



DEFAMILIARIZATION THROUGH MODALITY OF DISCOURSE:  
*WAITING FOR GODOT*

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**ABSTRACT:** Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* (1954) is a parody of the world following World War II. The play exemplifies the spirit of the age by using defamiliarization as a textual strategy by means of which the characters utilize epistemic modals leading their conversational exchanges to never-ending voidness and uncertainty. Therefore, this study analyses discursual features of *Waiting for Godot* by focusing on modality as the primary means for a void and indecisive attitude that is created through defamiliarization. The study further exemplifies how Beckett's use of defamiliarization foregrounds epistemic modality to create a discourse unique in his authorial path.

**KEYWORDS:** epistemic modality, defamiliarization, theatre of the absurd, *Waiting for Godot*, Samuel Beckett

La desfamiliarización a través de la modalidad del discurso: *En attendant Godot*

**RESUMEN:** *En attendant Godot* (1954), de Samuel Beckett, es una parodia del mundo posterior a la Segunda Guerra Mundial. La obra ejemplifica el espíritu de la época al utilizar la desfamiliarización como estrategia textual mediante la cual los personajes se valen de modales epistémicos que conducen sus intercambios conversacionales a un vacío e incertidumbre interminables. Por lo tanto, este estudio analiza las características discursivas de *En attendant Godot* centrándose en la modalidad como medio principal para una actitud vacía e indecisa que se crea a través de la desfamiliarización. El estudio ejemplifica, además, cómo el uso de Beckett de la desfamiliarización pone en primer plano la modalidad epistémica para crear un discurso único en su trayectoria autoral.

**PALABRAS CLAVE:** modalidad epistémica, desfamiliarización, teatro del absurdo, *En attendant Godot*, Samuel Beckett

## 1. INTRODUCTION

*Waiting for Godot* by Samuel Beckett (1954) is an experimental and distinctive play regarding language use and its psychological, philosophical, and political backgrounds (Esslin, 2014). Thus, it has been studied frequently in different aspects. A review of the relevant literature suggests that the play has been analysed from many different theoretical perspectives, although stylistic and discursal perspectives have rarely been employed in such analyses. However, a handful of studies that focus on the text's stylistic and discursal features bring insight into Beckett's authorial voice. Abdul-Hussein (2016) analyses the deictic expressions in *Waiting for Godot* and suggests that deixis is a prominent feature of the play and for 'the absurd theatre' in general. He argues that the use of deixis emphasizes the timelessness of the play while pointing at the absurdity of life. Furthermore, Hwang (2019) focuses on maxims of conversation in *Waiting for Godot* by comparing it with Harold Pinter's *The Birthday Party* and suggests that the violation of maxims in these two plays, which are accepted as examples of the absurd theatre, is a significant stylistic choice that provides these plays' absurdity. Bhatti, Azar, and Abbas (2019, 4) analyse the use of transitivity in *Waiting for Godot* and conclude that transitivity in the text creates a kind of "broken language" that conveys the meaninglessness of human life. In another study, Jasim and Aziz (2007, 10) analyse the repetitions in the play and suggest that "the cohesive function of repetition is used to achieve an interpretation of the play and make the reader see the meaning and relevance of Beckett's philosophy as the hopeless routine of life is seen throughout the play." Such studies show that analyses of the discursal features of the play bring additional insight into the text.

One particular type of study that is missing in the repertoire of all the studies that analyze *Waiting for Godot* is the one that takes the text as discourse by focusing on modality. Bearing this in mind, this study focuses on modality, exclusively on the epistemic modality, as a discourse analytic aspect of the play. The protagonists, Vladimir and Estragon, continuously use epistemic modals in their discussions about life, leading to nowhere and ending in absurd uncertainty. However, the function of the epistemic modal is to create an alienated and questioning attitude in the reader's mind through defamiliarization. This study focuses on two major characters' discourse displaying their alienation used as the primary function of the modality in the play. It is seen that as a typical example of an absurd theatre, this kind of defamiliarization is especially preferred in the discourse with an aim to have a distancing effect on the reader so as to make them question their own existence reality as an example of void absurdity that is being presented to them.

