Linguistic Stratagems of Survival in Harold Pinter’s *The Caretaker*

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In the second half of 20th century Harold Pinter emerged as the most original theatre talent. His name has often been associated with the well known absurdist Samuel Beckett and his plays have also been interpreted in the light of the latter’s plays. However, calling Pinter an absurdist is nothing more than oversimplification as in some of his plays the setting is naturalistic, dialogue is realistic and there hardly any element of absurdity therein. *The Caretaker* (1959) is one of such plays in which the characters make use of linguistic strategies to guard themselves against varied onslaughts. The wars are fought in the battlefield of language and linguistic manipulations work like weapons. Unlike the Becketean characters in whose hands language fail to communicate, Pinter’s characters manoeuvre language the way they want. Davies, the protagonist of *The Caretaker*, is a subtle manipulator of language and he amalgamates offence and defence in his words in a perfect proportion purposely. This way he can save himself from the overriding feeling of inferiority. He digs out all significant information about the strengths and weaknesses of his saviour Aston and then attacks him with an intention to push him out of the warm abode. Aston too has his own reasons to find out a way of survival. After the electric shock therapy and his mother’s betrayal he is left with a feeling of loneliness. Cut off from the outside world he wants to communicate and share his pangs. He puts faith in Davies. Unfortunately to show emotion in Pinter’s world is a weakness which is mercilessly punished by the other characters. However, Davies comes across more than a match in his confrontation with Aston’s brother Mick who is a shrewd designer and perceiver of language. He can easily see through Davies’s intents. With the help of a carefully planned series of anecdotes he defeats Davies and makes all ammunitions ready for driving the devilish Davies out. Thus in Pinter function of language is like a weapon with which one can win or lose games of survival.

Harold Pinter emerged as the most original theatre talent in the second half of twentieth century. He has been considered "One of the most naturally gifted dramatists to have come out of England since the war" (Walter Kerr qtd. in Esslin 29). In 2005, the most prestigious literary award - the Nobel Prize was conferred upon him for his contribution to theatre. Pinter’s name has often been associated with absurdist like Samuel Beckett and Eugene Ionesco. *The Birthday Party* (1957), *The Caretaker* (1959), *The Homecoming* (1964), *The Betrayal* (1978), The *Trial* (1997), and *Sleuth* (2007) are some of the famous plays which have come out of his pen. Critics have interpreted his plays on the line of Beckett’s plays because both the playwrights have been known as ‘absurdist’. However, this has sometimes led to misinterpretation. Pinter himself has refused to be an absurdist, and he reacted angrily when he was called an absurdist: “These damn words and the word 'Pinteresque' particularly—I don't know what they're bloody well talking about I think it is a great burden for me to carry. . . .” (Pinter qtd. in Bold 7). Hence to say that all of Pinter’s plays belong to the school called the theatre of the absurd is an oversimplification.
In some of Pinter’s plays the setting is naturalistic, dialogue is realistic and there hardly appears to be an element of absurdity therein. *The Caretaker* is one of such plays. Critics have been driven to believe that it is an absurd because the dialogues in this play are very close to real human conversation. The present paper attempts to explore the linguistic aspect of *The Caretaker*, and tries to see what stratagems are adopted by the varied characters for their survival in the play. Only one play of Pinter has been taken to ensure an in-depth probe into the issues under consideration. The characters appear to use linguistic strategies to guard themselves against the onslaught of their opponents. The wars are fought in the battlefield of language and linguistic manipulations work like weapons with which the battle is fought. And perhaps this stance of Pinter makes him different from Beckett as in the dramatic world of Beckett failure of communication was a significant issue which was initially thrust upon Pinter by various critics. The truth is that while in Beckett it was failure of communication, in the dramatic world of Pinter it is not failure of communication rather it is deliberate evasion from communication. The following analysis of Pinter’s play *The Caretaker* can prove this fact.

At the outset of the play we find that a gentleman Aston brings a tramp Davies to his house after rescuing him from a brawl in the café where the later worked. The two talk and Davies asks more and more questions and seems to be least interested in answering the questions put to him. Like a grasshopper he jumps from one topic of discussion to another and rambles about his past. When asked what his name is, the tramp once calls himself Davies while at other times he says that his name is Bernard Jenkins. To his benefactor Aston and his brother Mick, Davies repeatedly tells that he’ll go to Sidcup and will bring his papers to prove his identity. But in reality he never goes there. Moreover, he tells Aston that he rejected his wife because she was not clean, that he has eaten his dinner off best of plates and that he has got more rights than anyone else. All of Davies’s recollections of his past and his daydreams appear to be full of stratagem.

