

## Territorial Violations and Face Threats in Dramatic Discourse: Goffman's Framework Applied to Harold Pinter's *The Caretaker*

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### ABSTRACT:

This study explores how power gets asserted in Harold Pinter's *The Caretaker* (1960) through territorial violations and face threats. Goffman's (1971) work on territoriality is widely known, yet his framework has rarely been used to study dramatic discourse, while his face-work ideas have been borrowed again and again. The study sets out to do three things. First, to identify what kinds of territorial violation actually take place in the play. Second, to show how language itself can act territorially. And third, to trace the link between these violations and the way power keeps shifting among the three characters. Eight extracts were chosen purposively from *The Caretaker* and read qualitatively, drawing on Goffman's (1971) model of territorial behaviour from *Relations in Public*, with help from Searle's (1979) speech act taxonomy. What the analysis shows is that territorial violation in the play falls into three overlapping kinds: spatial-physical encroachment, linguistic-discursive dispossession, and identity-territory contestation. More importantly, Pinter's language does its work of power not by attacking face head-on, but by setting up territorial claims that quietly shape every interaction that follows. This points to a wider claim. Territorial violation is, in a sense, prior to face threat. Face threats show up as the damage left behind once a territorial claim has been successfully contested. The study, then, opens up a new way of using Goffman's territorial framework to read dramatic discourse, and adds something to the existing body of work by offering a linguistically grounded reading of power dynamics in literary texts.

**KEYWORDS:** Territorial Violations, Face Threats, Goffman, Dramatic Discourse, Harold Pinter, *The Caretaker*, Socio-Pragmatics, Power Dynamics.

انتهاكات الإقليم وتهديدات الوجه في الخطاب الدرامي: تطبيق إطار غوفمان على مسرحية "الحارس" لهارولد بنتر

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تحقق:

المستخلص

هذه الدراسة في انتهاكات الإقليم وتهديدات الوجه باعتبارها آليات لممارسة السلطة في مسرحية "الحارس" (1960) لهارولد بنتر. تكمن المشكلة في هذه الدراسة في غياب فحص تداولي اجتماعي منهجي لكيفية اشتغال إطار الإقليمية لغوفمان (1971) في الخطاب الدرامي، بوصفه إطاراً متميزاً عن مفاهيم العمل الوجهي الأكثر شيوعاً. تهدف الدراسة إلى تحديد أنواع انتهاكات الإقليم الفاعلة في المسرحية، وفحص كيفية اشتغال الاستراتيجيات اللغوية باعتبارها أفعالاً إقليمية، وتقييم العلاقة بين انتهاك الإقليم والتحويلات في توازن السلطة بين الشخصيات الثلاث. باستخدام المنهج النوعي، تم جمع 8 عينات قصداً من مسرحية "الحارس". باعتماد نموذج غوفمان (1971) للسلوك الإقليمي كما هو موضح في كتاب "العلاقات في الفضاء العام"، مدعوماً بتصنيف سيرل (1979) للأفعال الكلامية، تم تحليل العينات نوعياً. تكشف النتائج أن انتهاكات الإقليم في المسرحية تنقسم إلى ثلاث فئات متداخلة: التعدي المكاني الجسدي، والاستلاب اللغوي الخطابية، ومنازعة إقليم الهوية. كما تكشف أن لغة بنتر تمارس السلطة لا من خلال الهجوم الوجهي الصريح، بل من خلال ادعاءات إقليمية سابقة تشترط كل تفاعل لاحق، وهو ما يدعم الحجة القائلة بأن انتهاك الإقليم سابق تحليلياً للتهديد الوجهي، إذ تشتغل تهديدات الوجه باعتبارها الضرر التفاعلي الذي يترجم حين ينجح ادعاء إقليمي في زعزعة ادعاء آخر. توسع الدراسة استخدام إطار غوفمان الإقليمي في تحليل الخطاب الدرامي، وتسهم في مجموعة العمل الحالي من خلال تقديم تحليل لغوي قائم على أسس متينة لديناميكيات السلطة في الخطاب الأدبي.

