humorous potential should be detected in the choices of linguistic entities. Procter et al 1985, Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English is consulted for the rules that govern the relationship between lexemes, such as synonymy, antonymy, connotations, denotation, collocations, formal/informal, archaic/modern.... etc. The humour potential of syntactic and semantic choices is looked up in Leech and Svartvik 1994 Communicative Grammar of English and in Quirk and Greenbaum 1981.

3.2.3 The Cooperative Principle- CP (Grice 1975) and Reality Principle- RP (Liu 1995):

Both tools are used to measure how the interlocutors exploit conversational implicature to break with conversational bonds, which can be conducive to humour. By virtue of CP maxims, listeners try to work out implicatures in order to

render the utterance, nevertheless true and relevant. Violation of such maxims may result in humour. According to Nash, 1985:

The work of Grice, of Austin, and of J.R. Searle... is a contract involving the agreed conduct of various acts of assertion, direction, performance, verdict giving, promising, inviting, requesting, etc.. When the contract is broken, ... the effect may be funny. (Nash 1985: 116).

The following exchange exemplifies humour arising from violation of Quantity maxim in response:

E.g. 9	A: "Excuse me, do you know what time it is?"
	B: "Yes." (Attardo 1993:541)

The implicature of A's utterance, "Can you tell me the time", is reduced by B to a mere enquiry about B's abilities by violating Quantity, which results in humour.

3.2.4 Politeness Principle (PP):

According to Leech 1983, Politeness Principle is a conversational bond that effects harmony between interlocutors by using indirect strategies to save the other party's face. Breaching the PP maxims enables potential humour. (Simpson 1989; Leech 1992; and Zajdman 1995) PP analysis in the present study adopts mainly Leech's 1983 model, supplemented by the idea of "Face" as suggested by Brown and Levinson 1987. According to Simpson 1989, the following example is humorous because it represents a mismatch between the excessive mitigating strategy and the quite simple amount of imposition in the request:

E.g. 10	<i>am sorry to trouble you- I know it is an awful imposition- but could I possibly impose upon you and ask you if you could tell me what time it is.</i>
	(Simpson 1989: 177)

3.2.5 Conversation Organization Rules:

The sequences of talk examined in this research are to be judged against the Conversation organization rules as set by Sacks et al 1978 and supplemented by

insights collected from Coulthard 1977; Brown & Yule 1983; Levinson 1983, Herman 1991; and Tannen 1994. Sacks et al 1978 set parameters that describe the normal, expected sequential organization of conversation. The breaking of these normally expected conversational bonds can cause humour.

3.3 Procedure:

First, a synopsis of the status of the play in the literary canon and its plot are given. This is then followed by a more detailed look at the key participants in the target dialogues. Enhancers of humour mood are then discussed. Where relevant, the direction of analysis "starts with what is well known and clear-cut—the syntax, and moves to what is relatively variable and context dependent — pragmatics." (Leech 1983:153) This procedure helps limit the pragmatic interpretation, which is open to all variables by the pragmatic meaning of the lexical and syntactic choices. The dialogue is then checked for:

1. Violations of background knowledge of participants (mainly Presupposition and entailment; deixis; and terms of address).
2. Violations of the different maxims of the CP (Quantity, Quality, Manner, and Relation) as well as violations of the RP.
3. Violations of the PP maxims. (Tact, Generosity, Approbation, Modest, Agreement & Sympathy)
4. Violations of the normative rules of the Conversation Analysis (CA).

3.4 Data Collection Instruments:

It is acknowledged in the field of psychology of humour that people exhibit vast differences with respect to their responses to humour as there is nothing as "an objective joke". (La Fave, and Haddad, 1976; and Palmer, 1988) In the field of drama, "It is impossible to legislate on what "the audience" will find comic or at what point they are laughing, and it is surely dangerous to construct a thesis around such

unknown quantities." (Dutton 1986:11) It was decided, therefore that the comic dialogues that are analysed in this study should be collected from the works of renowned literary critics. Elin Damond's 1985 Pinter's Comic Plays is the main source for judging the funniness of the dialogues. Other literary critiques are also resorted to when possible, e. g. Bernard Dukore 1976 Where Laughter Stops.