Unlike Davies, his benefactor Aston is a simpleton and he narrates his real past to the tramp. He reveals that he has been to a mental hospital in the past. This revelation of Aston proves fatal as now onwards the tramp begins to dominate him. But like Davies, Aston’s brother Mick has many linguistic arrows in his arsenal which he will use very cleverly in future. With the passage of time Mick gets assured that Davies is not only a liar and dishonest man but also that he has started dominating his brother Aston. Now the two brothers join hands and expel the tramp from the warm sanctuary.

When the play opens Davies is on a crucial juncture of his life. He finds himself out of job and nowhere to go to. He has to fight for his survival. The tramp’s physical condition visibly reveals his economic status and his disturbed state of mind, reflected in his outbursts, clearly reveals his suppressed social existence. As Aston asks him to sit down he complains: “Sit down? Huh . . . I haven’t had a good sit down . . . I haven’t had a proper sit down . . . well, I couldn’t tell you” (Pinter II 16). He also reveals that he has been ill treated at places of charity and has been denied to have food and shoes. The repeated insults, apart from hurting the common man’s ego in him, have trained him in the art of guile and deception. He has learnt lessons from his past experiences and now he uses the words in such a way that they hide his weaknesses and dig deep into the weak spots of others. He manoeuvres language in such a way that it adds to his own benefits and exposes others’ weaknesses so that he can attack them at a crucial juncture. This way he can keep himself up and save himself from the overriding feeling of inferiority.
Davies is a subtle manipulator of language and he amalgamates offence and defence in his words in a perfect proportion for his purposes. He begins with self-pity so that he can create some sort of sympathy in the heart of his benefactor Aston. He complains of being ill-treated by the aliens; they denied him the place for sitting even. While talking to Aston he highlights how he has been made to do menial and drudgery work like disposing off the bucket of rubbish in the café where he worked before the latter rescued him from a brawl with the Scotchman. Davies mixes anger and self-pity in a magical proportion and reminds his benefactor in an outburst: “When he come at me tonight I told him. Didn’t I? You heard me tell him, didn’t you?” (II 17) whereas Aston repeatedly says, “I saw him have a go at you” (II 18). The tag questions here carry a ton weight; through them Davies emphasises his assertion and tends to make Aston agree with him in spite of his unwillingness for the same. To emphasise his self significance he adds a tag question every time he speaks, so that Aston may not refuse to agree with him and thus his self-respect. Here Davies’s clever linguistic manipulations are at work to establish himself as a respected but helpless and innocent old man.

Continuing his game at interplay of self-pity and inflating common man’s ego, Davies expresses his pangs as well as fury in an intricate web of words:

I told him what to do with his bucket. Didn’t I? You heard. Look here, I said, I’m an old man, I said, where I was brought up we had some idea how to talk to old people with the proper respect, we was brought up with the right ideas, if I had a few years off me I’d . . . I’d break you in half. . . . One night I’ll get him. When I find myself around that direction. (II 19)

Davies tries to make Aston agree with him that he paid back to the Scotchman and told him that to take the bucket out was not his job. Here the tramp intends to make Aston agree with him so that he may not need to remind him in future that he does not tolerate repression. Again, with his repeated use of personal pronoun ‘I’ the tramp affirms his self-respect and authority to pay back without delay if injustice is done to him. In between his natter, he punctuates the overriding sense of self with self-pity to make the things convincing by pointing out his old age. Soon he finds that revealing one’s weakness is a chink in one’s armour and comes back to his earlier stance announcing his physical capabilities: “if I had a few years off me I’d . . . I’d break you in half” (II 19). Davies’s inflated ego does not allow him to see his true self and hence time and again he escapes from his self through jugglery of words. Pinter underlines his insufficiency in linguistic game by allowing him only to use incorrect grammar.