## 2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

One of the major systems involved in expressing attitudes through language is modality. Modality mainly deals with speakers' attitudes and stances toward the propositions they express. Frequent use of specific types of modality produces particular effects, which

significantly impact the general feeling created in the text, including the impressions that “readers form of specific characters and the atmosphere or tone established by a text” (Gibbons & Whitely, 2018). Narratives with a “predominance of deontic and boulomaic modality and very little epistemic modality, as well as words that denote thoughts, feelings, and perceptions and evaluative lexis” reveal positive shading (Simpson, 1993, 51). On the other hand, narratives featuring epistemic and perception modal systems are negatively shaded. Negatively shaded passages often feature ‘words of estrangement’ emphasizing “a focaliser’s interpretative effort and lack of understanding or insight into other characters or situations. Texts with negative modal shading may create the impression of an alienated ... or estranged narrator/focaliser” (Simpson, 1993, 75). In this study, *Waiting for Godot*, which stands out as a prominent example of the Theatre of the Absurd, is analysed in terms of the functions of epistemic modals to create an estrangement effect with the characters’ indecisive and uncertain attitudes created by the use of these modals. Before giving textual evidence, it is aimed to define the Theatre of the Absurd and the concept of defamiliarization to have a firmer understanding of the background of the play.

### 3. *WAITING FOR GODOT* AND THE THEATRE OF THE ABSURD

*Waiting for Godot* is a play in two acts in which there are no definite answers to any questions asked in the play, and there is no real action in a conventional way. The main characters, Vladimir and Estragon, try to pass the time waiting for something or someone called Godot, the other two characters, Lucky and Pozzo, come up and then leave, and the Boy arrives with his message that Godot will not be coming that day. Bearing this structure in mind, the play is often interpreted as depicting the dull and repetitive nature of modern life, which is spent in anticipation of an entity that does not appear. Everything in life seems monotonous, tedious, faintly absurd, and above all, pointless. However, apart from all the futility and absurdity of life, it is also clear that life continues. The physical unwillingness of Vladimir and Estragon to move at the end of both acts of the play contradicts their decision to leave, implying that they have no real intention of ‘leaving’ their lives. Indeed, despite their agreement to end their miserable lives by hanging themselves on a tree, their suicidal attempt ends absurdly when Estragon’s trousers fall down, and they give up on the idea of committing suicide upon this awkward moment. This absurdity, together with the “meaninglessness of actions, sterility of the characters and strangeness of setting” help to put this play into the category of the sub-genre called ‘theatre of the absurd’ (Ullah et al., 2016, 56).

In its quest to portray its attitude toward existence, the ‘Theatre of the Absurd’ contradicts the traditional idea of drama. Esslin (2014, 20), in his book *The Theatre of the Absurd*, defines absurdity as: “out of harmony with reason or propriety; incongruous, unreasonable, illogical” is what applies to the play. Ionesco, who is one of the representatives of the genre, defines the term as: “Absurd is that which is devoid of purpose... cut off from his religious, metaphysical, and transcendental roots, man is lost; all his actions become senseless, absurd, useless” (as cited in Esslin, 2014, 20). According to Esslin, by abandoning rational devices and discursive

reasoning, “the ‘Theatre of the Absurd’ aims to depict the senselessness of the human condition and the inadequacy of the rational” way of interpreting the things happening around (2014, 21).

Rather than expressing arguments about the absurdity of the human condition, the Theatre of the Absurd exposes it through authentic stage images. Its anti-theatre traits address absurdity through numerous creative features, such as the lack of a plot or conventional theatrical language. *Waiting for Godot* creates a unique sense of insecurity, ranging from the anticipation of learning Godot’s real identity to the recursive disappointment of never meeting him in reality. There are several instances of characters speculating suicide throughout the text, but they never act to realize it. Characters are often shown to be suffering from misery and mistreatment from strangers with no hope of relief. Most of these uncertainties in the play are foregrounded through epistemic modality and negative shading.

#### 4. EPISTEMIC MODALITY

Kiefer (1987, 67) states that “modality is generally accepted as a category related to the speaker’s knowledge and comment in language studies”. In linguistic studies, modality is mainly categorized under two types identified by Jespersen (1924, 320-321): “1. Containing an element of will 2. Containing no element of will”. Kerimoğlu (2010, 436) argues that “the difference between possibility and necessity is replaced with the epistemic (containing no element of will) and deontic (containing element of will) couple in the linguistic modality studies.” While “epistemic modality focuses on the belief or lack of belief related to the speaker’s proposition” (Coates, 1987, 112), deontic modality brings the speaker’s psychological and mental condition rather than his/her level of knowledge to the fore. Kiefer (1997, 241) distinguishes two kinds of modality: “Semantically, epistemic modality is based on the speaker’s knowledge, deontic modality, on the other hand, on physical or mental states or outer circumstances.” In *Waiting for Godot*, we see that major characters are mostly uncertain and lack knowledge about themselves and anything around them. This lack of knowledge and uncertainty is generally conveyed through epistemic modality.