3.5 The Data:

The Data analysed is 192 consecutive turns (henceforth,T) from the Brainwashing scene in the Faber and Faber 1991 edition of Pinter's 1958 The Birthday Party, and 75 non-consecutive turns of the opening scene of Pinter's 1974 No Man's Land as displayed in the Methuen 1975 edition. Appendix B below has a sample of the analysis and the data.

4. The Results

Generally, the results prove that linguistic humour in the data analysed tends to be pragmatic in that Pinter uses ordinary language extraordinarily. There is no play on words, nor breakdown of linguistic structures. Humour comes from the mismatch between the linguistic communicative strategy and the discourse context rather than from breakdown of linguistic structures.

In The Birthday party humour results from:

1. Goldberg's and McCann's playing with Stanley's presuppositions, e.g. "You're dead."
2. Collaboration in the floor between the two tormentors, which amounts in some instances to complete overlap so as to victimize Stanley and make of him a "butt" of humour.
3. Violation of CP Quantity: this comes in the form of excessive floor hogging by Goldberg, which sets in power relations, a recurrent Pinteresque theme. It also

comes in the form of McCann's violation of CP Quantity by repeating Goldberg's exact words.

4. Violation of adjacency Rules via following each question by another question.
5. Violation of CP Relation: this is realized by the fact that the crimes of which Stanley is convicted are divorced from both the co-text and the situational context. This reflects the painteresque theme of impossibility of cooperation.

In No Man's Land humour comes from:

1. Violation of Reality Principle (RP) by both Spooner and Hirst. Spooner violates RP mostly in order to avoid Hirst's deprecating remarks. Hirst violates RP to retort Spooner and to deflate Spooner's disparaging statements.
2. Consistent violation of Adjacency Rules by Hirst that results in discernable silence. This concretizes Pinter's theme of impossibility of cooperation and establishes Spooner's defeat.
3. Excessive patterning of violation of CP Quantity by Spooner via contributing more and by Hirst via contributing less.
4. Humorous violations of PP maxims, which draw the lines of the relationship between the two characters. While Spooner consistently observes Tact, Generosity, Approbation and Modesty, Hirst equally consistently violates them. Hirst also violates Sympathy with Spooner's self-deprecation. The only PP maxim that Hirst observes is Agreement to the effect that what he agrees upon is Spooner's self dispraise.

5. Conclusions and Discussion

Based on the analysis of the collected data, the following conclusions can be reached:

Generally, both plays display complicated pragmatic humour that violates conversational Maxims and sequential rules, rather than simple linguistic humour that violates semantic and lexical rules.

In The Birthday Party violations are direct and excessive. For example, all the characters are noted for subverting the conversational postulates of normal talk. Gold/Mcc's violations of Turn Taking rules set in the dominating/dominated tone that enhances power relations. While Gold violates TurnTaking rules by excessive floor hogging, Mcc violates TT rules by repeated inappropriate self-selection. They both violate adjacency rules by following their questions to Stan with further questions in order to block his access to his conversational rights. The result is absence of silence. Both Gold and Mcc violate turn transition rules by repeatedly interrupting Stan. Stan violates TT rules by following Gold/Mcc questions with further questions rather than with answers.

In No Man's Land linguistic violations are subtle and indirect. For example, humour in the extracts is caused mainly via mutual violations of RP and PP by both H and S. S's goals are to ingratiate himself to H and to disregard H's disparaging comments. Conversely, H's goals are to disregard S's ingratiating attempts, to insult S and to deflate S's bragging implicatures. A significant amount of humour in the data is also attributed to S's clownish linguistic tricks that ape the language of advertising. Being only reflections of deviant human relationships, humorous language in No Man's Land is attributable to impossibility of integration of incongruous elements. Humour arises mainly from S's failing attempt to integrate himself into H's elite circle. Turn taking analysis shows that humour in the extracts is also achieved by quantitative discrepancy between S's excessive volubility and H's excessive taciturnity.