Continuing his verbal game, Davies tells Aston that he has to go to Sidcup to bring his papers and for the same he is searching for a pair of shoes and for weather to break. Pinter makes this desire of his the central motif in his escape game. Shoes, which are “life and death to him (me)” (II 22), he has been refused to have time and again. Whenever Davies finds himself in trouble, he craves for the pair of shoes which could have helped him prove his identity. He asks Aston for a viable pair of shoes which he can wear and can go to Sidcup to bring his papers. Davies’s self-pity as well as his sense of self-respect comes to the fore in these utterances. From the beginning of the play to the end, Davies is in search for a pair of shoes so that he can get down to Sidcup and bring his papers. His sporadic talk of the papers at Sidcup, desire for shoes, and wait for the weather to break form almost a symbolic pattern. It appears that he has lost identity in the absence of shoes or he tries to evade the question of his identity by blathering.
about the shoes so that he can gather a false consolation that had he been in possession of a pair of shoes he would have been a respectable man after proving his identity. However, he never goes to Sidcup owing to lack of shoes and unfavourable weather, he says. He is almost trapped in his illusions. His quest for the pair of shoes, which is on even when the play ends, reflects man’s eternal quest for identity and the impossibility of discovering it.

Davies’s intents of challenging the Scotchman and the man in the ‘charity show’ are nothing more than mere lip service. He knows very well that he is an old and incapable man. But through his linguistic assertions he wishes to create an impression with himself as well as Aston that he is aggressive, dangerous and self respecting man who will not tolerate suppression at any cost. This kind of jugglery, he appears to believe, can help him maintain his self respect in his own eyes and help in saving his rights from being crushed by others. To further his self respect and fair nature, he revisits his past and recalls how he left his wife only after one week of his marriage owing to her untidiness. The root of Davies’s boasts can be traced in the fact that “suppression of the basic desire for power leads to a feeling of inferiority and incompetence which demands compensation in the form of maximisation of ego-consciousness” (Behera 52). Here Davies appears to inflate his ego to neutralise his sense of insignificance.

For neutralising his sense of insignificance owing to his past insults, the tramp manipulates things to drive benefit out of the words he speaks. In his habit of manipulating things in his favour, he forgets his name even. When Aston asks him what his name is, he says: “Jenkins. Bernard Jenkins. That’s my name. That’s the name I’m known, anyway” (II 29). After a few moments he reveals that his name is Mac Davies. Similarly he forgets or pretends to forget his nationality. When Aston wants to know where he was born, he prevaricates: “I was . . . uh . . . oh, it’s a bit hard, like, to set your mind back . . . see what I mean . . . going back . . . a good way . . . lose a bit of track, like . . . you know . . . .” (II 34). Indeed Davies is a clever man; he wants to know everything about Aston but is not willing to tell him anything true about himself. He never allows the other one to get an upper hand. When Aston tells him about an incident when an unknown woman sitting in a café suddenly put her hand over his and wanted to have a look at his body, Davies immediately creates a past and says: “They’ve said the same thing to me. . . . Women? There’s many a time they’ve come up to me and asked me more or less the same question” (II 34). Thus he emphasises that he is no inferior and has had wonderful experiences in his life. His blending of self-pity and ego reminds us of P.B. Shelley who says:

    . . . when to outstrip thy skiey speed
    Scarce seem'd a vision; I would ne’er have striven
    As thus with thee in prayer in my sore need.
    Oh, lift me as a wave, a leaf, a cloud!
    I fall upon thorns of life! I bleed!
    A heavy weight of hours has chain’d and bow’d
    One too like thee: timeless, and swift, and proud. (Shelley 341)

The Romantics, like the characters in the Theatre of the Absurd, looked ‘before and after’ and ‘pined for what is not’. Man in the Theatre of the Absurd searches for meaning in a meaningless world and for this, either he escapes into past or future and craves for non-existent meaning like Shelley’s protagonist in the poem quoted above.
Once Davies establishes his significance as an important individual, he sets about collecting information – whether the house belongs to Aston, whether he is the landlord, how many more rooms are there in the house, what kind of rapport he has with his brother Mick, etc. And after ensuring that his own secrets are intact, and the information he has collected about Aston is enough for his purpose he becomes aggressive and asserts himself as self-righteous even when he is wrong. When Aston tells him that while sleeping he was making noises, he becomes aggressive: “Now, wait a minute. Wait a minute, what do you mean? What kind of noises? . . . I don’t jabber, man. Nobody ever told me that before . . . I mean, where is the sense in it?” (II 31, 32). When Aston tries to calm him down saying: “May be it was the bed”, Davies becomes more forceful: “Nothing wrong with this bed.” Aston’s humbler attempt further in the modest suggestion: “Might be a bit unfamiliar” only invites Davies’s ruthless tone and fury: “There’s nothing unfamiliar about me with beds. I slept in beds. . . . I slept in plenty of beds” (II 32). In fact, here Davies’s aggression is a refusal to accept a subordinate position in Aston’s house. He is resolute on convincing himself as well others that he is an honourable old man whose ideas, right or wrong, no one can challenge. In this way Davies refuses to accept his real self and imagines himself as someone better placed than he actually is.