الكلمات المفتاحية: انتهاكات الإقليم، تهديدات الوجه، غوفمان، الخطاب الدرامي، هارولد بنتر، مسرحية الحارس، التداولية الاجتماعية، ديناميكيات السلطة.

## Introduction:

Harold Pinter's *The Caretaker* (1960) is widely seen as one of the defining works of mid-twentieth-century British drama. The whole play takes place inside a single cluttered room in West London, and most of its tension comes from a triangle of three men: the brothers Aston and Mick, and a homeless drifter called Davies, who is pulled in off the street and offered a bed and the vague promise of a caretaking job. What plays out from there is a long, slow negotiation over territory. Who belongs in the room? Who has the right to speak in it? Who can name and rename the others? And in the end, who gets to set the terms under which two or three people share the same space? None of this is ever voiced. The characters don't argue about ownership in plain terms; they fight over it on the slant, through pauses, through grammar, through who holds a look and who breaks it. As Murtaza, Shafiq, and Saleem (2020) describe it, Pinteresque language is "marked with the incessant flouting of communication principles, tautological repetition based on real speech pauses, silences" (p. 480). It is precisely this broken, untidy quality of the dialogue that makes the play worth reading pragmatically in the first place.

Dramatic dialogue has not always been treated as legitimate linguistic data. Yet the case for treating it that way was put forward decades ago, and it has only firmed up over time. Burton (1980) was perhaps the earliest to make that case stick. Beneath what reads as absurdist chatter, she demonstrated, Pinter's characters carry out very precise interactional work, employing the most ordinary turns of speech to press for dominance and to control the floor. Herman (1995)

pushed the position further still, framing dramatic discourse not as the poor relation of real conversation but as a discursive mode with its own grammar of interaction. Subsequent scholarship has continued in that vein. Khafaga's (2023) reading of *King Lear*, for instance, comes at face threats from a psycho-pragmatic angle, and his argument is worth pausing on: in dramatic dialogue, face threats are not just symptoms of power relations already in place, they are how those relations get built in the first place. Abd Aliwie (2025), working on Pinter's *The Birthday Party*, makes a parallel move with silence, reading it as a speech act in the full Searlean sense rather than as the absence of one. Almansi and Henderson (1983/2021) come at the same point from a more literary direction, locating Pinter's language inside a tradition where the surface of ordinary speech keeps hiding serious structures of domination underneath.

All of this is useful, but something is still missing. None of this work makes sustained use of Goffman's (1971) model of territorial behaviour, the one he develops in *Relations in Public*. The pragmatic and discourse-analytic work on drama has been growing steadily, but that particular framework has barely been applied to dramatic texts in any systematic way. Most of the existing studies stay with face theory and politeness, which means the territorial side of dramatic interaction is left underdeveloped. And yet territory, who has a rightful claim to what space, what words, what identity, has to come before face in any analytic sense. You cannot threaten someone's face unless there is already a shared understanding of what that face owns and where its edges are. This is the gap the present study sets out to fill.

The aim, accordingly, is to bring Goffman's (1971) territorial framework into Pinter scholarship, with support from Searle's (1979) speech act taxonomy, in order to examine how power is enacted through territorial violation in *The Caretaker*. Three research questions guide this inquiry. First, which kinds of territorial violation actually show up in the play, and how are they spread across the three characters? Second, what does it mean to say that a linguistic strategy is a territorial move, and how do those moves relate to the cruder, more visible physical ones? And third, what is the connection between territorial violation and the way power keeps tilting and re-tilting across the three acts?

### Literature Review:

Pinter's *The Caretaker* has been pulling critics in for decades, and it is not hard to see why. A lot gets folded into that one room, power, identity, dispossession, the slow undoing of a man who has nowhere else to go, and the play makes you feel all of it at close quarters. The critical literature reflects this richness. Some readers come at the play through an existential frame, others through an absurdist one, others still through psychoanalysis, and each tradition has produced its own version of what is going on with Davies and the two brothers. Pragmatic and discourse-analytic readings, by contrast, are thinner on the ground. Only a small

number of studies have looked at how the language itself does the work of subjugation and dominance in the play, which is the thread the present review tries to pick up. Mohsen and Abdullah (2022), for example, take impoliteness as a productive lens for dramatic dialogue. Drawing on Culpeper's impoliteness theory, they investigate how impoliteness strategies operate within the literary discourse of *The Caretaker*, and argue that pragmatic tools of this kind can be productively applied to the dialogue of dramatic characters in absurdist theatre to bring out different conversational dynamics. Their analysis is useful in showing how central face attack is to the play's dramatic energy. But it stays inside Culpeper's framework, and does not push beyond it to consider the spatial or territorial dimensions of the conflict.