The analysis proves that the humorous language used is not an incidental device to provide release from tension, but it is integral to his technique in that it draws characters, foregrounds ideologies and concretizes themes. For example, humorous violation of Quality in the two plays concretizes the theme of impossibility of verification. The characters' lying is sometimes detected by the audience by careful reference from one scene to another. Humorous linguistic violations help convey

Pinter's view that language, the major means of communicating meaning,

Comparing results proves that humour in *No Man's Land* is subtler. Humour in the *Birthday Party* is chiefly caused by means of direct, self-revealing linguistic violations of presupposition and Turn Taking rules. For this reason, "the process of disambiguation ... usually takes place immediately and, ideally, only one meaning of the utterance is intended by the speaker and perceived by the hearer." (Raskin 1985: 115) Conversely, in *No Man's Land* humorous linguistic violations are based chiefly on indirect strategies, such as RP and PP, whose indirectness helps trigger more than one viable interpretation. Syntactic choices in the play also aim at promoting indirectness. (E.g. T 3 in the exemplary analysis) Such violations are generally subtle and uncertain. Humour entities "with overtly expressed triggers are simpler than those with dissipated. (Raskin 1985: 117) Comparing results proves that the linguistic violations in *No man's Land* are more indirect and therefore subtler. In *The Birthday Party* they are direct and therefore simpler.

The study attempts to extend the boundaries of traditional criticism and to demonstrate how using linguistic tools to analyse literary humour can contribute to our understanding of the technical role that linguistic humour plays in dramatic dialogue. By so doing, it is made possible to investigate why humour in Pinter provokes the reactions and impressions that it does.

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Appendix A- Figures

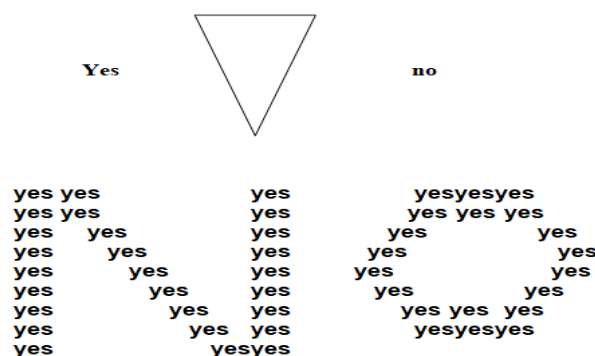
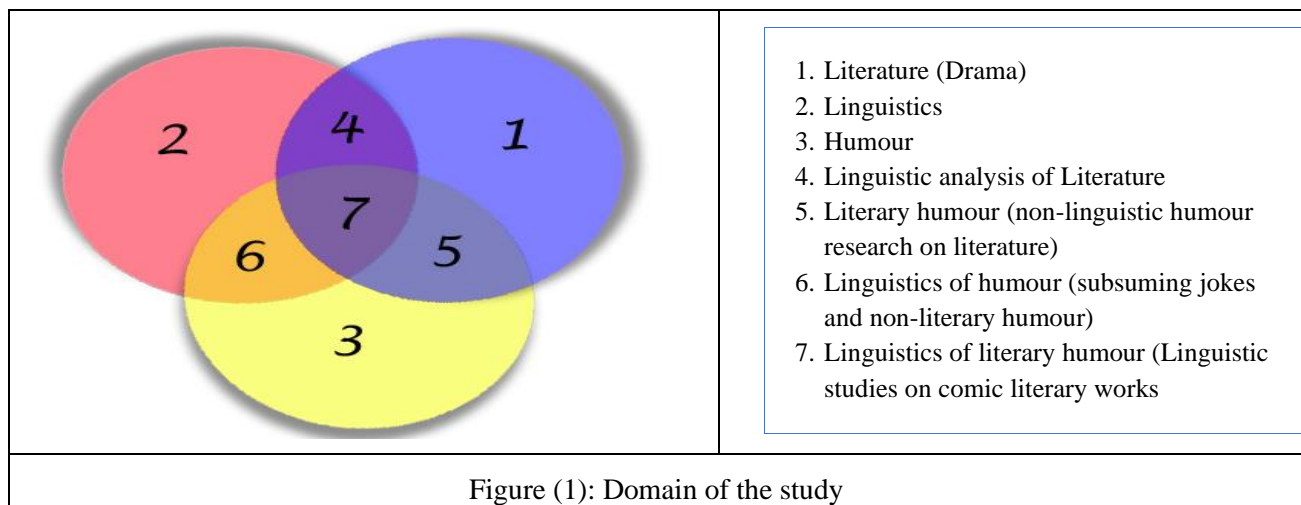