Aston too has his own reasons to find out a way of survival. After the electric shock therapy and his mother’s betrayal (he thinks that his mother’s nod to the doctors for the therapy was an act of betrayal), Aston is left with a feeling of loneliness as now he lives in a separate house, cut off from the outside world: “I don’t talk to people now. I steer clear of places like that café. I never go into them now. I don’t talk to anyone . . .” (II 66) he admits. Perhaps he brings Davies along with him to escape from his lonely self. Through him he attempts at establishing a relationship with the outside world. He wants to share his pangs with him to make them less painful. That is why he tries his level best to make him comfortable in his house, gives him money, allows him to stay in his room even in his absence and keeps his cool when Davies outrages against him unnecessarily. He puts his faith in the tramp and tries to unburden his heart by narrating him the reality of his past in emotional and honest linguistic terms:

I used to talk to them. I talked too much. . . . Then one day . . . this man . . . doctor, I suppose . . . told me I had something. . . . he said we’re going to do something to your brain. . . . anyway, he did it. . . . my thoughts . . . had become very slow . . . I couldn’t think at all . . . I couldn’t get . . . my thoughts . . . together . . . I couldn’t hear what people were saying. . . . (II 63-66).

This long speech is emotional admission of Aston’s past troubles which he shares with Davies considering him a friend. This way he tries to unburden his soul from the painful memory of his past and thus make himself comfortable. But in Pinter’s dramatic world surcharged with deception and guile, “to disclose to others the poverty within us is too fearsome a possibility” (Pinter “Introduction” xv). Ironically, the tramp finds a weak spot in this admission of mental weakness and now onwards he assumes the position of a dominant partner in his relationship with Aston. He rather attempts to chuck Aston out of the room and secure the place for himself and thus reinforces Pinter’s most successful director Peter Hall’s assertion that “to show emotion in Pinter’s world is a weakness, which is mercilessly punished by the other characters” (Hall qtd. in Bold 23).
In the company of Aston, Davies has been manipulating the things to establish himself as a deprived and ill-treated but clean, honest and a self-respecting gentleman. With his clever linguistic manoeuvring he has gathered information like of his mental weakness, lack of family support to him and of the ownership of the house, but he has not given away anything about himself to Aston. Whenever Aston has questioned him he has evaded the issues through one tactic or the other. Now the tramp tries to control Aston and finally to chuck him out of the warm sanctuary of the room to secure the place for himself.

However, the astute manipulator of language Davies comes across more than a match in his confrontation with Aston’s brother Mick who “is a practiced exponent of the tongue in cheek, and he also has an unsettling knack of shifting between different levels of phatic and rhetorical discourse” (Almans and Henderson 53). Being a shrewd designer and perceiver of language he can see through Davies’s intents in the very first meeting with the tramp. Consequently, he can attack those aspects of Davies’s personality which the latter wishes to guard most tenaciously. First of all, he makes the tramp believe that he is searching everything under the surface of the old man’s pretension. When Davies tells him, on enquiry, that his name is Jenkins, Mick breaks it into syllables “Jen . . . kins” (II 39) as if he is searching for something of the past in his name, thus terrifying the tramp. He also asks him which bed he slept in last night. After a few moments, for a second time he asks “What did you say your name was?” and on getting the reply again dissects it to find out what should be done with the man with such a name “Jen . . . kins” (II 40). Again a third time he repeats the same ritual of asking his name, the bed he slept in and whether he slept well and breaking his name into pieces (II 42). Thus Mick conveys a clear message to Davies that he is suspicious and is not taking him as an easy customer. In addition to this, Mick ignores the questions that Davies asks, and thus refuses to allow him any control over him. It is he who continues to ask one question after the other to Davies and thus controls him reminding us of Stanley in the face of the questions asked by Goldberg and McCann. In between his probing queries Mick compares Davies to a bloke he once knew in Shoreditch and then to his uncle’s brother like this:

You remind me of my uncle’s brother. He was always on the move, that man. Never without his passport. Had an eye for the girls. Very much your build. Bit of an athlete. Long-jump specialist. [. . .] Had a penchant for nuts. That’s what it was. Nothing else but a penchant. [. . .] Had a marvellous stop-watch. Picked it up in Hong Kong. The day after they chucked him out of the Salvation Army. [. . .] To be honest I’ve never made out how he came to be my uncle’s brother. I’ve often thought that may be it was the other way round. I mean that my uncle was his brother and he was my uncle. But I never called him uncle. As a matter of fact I called him Sid. My mother called him Sid too. [. . .] Your spitting image he was [. . .]. (II 40)