Murtaza, Shafiq, and Saleem (2020) come at the play from a different direction, through Grice's Cooperative Principle. They argue that Davies's constant flouting of the maxim of quantity, set against Aston's monosyllabic withdrawal, works as a strategy of identity concealment in what they describe as a battle of social space and image. The vocabulary of "social space" they introduce is suggestive, but their study stops short of treating space as a fully Goffmanian analytical category. The term remains metaphorical rather than systematic. Mhayyal and Sabi (2018) take up the question of silence, reading it within the broader frame of the Theatre of the Absurd. Pinter's pauses and silences, they argue, communicate more than the actual dialogue does, and reflect the failure of communication that defines the condition of modern man. Their reading is largely literary and thematic, though, and does not really engage with the pragmatic mechanisms through which silence does its interactional work.

Pragmatic studies on Pinter's other plays show a similar pattern. Mandala (2017) offers a pragmatic-stylistic re-reading of *The Dumb Waiter*, drawing on Short's stylistic approach to dramatic dialogue to revise Burton's (1980) influential reading. Where Burton had identified Ben as the dominating interactant and Gus as the dominated one, Mandala argues the opposite, that Gus is in fact the dominating discursive figure. The point is not just about who controls whom, but about how pragmatic-stylistic re-analysis can recalibrate established interpretations of dramatic power relations. Tutaş and Demirkol Azak (2014), working on Pinter's *The Birthday Party* (1958) and *Old Times* (1970), apply Culpeper's five impoliteness strategies and argue that the characters' linguistic impoliteness operates as the most effective weapon in their power struggles. Building on Bousfield and Locher's view of impoliteness as an exercise of power, they examine how the characters' preferences for direct or indirect strategies affect the power relations between them. Elyamany (2019) narrows the focus to a single climactic episode, the interrogation scene in *The Birthday Party*, and reads it through conversation analysis combined with a two-fold pragmatic analysis that brings together Gricean maxims and impoliteness super-strategies. She shows how the asymmetrical relational power among the characters produces what she

calls an "identity loss" through unwarranted verbal assault on the face of those stripped of power. These studies have clearly advanced the linguistic analysis of Pinter's drama. Yet they all stay anchored in face-based and politeness-based frameworks, which leaves the territorial dimension of dramatic conflict analytically untouched.

Closer to the present study in orientation is Abd Aliwie (2025), who approaches conversational silence in *The Birthday Party* as a complex speech act in dramatic discourse. Working with both qualitative and quantitative analysis, he examines how three types of silence, internal, interactive, and turn-constituting, interact with Grice's maxims and serve strategic functions tied to power, face, and the dodging of offers. His study is valuable in its own right, but it focuses on silence as a single pragmatic phenomenon rather than on the broader question of how territorial claims are advanced and contested through language. Outside Pinter scholarship, Khafaga (2023) provides a useful methodological precedent in his psycho-pragmatic analysis of impoliteness in Shakespeare's *King Lear*. Drawing on Locher and Jucker's factors of relational work and Archer's concept of reality paradigms, he argues that the psychological traits of interlocutors function as antecedents of verbal aggression at the intradiegetic level of communication. His framework extends pragmatic analysis to the psychological dimensions of dramatic dialogue, which is productive. But it too remains anchored in face and relational-work theory, and does not address the territorial conditions under which face and identity are claimed and contested in the first place.

