

## **Abstract**

This study identifies, explores and examines the theatrical sign in the selected plays of Jean-Paul Sartre, Samuel Beckett and Eugene Ionesco in terms of the differential and oppositional relations that exist among the theatrical and dramatic elements. The theatrical sign contains the signifier (dramatic performance as a whole) and the signified (the collective consciousness of the public) that gives a philosophy or meaning. Following the basic concepts of Saussurean structural linguistics, the relations that exist among the components of a sign are differential and oppositional. The literary movements and philosophies—existentialism and phenomenology—that actually pervade the very content of these plays also appear to be similar to structuralism in many respects when studied from a structural perspective. The study maintains that the theatrical sign that it explores in the plays has a meaning. Therefore, Esslin's and certain other critics' view that the plays present nothing more than the absurd human situation is questioned and contested. There are critics like Michael Y. Bennet who disagree to Esslin's views about the plays by proposing that the plays do have a philosophy or meaning. These critics derive a philosophy from the plays, but their views fail to cover all the aspects of these plays. The form of these plays is such that they need to be studied individually with respect to the total dramatic and theatrical elements found in them. This study, therefore, derives the philosophy or meaning from the selected plays of the selected playwrights in terms of the total structural and differential relations. It proposes that the plays cannot be interpreted properly unless they are studied with respect to the total dramatic elements. Since the theoretical framework for this study is structuralism or the differential system of meaning-making, the study uses the phenomenological and existential concepts akin in structure to the concepts propounded by Saussure. This study employs Close Textual Analyses as a research method.