This splendid series of disparate anecdotes appears to be purposely planned by Mick to defeat Davies in verbal contest for ascendancy. Here the uncle’s description, who resembled Davies, as claimed by Mick, is so blurred and baffling that it perplexes the tramp. The perfect blend of thesis and antithesis in the comparison leaves Davies badly confused and totally deflated. He is not able to decide what Mick thinks about him by comparing to the ‘uncle’s brother’. Further Mick’s use of words like ‘penchant’, with
which perhaps the tramp is hardly familiar, not only distances him from Davies but also
gives the tramp a shiver of inferiority.

Further, Mick tells Davies his subsistence by reminding him that he’s a liar: “I’m
afraid you’re a born fibber, en’t you?” (II 43). He moves on to say that the tramp is a
‘rogue’ and ‘an old scoundrel’. Perceiving his financial incapability, Mick touches his
most painful nerve by revealing to him his intention of charging a heavy room rent for
his stay in his house:

You’re stinking the place out. You’re an old robber . . . old skate. You
don’t belong in a nice place like this. . . . barbarian. Honest. You got no
business wandering about in an unfurnished flat. I could charge seven
quid a week for this . . . Three hundred and fifty a year exclusive. No
argument. I mean if that sort of money is in your range don’t be afraid to
say so. Here you are. . . . cost you eight hundred and ninety if you’re all
that keen. . . . Otherwise I’ve got the van outside, I can run you to the
police station in five minutes, have you in for trespassing, loitering with
intents, daylight robbery, filching, thieving and sting the place out. What
do you say? . . . (II 44-45)

Mick’s belligerent intention, his oblique challenge, his reference to the police station and
to the heavyweight finances needed, the lethal vocabulary used, the wide ranged
knowledge of the speaker – all combine to deflate the self-confidence that Davies has
gathered with the help of his verbal games that he played with Aston since his arrival.
Mick appears to design every word he speaks in such a way that it acts straight on the
trembling cowardice of the tramp. This speech, apart from forcing Davies to decide that
he is no match for Mick, discourages him from escaping into a false impression about his
own linguistic capability, material possessions, well guarded secrets and social and moral
impressions. In Pinter’s world inadequacy of language stands for personal insufficiency
and mastery of language an indication of superiority. That is why his characters tend to
depend upon the unusual and ‘educated’ words.

However, Mick is in no mood to finish off the tramp so easily. That is why he
allows a feeling of friendship to exist between him and the tramp. For this, Mick
maintains a good rapport with him and asks him questions about his comfort, praises him
like anything and criticises his own brother to the pleasure of the tramp. Pretending to be
an avowed well-wisher of the tramp he asks: “You sleep here last night? . . . Sleep well?”
(II 39), “How did you like my bed?” (II 42), “I’m very impressed by what you’ve just
said”, “I mean, you’re my brother’s friend, aren’t you?” “I’m sorry to hear my brother’s
not very friendly” (II 56) and “I’m coming to the conclusion he’s a slow worker” (II 58).
Mick’s these utterances have an unfathomable depth since it is through these remarks
that he pulls out the dark and dingy thoughts lurking inside Davies’s mind. This way he
prepares proper ambience for Davies to speak his true mind regarding Aston. He
instigates Davies to speak against his brother by opening the criticism himself:

MICK. Well, it’s not a nice thing to say. . . .
Davies (rising, coming downstage). Go on now, you say it.
MICK looks at him.
MICK. He doesn’t like work.
DAVIES. Go on! . . .
MICK. Causing me great anxiety. You see, I’m a working man; I’m
a tradesman. I’ve got my own van. . . . He’s supposed to be
doing a little job for me . . . I keep him here to do a little job . . . but I don’t know . . . I’m coming to the conclusion he’s a slow worker.

Pause.