What emerges from this body of work is a clear gap. While previous studies have substantially clarified the play's impoliteness patterns, Gricean dynamics, and silences, none of them has investigated how the eight territories of the self, particularly possessional territory, conversational preserve, informational preserve, and identity territory, are claimed, marked, and violated through the verbal and non-verbal acts that drive the play's action. The present study aims to fill that gap. It uses Goffman's (1971) territorial framework, supported by Searle's (1979) speech act taxonomy, to analyse how discourse in *The Caretaker* enacts power through territorial violation. The aim is to provide a more nuanced and linguistically grounded reading of dramatic conflict in Pinter's work, one that takes seriously the spatial and territorial logic that the existing literature has so far left aside.

### **Methodology:**

This study works with a qualitative research design to examine how territorial violations and face-threatening acts get built up discursively in Pinter's *The Caretaker* (1960). For material of this kind, qualitative analysis is the natural fit; dramatic discourse is deeply situated and context-bound, as Taylor, Bogdan, and DeVault (2015) point out in their broader discussion of qualitative research. The

dataset comprises eight extracts, selected purposively from the Eyre Methuen Master Playwrights edition of *The Caretaker* (Pinter, 1960/1977). Each extract was chosen because it captures a moment where language openly performs a territorial claim, marks a territorial boundary, or carries out a territorial violation. The selection criteria included discursive features like possessive deixis, presupposition, naming and renaming, turn-taking dominance, and silence, alongside the crucial plot turning points at which the balance of power between the three characters tilts. For the analytical procedure, the study draws on directed content analysis (Hsieh and Shannon, 2005), an approach that lets the researcher bring a pre-existing theoretical framework to bear on the data in a systematic fashion. Every extract is read through three integrated analytical moves: pinning down the type of speech act being performed, the territory it claims or violates, and the modality of violation at work. Taken together, this three-step procedure traces the territorial dynamics through which power gets enacted and resisted across the play.