Epistemic modality is mainly concerned with the speaker’s (or focaliser’s) assumptions or evaluation of possible inferences. It reveals the speaker’s or focaliser’s confidence or lack of confidence in the truth value of the propositions expressed. A classic definition is that of Lyons (1977, 797): “Any utterance in which the speaker explicitly qualifies his commitment to the truth of the proposition expressed by the sentence he utters, whether this qualification is made explicit in the verbal component or in the prosodic or paralinguistic component, is an epistemically modal, or modalized, utterance.” For Halliday (1970, 349), epistemic modality is “the speaker’s assessment of probability and predictability.” For Palmer (1986, 54-55), though, epistemic modality indicates the “status of the proposition in terms of the speaker’s commitment to it.”

In *Waiting for Godot*, Beckett employs epistemic tools of modality to exemplify Vladimir and Estragon’s incomprehensible and chaotic world, although the two characters’

constructions of their epistemological structures do not help them formulate a stable sense of truth for themselves. As they are unable to connect their past with their future, these two characters seem to lose their concept of temporality. They are also linguistically paralyzed, as their language no longer provides them a sense of reality and self. There is no stable cause-and-effect relationship between their dialogues and their actions. The fact that they are waiting for Godot is the only thing that keeps their lives constant.

Apart from their physicality and activity on the stage, these two characters are unable to achieve anything intellectually. Hence, the only intellectual activity they can do is to make futile inferences. By using modals with the function of shading reality, *Waiting for Godot* also provides the traces of the estrangement effect, which is used in the play as a technique to shake the readers and the audiences and let them question their reality and existence in a representation of the meaningless world presented to them with the absurdities and uncertainties in the play.

## 5. RUSSIAN FORMALISM AND DEFAMILIARIZATION

Russian Formalism was a popular school of literary criticism in Russia in the early 1900s. It comprises the studies by a group of renowned Russian and Soviet scholars, including Viktor Shklovsky, Grigory Vinokur, Roman Jakobson, Yuri Tynianov, and Boris Eichenbaum, who revolutionized the literary criticism by emphasising the priority and autonomy of poetic language in the study of literature. Formalism changed the way people approached literary texts. Prior to Formalism, literature was mainly viewed as a reflection of the author's mentality, ideological components, or historical interest. The literary content and the author's artistic strategies became the subject of formalist analysis; as a result, with the effect of Russian Formalism, greater appreciation for the creative process became the focus of criticism.

The emphasis on the functional importance of literary devices and its original idea of literary history are the distinctive features of Russian Formalism. Instead of traditional psychological and cultural-historical approaches, Russian Formalists proposed a scientific method for understanding poetic language. Two general principles guide the formalist study of literature: first, literature itself, or rather those characteristics that distinguish it from other human activities, must be the subject of literary theory; and second, 'literary facts' must take precedence over literary criticism's metaphysical commitments such as philosophical, aesthetic or psychological features (Steiner, 1984).

*The Theory of the 'Formal Method,'* written by Eichenbaum in 1926 (translated by Lemon and Reis, 1965), provides an overview of the Formalists' methodology and articulates that their goal was to create a science of literature in which Linguistics would be a core part of such science. Shklovsky was the group's primary critic, according to Eichenbaum, and he was responsible for two of the group's most well-known concepts: defamiliarization (ostranenie, meaning 'estrangement' or 'making it strange') and the plot/story distinction ('syuzhet'/'fabula') (Leitch et al., 2001). Defamiliarization is one of the most important ways

that literary language differs from everyday language, and it is also a feature of how art works in general, specifically by presenting the world in a bizarre new way that allows us to view things differently. According to Shklovsky, developing new strategies of defamiliarization is an element of literary history innovation (1990). The dichotomy between story and plot, or ‘fabula’ and ‘syuzhet’, is also another famous dichotomy presented by the formalists. The plot (‘syuzhet’) can unfold in a non-chronological order, but the story (‘fabula’) is a chronological sequence of events. Repetition, parallelism, gradation, and retardation are examples of artistic devices that can be used to order events.