What would your advice be? (II 57-58)

Davies sees an opportunity to hit hard. He complains against Aston that he disturbs his sleep, wakes him up in the middle of the night and that he is work shy. He tries to prove Aston’s worthlessness in the scheme of things. Then he proceeds to count his own utility to Mick: “I am a capable sort of man. . . . I’ve had plenty offers in my time . . . No one messes me about . . . Oh . . . yes. Spent half my life . . . Overseas . . .” (II 59-60). Mick inflates his confidence deliberately by supplying new alternates: “I could rely on a man like you . . .”, “you look a capable sort of man to me”, “I mean you have been in services, haven’t you?”, “In the colonies weren’t you?”, “That’s it. You’re just the man I been looking for . . .” (II 59-60). Now chances of survival appear concrete and bright to the tramp.

Now, Davies is clear about the relationship between the brothers and his own station in the eyes of Mick. Hence he finds more faults with Aston and reinforces his own utility in the house. Later he picks up an argument with Aston and says: “What do you expect me to do? . . . What do you want me to do, stop breathing?” (II 75) and when the latter asks him to find a place somewhere else, he retorts: “Find somewhere else? . . . Me? You talking to me? Not me, not me man! You!” (II 77). Thus he dreams of throwing Aston out and himself living in the room. Next time when he meets Mick, he criticises Aston and calls him a man without any ‘sense’, a ‘nutty’ and also gives vent to his angry emotions to which Mick softly reacts: “I could tell him to go I suppose. . . . I mean, I’m the landlord”; Davies nods enthusiastically: “That’s what I’m saying. . . . I tell you he should go back where he come from!” (II 80). Perhaps Davies forgets that after all, blood is thicker than water! Davies’s outbursts make Mick’s blood boil. The tramp has committed the mistake he has been forcing Aston to commit throughout—he has spoken his true mind and has exposed his real self to which Mick concludes:

You’re a bloody impostor, mate! . . . You got two names. What about the rest? Eh? . . . What did you call my brother? . . . He’s what? . . . Nutty? Who’s nutty? . . . What a strange man you are. Aren’t you? You’re really strange. Ever since you come into this house there’s been nothing but trouble. Honest. I can take nothing you say at face value. Every word you speak is open to any number of different interpretations. Most of what you say is lies. You’re violent, you’re erratic, you’re just unpredictable. You’re nothing else but a wild animal . . . you’re a barbarian. And to put the old lid on to it, you stink from arse-hole to breakfast time. . . . I’m compelled to pay you off for your caretaking work. Here’s half a dollar. (II 82-83)

This way Mick exposes the real self of the tramp and pulls down all the deceptive façades that he has tried to accumulate through linguistic stratagem since his arrival. He brings all the cleverness out from under the surface of Davies’s affectation of cleanliness, comfort, moral uprightness and self-respect and reduces him to a mere stammerer who mumbles: “All right then . . . you do that . . . you do it . . . if that’s what you want . . .” and Mick confirms him to pack off: “THAT’S WHAT I WANT!” (II 83).
However, Davies is still not defeated; he believes that his linguistic capabilities can win back Aston’s favour. He comes back to collect his smoking pipe when Mick is gone and tries his trick once again: “You been a good friend to me. You took me in” (II 84). He tries further to develop his understanding with Aston by sympathising with his ill mental health, but to no avail. When everything fails, he desperately implores: “I’ll be your man, you say the word, just say the word . . .” (II 85). But since his mendacious masks have already dropped, Aston can see the astute intentions lurking behind the labyrinth of his guileful words. Therefore, he turns down the offer with a sharp, unsettling “No” (II 86). Davies is still fighting the battle of his life when the play closes with yet another of his unconvincing performance with language:

Listen . . . if I . . . got down . . . if I was to . . . get my papers . . .
would you . . . would you let . . . would you . . . if I got down . . .
and got my . . . Long silence. (II 87)

The ‘long silence’, with which the play ends, confirms Davies’s defeat in the linguistic game as Aston’s silence speaks volumes.

Thus, Davies, the eponymous protagonist, comes forward as the central figure of the play as it is his fortune that keeps fluctuating in The Caretaker. The way the play ends—with no certainty about his leaving the room, emphasises the fact that playwright focuses on the linguistic aspect of the play. It is the strategic use of language by Davies for survival sake and by Mick to bring him out of his illusion with the help of the same tool that maintains the spectators’ interest throughout the play. This way, a battle for possession, which is a prominent theme in Pinter’s early plays, holds a significant place in The Caretaker where there is a verbal tournament to decide who will gain the dominant position and territorial rights.

Works Cited:

---. “The Caretaker”, Plays: Two. London: Methuen, 1988. Print. All the subsequent references for The Caretaker have been taken from the same edition of the play cited hereafter in the text with the volume number II and the corresponding page number(s) in parentheses.