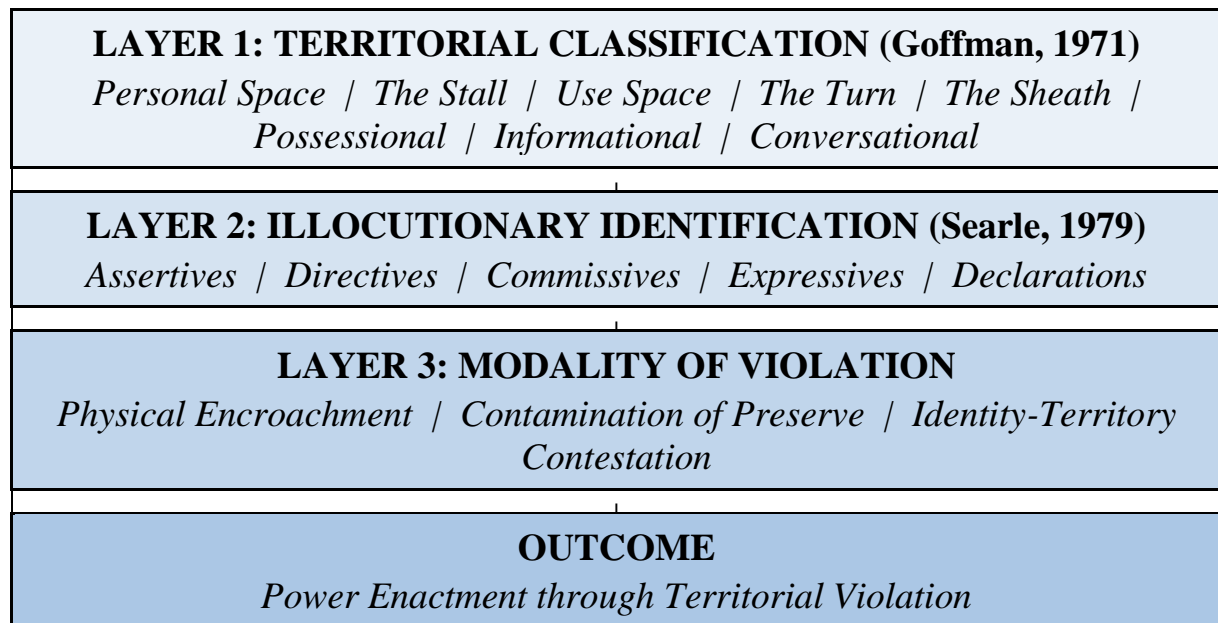
### Theoretical Framework

This study brings together two complementary frameworks to examine how language in *The Caretaker* enacts and contests power through territorial violation: Goffman's (1971) model of territorial behaviour, set out in *Relations in Public*, and Searle's (1979) speech act taxonomy from *Expression and Meaning*. The two frameworks are productive in combination because each addresses a dimension the other leaves implicit. Goffman tells us what is at stake in a given interaction, the territory being claimed or violated, while Searle tells us how that stake is being pressed, the linguistic mechanism through which the claim or violation is performed. Several key terms drive the analysis, territory, markers, modalities of violation, speech acts, and face threats, and each one needs a brief definition. In Goffman's framework, territory refers to the field of objects, claims, and prerogatives over which an individual exercises rightful possession in social interaction (Goffman, 1971). The eight territories of the self that Goffman maps out are personal space, the stall, use space, the turn, the sheath, possessional territory, informational preserve, and conversational preserve. Markers are attached to each one, the verbal and non-verbal signals by which claims get advertised and boundaries enforced (Goffman, 1971). As for modalities of violation, three main forms are distinguished in Goffman's account: physical encroachment upon a claimed space, contamination of a preserve through unwarranted intrusion, and the contestation or revocation of identity-related territorial claims. Searle's (1979) taxonomy, for its part, sorts speech acts into five types, assertives, directives, commissives, expressives, and declarations, with each one carrying a distinct illocutionary function in interaction. Face threats, lastly, are the verbal acts that damage the public self-image of interlocutors, and

they typically take shape through directives, expressives, and assertives that threaten the addressee's face (Goffman, 1967, 1971).

Bringing these two frameworks together makes a layered analysis of dramatic dialogue possible. Goffman's territoriality model accounts for the spatial, possessional, and identity-related sides of conflict, while Searle's speech act taxonomy pins down the linguistic mechanisms through which territorial claims are advanced and contested. Used together, the two frameworks let the analyst identify the type of speech act being performed, the territory it claims or violates, and the modality of violation involved. The legitimacy of applying socio-pragmatic frameworks to dramatic dialogue is by now well established. Burton (1980), in her chapter-length analysis of Pinter's *The Dumb Waiter*, showed that stage speech encodes the same range of communicative strategies linguists extract from naturally occurring interaction. Herman (1995) carried this approach forward in a more systematic way, extending it to a wider range of dramatic texts. For the kind of work the present study sets out to do, then, where socio-pragmatic specificity needs to be brought together with the territorial dimension of dramatic conflict, the combined Goffman-Searle framework turns out to be particularly well suited to *The Caretaker*.

**Figure 1: An Integrated Socio-Pragmatic Model of Territorial Violation in Dramatic Discourse**



The model that runs through this study has three analytical layers. The first identifies the territory at stake in any given moment, working from Goffman's (1971) eight territories of the self. The second pins down the kind of speech act being performed, using Searle's (1979) taxonomy. And the third specifies the modality of violation involved. Read together, the three layers let the analyst trace, step by step, how power gets enacted through the systematic violation of territorial

claims, and through the specific speech acts that carry those violations out in dramatic dialogue.

## Results

In what follows, the eight extracts are read one by one through the three integrated layers of the Goffman-Searle framework outlined in Figure 1: territorial classification, illocutionary identification, and modality of violation.

### *Extract No. 1:*

***MICK is alone in the room, sitting on the bed. He wears a leather jacket.***

***Silence.***

***He slowly looks about the room looking at each object in turn. He looks up at the ceiling, and stares at the bucket. Ceasing, he sits quite still, expressionless, looking out front.***

***Silence for thirty seconds.***

***A door bangs. Muffled voices are heard.***

***MICK turns his head. He stands, moves silently to the door, goes out, and closes the door quietly.***

***Silence.***

(Pinter, 1960/1977, p. 16)

The play opens with no words at all. A single figure sits in an empty room, takes in every object, stares for a while at the leaking bucket, holds still for thirty seconds, and then leaves silently the moment voices approach. Before any character has spoken, before any conflict has been named, the territorial logic of the play has already been put in place.