Defamiliarization, also known as ‘ostranenie,’ is an artistic technique that involves presenting familiar objects in an unusual or absurd way to allow viewers to learn new perspectives and view the world in new ways. According to the formalists who created the term, it is the core concept of art and poetry. Russian formalist Viktor Shklovsky coined the word ‘defamiliarization’ to “distinguish poetic from practical language on the basis of the former’s perceptibility” (Crawford, 1984, 209). He states that poetic language is inherently different from everyday language since it is more challenging to comprehend.

The primary purpose of art is to convey the sense of things as they are perceived rather than as they are known. This technique of art is to make objects ‘unfamiliar,’ to make forms difficult to perceive to increase the difficulty and length of perception because perception is an artistic end in itself and must be prolonged (Berlina, 2017). As Nin (1976) argued, the function of art is to renew our perception. We lose sight of what we are familiar with. The writer rattles up a familiar situation, and “we discover a new meaning in it as if by magic” (Nin, 1976, 25).

Written by using defamiliarization, *Waiting for Godot* is a play of contradictions: “the master who ends up fettered to the slave, the tramps who play Jesus one minute and the fool the next, who wait patiently for the unattainable, yet struggle violently to pull off their boots; who want to hang themselves in order to pass the time” (Scott, 2013). It does not have any straightforward plot, and readers cannot identify themselves with any of the characters directly as they are not types of characters that are easily found in daily life; however, the readers and audience begin to feel their own absurd tragedy of existence while questioning the absurdity on the stage. Vladimir, Estragon, Pozzo, and Lucky are strangers to the audience. *Waiting for Godot* introduces the strangers to the readers in a bizarre universe, allowing them to discover a certain truth about their existence. Readers are forced to evaluate their own perspectives about their lives after encountering those of these strangers. Beckett’s imaginative and terrifying depiction of the play’s universe forces the reader to recognize that their reality might also be a fictitious representation rather than objective truth and their own reality is also as absurd and fictitious as the play they are reading.

In *Waiting for Godot*, defamiliarization is mainly constructed through modality. In that sense, reading some significant dialogues in the play reveals that Beckett’s style of defamiliarization is characterized by modality in discourse, and the reader becomes alienated from the text via this style which urges the reader to be more thoughtful in perceiving the text.

## 6. MODALITY AND THE DISCOURSE OF THE PLAY

As a typical example of the Absurd Theatre, *Waiting for Godot* is overloaded with structural oddities. As Terrazas (2001) indicates, the characters construct their own lives in the fictitious world of the play; nevertheless, they destroy the conventional functions of language. The abundance of modality used in the discourse helps achieve this construction as well as absurdity in the underlying vainness prevalent throughout the play. This vainness, mainly created by epistemic modals, shows itself in the uncertainties and discussions that lead nowhere. Even at the beginning of the play, the vainness and uncertainty are visible in the first encounter between the major characters Vladimir and Estragon. When they first meet in Act I, Vladimir addresses Estragon in a welcoming tone by saying, "... So there you are again", to which Estragon responds by stating, "Am I?" (Beckett, 1954, 2). Estragon's response is ambiguous since we do not understand if Estragon has been there before. Hence, this kind of uncertainty leads to alienation. In another dialogue between these two, we see another type of alienation created by the use of epistemic modal structures such as 'certainly,' 'I don't know,' and 'no doubt' (Beckett, 1954, 2). By uttering such uncertain remarks, Estragon and Vladimir exemplify their gloomy worlds. When Vladimir mentions the sufferings of Estragon in the hands of 'them,' Estragon seems alienated from his burdens of life. Epistemic structures of 'certainly' and 'I don't know' create a doubtful situation, and the reader becomes unsure about his sufferings.

Another epistemic modal structure shows itself in their discussion about the Bible when Estragon admits that he must have had a look at it. Still, the readers become suspicious if he really knows what he is talking about when he mentions trivial things about the Bible, such as "I must have taken a look at it" and "I remember the maps of the Holy Land. Coloured they were. Very pretty. The Dead Sea was pale blue. The very look of it made me thirsty. That's where we'll go, I used to say, that's where we'll go for our honeymoon. We'll swim. We'll be happy" (Beckett, 1954, 4). Estragon is not sure that he has read the Bible before though he remembers reading the maps. Another epistemic modal used there resembles Estragon to a poet because Vladimir claims that Estragon "should have been a poet" (Beckett, 1954, 4). As a reader, we cannot grasp the meaning of Estragon's statement that he was once a poet. The use of 'obvious' may function as an epistemic modality, but it does not lead to truth conditions; instead, it increases the uncertainty because he does not seem like a poet. Obviously, Estragon is not interested in the story, but we understand from the stage direction that he does not really move, so he is going nowhere. This exchange of statements in discourse shows that the real intention of the discussion is to show how characters are alienated from their reality, and through this alienation, it is expected for the reader to question themselves on the things they read about the Bible. The discussion goes on though the characters themselves seem uninterested.