Figure 2: The cognitive aspect of humour. The figure unites two contradictory aspects "No" and "Yes" (Adopted from Wilson, 1979: 21)

Appendix B- Sample Analysis

1. The Birthday Party -The Brainwashing scene:

1.1 The Scene:

This is an example of linguistic analysis of the linguistic humour in a celebrated scene in Pinter's *The Birthday Party*, the interrogation of Stanley by Goldberg and McCann. The scene is variously called "the trial scene" and "the interrogation scene", (Toolan 2000: 177); "the torture scene", (e.g., Malkin 1992: 61); and the "brainwashing scene." (Esslin 1992:70)

Burkman 1971 believes that humour in the scene under analysis comes from "the spark of resistance in the cowardly Stanley." (p.36)

Dukore, 1976 stresses the cognitive contrasts as basic to the humour potential of the scene because, "In the interrogation scene...humor derives from non sequitur and contradiction, which become decreasingly funny as the persistent rhythm of threat and menace increases." (p.15) Diamond, 1985 describes the scene as "an interrogation act consisting of questions and accusations fired at Stanley and characterized by comic non-logic." (p. 55)

The choice is based on the fact that this scene has received a great attention by critics and linguists alike, though none of them has attempted applications of linguistic tools to specify the linguistics of the humour involved. Obviously, the passage under study plays a decisive role in Goldberg (henceforth, Gold) and Mccan's (henceforth, MCC) success to brainwash Stanley (henceforth, Stan) and consequently to win the power game and to overcome him. The analysis according

1.2 Sample of the Script:

T1	Gold	<i>You stink of sin.</i>
T2	Mcc	<i>I can smell it.</i>
T3	Gold	<i>Where was your wife?</i>
T4	Gold	<i>Answer.</i>
T5	Gold	<i>What have you done with your wife?</i>
T6	Mcc	<i>He has killed his wife!</i>
T7	Gold	<i>Why did you kill your wife?</i>
T8	Mcc	<i>How did he kill her?</i>
T9	Gold	<i>How did you kill her?</i>
T10	Mcc	<i>You throttled her.</i>
T11	Gold	<i>With arsenic.</i>

T12	Mcc	<i>There's your man!</i>
T13	Gold	<i>Why did you never get married?</i>
T14	Mcc	<i>She was waiting at the porch.</i>
T15	Gold	<i>You skeddadled from the wedding.</i>
T16	Mcc	<i>He left her in the lurch.</i>
T17	Gold	<i>You left her in the pudding club.</i>
T18	Mcc	<i>She was waiting at the church.</i>
T19	Gold	<i>Do you recognize an external force?</i>
T 20	Mcc	<i>That's the question!</i>
T21	Gold and Mcc	<i>Which came first? Which came first? Which came first?</i>

1.3 The Analysis:

Resorting to rules of turn taking (Sacks et al 1978), makes clear that humour in the example comes mainly from collaborative floor. Evidence for collaborative floor as used by Gold and Mcc in the extract can be found in:

1. Collaboration on developing ideas, e.g. of Stan's being sinful as in (T 1 &2).
2. Sharing in most turns in developing the act of convicting Stan, e.g. of killing his wife as in (T 3: 12).
3. Then in equally firmly convicting him of not getting married, which counters the previous claim. (T 13: 18)
4. Completing one another's utterances. (T 19 & 20)
5. The collaboration by complete overlap in a duet-like reiteration. (T 21)

In this example, humour arises from the violation of Sacks et al 1978 Turn Taking rule number two that says: "overwhelmingly, one party talks at a time" (Pp.10& 15). The rule suggests that a "single floor", i.e. one after the other, is the normal sequence of talk exchange in everyday conversation. This one-to-one exchange type is challenged in the brainwashing scene at hand by the "collaborative floor" type of exchange, i.e., "free-for-all" stretches [of talk] ... which show... much simultaneity." (Edelsky, 1981: 391) The scene is an exact copy of the types of collaboration in the floor as illustrated in Edelsky 1981, who proposes that collaborative floor may show some of the following:

1. "Simultaneity", i.e. overlaps (P. 391).
2. "[J]oint building of an answer to a question".