Similarly, Vladimir's questions about the Bible show his suspicion towards the Bible. However, their talk is mere miscommunication. Estragon says, "I thought you said hell" to

which Vladimir adds, “From death, from death” (Beckett, 1954, 6). His uncertainty comes to the fore as he uses epistemic structures such as ‘I thought’ or ‘must have been,’ which are supposed to be the answers to the questions, but they are not, and they add more uncertainty to the questions. Vladimir and Estragon are shown alienated from the religious text while discussing it with questions leading nowhere. This function also leads the reader to question their own beliefs as the use of defamiliarization indeed intends it. While the readers or the audience, as the perceivers of the discourse, are trying to understand what these two characters are discussing and what they disagree with, they begin to question what is being told in the Bible by being alienated from the text or the stage and the perceivers question their own beliefs.

The atmosphere of uncertainty in the play is further created through the use of epistemic modality, especially when the topic of discussion centres around Godot. Vladimir says, “We’re waiting for Godot.” However, Estragon responds to this statement by asking, “You’re sure it was here?” (Beckett, 1954, 7). Surely they are waiting, but they do not seem to know what they are waiting for, so the reader is distanced from their reality. In another instance that shows the use of modality, Vladimir and Estragon discuss something that is indeed trivial. Still, their tone and the use of the modal structures reveal that there is something worth thinking. This makes the reader feel alienated again:

ESTRAGON: What is it?

VLADIMIR: I don’t know. A willow.

ESTRAGON: Where are the leaves?

VLADIMIR: It must be dead.

ESTRAGON: No more weeping.

VLADIMIR: Or perhaps it’s not the season.

[....]

VLADIMIR: A—. What are you insinuating? That we’ve come to the wrong place?

ESTRAGON: He should be here.

VLADIMIR: He didn’t say for sure he’d come.

ESTRAGON: And if he doesn’t come?

VLADIMIR: We’ll come back tomorrow.

ESTRAGON: And then the day after tomorrow.

VLADIMIR: Possibly.

ESTRAGON: And so on. (Beckett, 1954, 7)

The two characters’ discussion of the tree is a trivial topic to discuss, exemplifying their alienation from their reality. Vladimir and Estragon act as though the tree on the stage is not actually a tree as they deny its existence in an absurd discussion. Vladimir’s decision to keep on waiting for Godot demonstrates how he and Estragon are caught in a type of self-made prison: they are free to escape, but their expectation for Godot’s arrival keeps them there. Two characters are unaware of the time and place through the play as well:



VLADIMIR: Ah no, there you're mistaken.  
 ESTRAGON: What did we do yesterday?  
 VLADIMIR: What did we do yesterday?  
 ESTRAGON: Yes.  
 VLADIMIR: Why . . . (*Angrily.*) Nothing is certain when you're about.  
 ESTRAGON: In my opinion we were here.  
 VLADIMIR: (looking round). You recognize the place?  
 ESTRAGON: I didn't say that.  
 VLADIMIR: Well?  
 ESTRAGON: That makes no difference.  
 VLADIMIR: All the same . . . that tree . . . (*turning towards auditorium*) that bog . . .  
 ESTRAGON: You're sure it was this evening?  
 VLADIMIR: What?  
 ESTRAGON: That we were to wait.  
 VLADIMIR: He said Saturday. (*Pause.*) I think.  
 [...]  
 ESTRAGON: If he came yesterday and we weren't here you may be sure he won't come again today.  
 VLADIMIR: But you say we were here yesterday.  
 ESTRAGON: I may be mistaken. (Beckett, 1954, 9)

Estragon says they came to this place yesterday, but Vladimir disagrees. Estragon asks if Vladimir is sure they are at the right place on the right day. Vladimir believes so (it is Saturday) but searches his pockets for a note indicating which day they were meant to come to wait for Godot. Estragon is unsure what day it is and is concerned that Godot may have arrived the day before, and they were not there to see him. Unlike Vladimir, who has a relatively better sense of time, Estragon is totally alienated and has no clear idea what day it is. By using epistemic modal structures such as “[...], You're sure it was this evening? [...] He said Saturday I think. [...] I may be mistaken,” characters seem to lose their temporal discipline and even the notion of time is estranged.

When two characters end up their discussion or fail to find answers to their questions, the only thing they can do is to ask for the opinion of the long-awaited ‘authority’ to relieve themselves. Vladimir says he is interested in hearing what Godot will offer them, while Estragon questions what they had wanted from Godot. Vladimir responds that it was not a definite thing and adds that it was just a type of prayer. When Estragon asks about Godot's response, Vladimir says he would wait and see. Godot's promise of some sort of salvation is implied here but in an uncertain manner. Not only do Vladimir and Estragon doubt that Godot will appear, but they also doubt that if he does, he will be able to help them or not. Nonetheless, they keep waiting for him. This uncertain waiting causes the readers to lose their empathy, so they are alienated from the action going on the stage. As a result, they are expected to begin questioning their own expectations and uncertainties in their lives.

We also see the symbolism of freedom of thought in the play, but this is not done by criticizing society openly. Instead, Beckett uses defamiliarization through the absurdity that

he creates with the questions leading to nothing by using epistemic modal structures. In such instances, epistemic modals are created through suprasegmentals such as intonation. Estragon asks Vladimir by means of intonation, “We’re not tied?” Vladimir asks what he means, and Estragon wants to know if they are actually tied to Godot. Vladimir admits they are tied, at least for the time being. Estragon wants to be sure and asks if they are certain that this person is really called Godot, and Vladimir responds, “I think so” (Beckett, 1954, 12). Thus, the act of waiting for Godot turns out to be such an enormous burden for Vladimir and Estragon because they feel they are ‘tied’ to him. As a result of such an alienation effect, the reader is expected to question their own ties to the things they are unaware of themselves.

Pozzo interferes in Vladimir and Estragon’s debate over their expectations of Godot. In one scene, he is shown as someone unsure of what to do while waiting for Godot though he does not even remember Godot’s name in the play. Pozzo says that he would not want to leave until the night if he were also waiting for Godot. He says he wants to sit on his stool again but is unsure how. Estragon tries to help him sit down by asking him to sit. Pozzo agrees to sit when Estragon wants him to. Pozzo then claims that he must leave due to his busy schedule, but Vladimir responds that “time has stopped” (Beckett, 1954, 31). Pozzo is not convinced. Vladimir’s remark that time has stopped encapsulates the play’s repetitious, recursive approach to time. The characters and readers are alienated by this uncertain discussion having an abundance of epistemic modality:

POZZO: Why it’s very natural, very natural. I myself in your situation, if I had an appointment with a Godin . . . Godot . . . Godot . . . anyhow, you see who I mean, I’d wait till it was black night before I gave up. (*He looks at the stool.*) I’d very much like to sit down, but I don’t quite know how to go about it.

ESTRAGON: Could I be of any help?

POZZO: If you asked me perhaps. (Beckett, 1954, 31)

The feeling of alienation created by linguistic devices such as epistemic modality is not merely represented by verbal exchanges. In fact, the characters’ physical actions contribute to this feeling in an absurd manner. Estragon says he and Vladimir “weren’t made for the same road” (Beckett, 1954, 49). Vladimir calmly responds that there is nothing certain about it yet and tells Estragon that they still have a chance to part and leave then if he would like to. However, Estragon responds to this offer by saying that it is not worth doing. Vladimir agrees with this, and Estragon then asks if they should go, and Vladimir confirms, “Yes, let’s go” (Beckett, 1954, 49), but they do not move. Vladimir and Estragon eventually decide to remain together as companions. At the end of the act, we see another absurd gesture, as the characters are again paralyzed in their constant positions, despite their intention to leave. This final scene of the play leaves the audience and the reader in an alienated state. Unable to see any actions on the stage, the reader and the audience are expected to think about their stance against the oddities of their own lives.

## 7. CONCLUSION

Any work of literature can be interpreted through a form-centered perspective, according to Formalism. A text should be an autonomous area in an isolated universe with no external systems. Form and meaning are inextricably linked for a formalist, and no literary work is unimportant. The structure of a literary text is one of the essential aspects for formalists to consider. The action and location are the same in both acts of the play. The nearly identical acts reflect a recurring pattern that runs throughout the play. *Waiting for Godot* is a tragicomedy of absurdist characters with an existentialism-centered central topic. As it is an absurdist drama, it emphasises the concept of defamiliarization.