3. "[S]haring in the creation of an idea or a function" (P. 393).
4. "Collaboration on developing ideas." (Pp. 391: 393).

The humour derived from such collaboration in the floor is explainable in terms of Crystal and Davy's 1969 description of the language of conversation in that "it is also fairly common for A to complete B's sentence, or vice versa...or for the two speakers to provide an ending for a sentence simultaneously – a situation frequently parodied by comedians." (p. 112, original emphasis)

What is also incongruous and hence humorous here is that such simultaneous speech occurs in scripted dialogue in such a way that violates the audience's genre expectations and challenges Elam's 1980 diagnostic statement that "In scripted discourse we find, unlike in real conversation, neat turn taking, syntactically complete sentences...etc." (p. 90) Humour is built via satirizing such traditional rules by violating them.

Collaboration in the floor also reinforces the concept of choral effect and group pressure and accentuates the tormentors' strategy to normalize their claims and to practice group pressure on Stan by changing his social and logical presuppositions and by replacing them with their own.

2. No Man's Land-The Interrogation Scene

2.1 The Scene:

The exemplary sequences mark the play's opening scene and the first stage of the relationship between Hirst (H.) and Spooner (S). From the sequences analysed we can see how S is trying to ingratiate himself to H and how H is trying to get rid of S.

Dukore, 1976 describes the humour potential in this scene as: "comically, the opening scene of the play anticipates a tragicomic conclusion that denies the exclusiveness of that comedy." (p. 63) In describing the rest of exchanges between Spooner and Hirst, Dukore holds that "While Spooner's early talkativeness is a source of laughter, the dramatic action either denies or else ironically confirms his statements." (p. 64).

Diamond, 1985 states that the humour potential on behalf of Spooner is ascribed to "ironic self-mockery" that "tilts toward aggression." (p. 184) Diamond refers to the rest of the dyadic exchange as "comic volleying" (p. 187)

2.2 Sample of the Script:

T1	S	<i>Yes! I was talking about strength. Do you recall?</i>
T2	H	<i>Strength. Yes.</i>
T3	S	<i>Yes. I was about to say, you see, that there are some people who appear to be strong, whose idea of what strength consists of is persuasive, but who inhibit the idea and not the fact. What they possess is not strength but expertise. They have nurtured and maintain what is in fact a calculated posture. Half the time it works. It takes a man of intelligence and perception to stick a needle through that posture and discern the essential flabbiness of the stance. I am such a man.</i>
T4	H	<i>One of the latter?</i>
T5	S	<i>One of the latter, yes, a man of intelligence and perception. Not one of the former, oh no, not at all. By no means.</i>

Pause

2.3 The Analysis:

In T3, S. describes two types of people. The first type is hypocrites, who pretend to be strong, but in fact they are not. The second is the intelligent man who uncovers and exposes these hypocrites. Choosing mainly the formal variety for his turn, S uses ellipsis, as "ellipsis is another feature of formal style" (Leech and Svartvik, 1994:14). In the final sentence of T3, S uses the elliptical "I am such a man", as opposed to the unelliptical "I am such a man of intelligence and perception". According to Oaks, 1994, "...redundancies [in language]... often prevent structural ambiguity" (Oaks, D. 1994:397). Ellipsis, in turn, enables ambiguity and misunderstanding that may result in humour as in:

E.g. 11	a) How was the blind carpenter able to see? b) He picked his hammer and [his] saw. (Rosenbaum, 1976:61, in Oaks, D.1994: 385)
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Ellipsis in the phrase: "of intelligent and perception" enables misunderstanding on part of H, in T4. Accordingly, H inquires whether S is describing himself as "such a man of intelligence and perception", or as "such a man who inhibits the idea and not the fact". Reality Principle, RP (Liu 1995) is the principle that helps the listener rule out ambiguities and incorrect interpretation believing that the speaker is referring to a situation he can make sense of.

H's violation of the RP in T4 results in humour because H builds his violation on the ambiguous element in S's utterance and brings to focus this far-fetched inference and so creates humour.

In No Man's Land, we can appreciate the constantly shifting relationship between H and S by observing how far they conform to or violate the conversational maxims. S violates Reality in many instances in the extract.