'Fabula' (story) and 'Syuzhet' (plot) are significant when discussing defamiliarization. The play contains various absurdist aspects; thus, it does not follow the rules of a traditional fabula. *Waiting for Godot's* fabula is separated into two acts, each having various 'syuzhet'. Different plotlines, such as those of Vladimir and Estragon, are joined via cross discussions and dialogues in a parallel structure to form a single plot. Similarly, Pozzo and Lucky's monosyllabic dialogue is another narrative. The 'syuzhet' has a defamiliarizing impact on the play because the actors' actions and dialogues play no significant role and do not directly contribute to enhancing a reader's life. The play's characters seem to be tough to understand. The play's characterization is a prominent feature of absurdist theatre. The characters in *Waiting for Godot* are not typical, and they do not have much to do with the plot. Godot plays a vital role despite his physical absence, and Vladimir and Estragon appear to be waiting for him. His identity is unknown, but he is thought to be a "God-like figure," which also signifies a psychological and physical waiting period. Vladimir and Estragon, who appear to be waiting for Godot interminably, are made out to be the play's central characters and have a continual stage presence.

Their peculiarities in their dialogues as well as actions and the act of waiting for an unknown creature in the barren land convey an intense sensation of defamiliarization. They are distinct characters because of their infantile conduct, repetition of one other's words and actions, and mental and physical degeneration symptoms. Pozzo has a master-slave relationship with Lucky. Lucky is shown as a clown rather than a person; he is a dog doing tricks for his master, devoid of dignity and individuality. Pozzo, on the other hand, is Lucky's pompous master and illustrates their evident social class disparity. He appears to be from the aristocratic past and is completely unaware of his situation. As a result, the characters' relationships are strange.

The play's language is also an essential aspect of the study. The voidness and absurdity of existence, as well as a man's inability and refusal to make decisions and take action, are conveyed not only through storyline and setting but also through language. Because they cannot impart any definite meaning and so cannot give any significance to a senseless universal, the monotonous and contradictory discourse with repetitious terminology, pronoun shifts, and all other comic effects fail to respect their function of communication.

Several instances of communication breakdown and speech disintegration occur throughout the performance. Cross-talks and pointless conversations between Vladimir and Estragon, as well as Pozzo's monosyllabic commands to Lucky, are examples for the above.

*Waiting for Godot's* protagonists show clear examples of isolation in an absurd post-apocalyptic world; they are locked in a circle of stagnation, waiting for an unknown but allegedly authoritative entity named Godot, although it appears that Godot will never come. *Waiting for Godot's* universe is a bizarre and perplexing landscape that appears to be a satire of the real world of the post-war. Like much of the continent, France was fighting to regain its former strength and dignity following WWII when the play premiered in Paris in 1953. Written under such an atmosphere, Beckett defined *Waiting for Godot* as a tragicomedy in its original subtitle. Beckett uses this genre to reveal the decline and hopelessness of Western society. While revealing this devastating effect of the post-war era, Beckett uses defamiliarization to create a distancing effect to compel the reader to question themselves and their own existence. The stylistic choice he predominantly uses is the epistemic modality which serves to questions leading to no definitive answers so that this epistemic voidness of meaning turns out to be a kind of mimesis of the real world around the reader.

The play has many defamiliarization elements in terms of forms and features. Defamiliarization is an aspect of a work that encourages the reader to intensify their attention, attend to the text, and look again at an image in an effort to take in the unexpected. In that sense, we see that throughout the play, there is no opportunity for the reader to directly identify themselves with the characters, which are hard to find in everyday life to empathize, project their personality onto, or live through their tragedy as if they were their own without questioning the seemingly absurd dialogues and awkward inactivity or voidness on the stage. Therefore, with the effect of defamiliarization, the familiar becomes the unfamiliar and inspires new experiments and knowledge in the reader.

Beckett's construction of modality distances the reader to the text while the characters' epistemic questioning leads nowhere. In their dialogues and never-ending expectation about a thing that never comes, Vladimir and Estragon exchange an abundance of epistemic modals. Using modals in their discussions that result in nothing but uncertainty, there remains a realm of unknown and void existence for the reader, who is also alienated from the text through these stylistic choices of the playwright.

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