From a territorial perspective, Mick's behaviour throughout this opening sequence shows what Goffman (1971) describes as home territory: a space whose occupant feels no need to manage his presence for the benefit of an audience. Think about it. Thirty seconds is a long time to sit doing nothing. In a space they don't own, most people would fidget, glance at the door, reach for their phone if they had one. Not Mick. His eyes drift slowly around the room, settle on the bucket for a while, then on nothing in particular, and the stillness suits him. That slow inspection, the long stretch of stillness, the unhurried exit, these aren't a guest's gestures. They belong to someone with nothing left to prove about being in the room. So if we read the sequence as a claim over possessional territory, the point is really that no claim has to be made. The thing is already settled. Mick isn't performing ownership for our benefit. He is simply there.

Speech acts are interesting here, because there are basically none. Or rather, there are no spoken ones. What the sequence offers instead is a stretch of physical gestures that, in Searle's (1979) terms, function as implicit assertives. Each one of

them, the prolonged gaze, the stillness, the careful closing of the door, makes a claim, and the claim arrives without anyone having to say it out loud. Notice where Pinter puts his weight in the stage directions. Two adverbs do almost all of it: "silently" and "quietly". And the timing matters too. When the muffled voices come in from outside, Mick does not bolt. He turns his head, stands up at his own pace, and walks out. The going is calm because the going is unforced. He leaves on his own terms. That kind of departure carries the same weight as a verbal declaration of ownership, but with one obvious difference: he never has to make the declaration.

What about violation, then? Strictly speaking, there is none in this extract, because there is no one for Mick to violate. He is alone. But the scene is doing something subtler. It is laying the ground in advance. By the time the door bangs and Davies and Aston walk in a few moments later, the room they enter is not the room Mick was sitting in. Or rather, it is the same room, but it has been claimed in the meantime. Walked through. Surveyed. Quietly closed up and handed over. Whoever crosses that threshold next is crossing into a space whose terms were set by someone who has already left. In that sense, this opening conditions every face threat that follows in the play. Davies, when he eventually walks in, cannot really be threatened in his face inside this room, because his face has no standing in it to start with. The reading lines up with what Mhayyal and Sabi (2018) argue about silence in Pinter, that it communicates more than the dialogue does, but it also stretches their position a little. Silence here is not just communicative. It is doing territorial work. It performs an explicit ownership claim, and it gets to do this without paying the cost of articulating one.

***Extract No. 2:***

***ASTON. Sit down.***

***DAVIES. Thanks. (Looking about.) Uuh....***

***ASTON. Just a minute.***

***ASTON looks around for a chair, sees one lying on its side by the rolled carpet at the fireplace, and starts to get it out.***

***DAVIES. 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....***

***ASTON (placing the chair). Here you are.***

***DAVIES. Ten minutes off for a tea-break in the middle of the night in that place and I couldn't find a seat, not one.***

***ASTON. Take a seat.***

***DAVIES. Yes, but what I got to do first, you see, what I got to do, I got to loosen myself up, you see what I mean?***

(Pinter, 1960/1977, p. 17)

This extract presents the play's first act of admission. Aston has rescued Davies from a fight at the café and brought him home. On the surface the exchange looks hospitable, but a closer look at the language tells a more complicated story. The thing to notice is what Aston is actually doing while he is being polite. He is not just inviting a guest in. He is quietly working out the conditions under which the guest is allowed to be there.

Watch how the room shows itself to be Aston's. He moves through it with the kind of ease that only comes from familiarity, knows exactly where the chair is buried under all that clutter, and he is the one who picks the spot for Davies to sit. Davies, on the other side of this, walks in "looking about", and that little stage direction is more telling than it seems. In Goffman's (1971) terms, that is not the posture of someone with a claim. It is the posture of someone doing reconnaissance. He is reading the room first, because he has to, before he can figure out how to be in it. So what we have is an unequal arrangement of use space, even though both men are in the room. Aston is the one who decides where Davies goes, and when. Davies just waits to be told. Physically, yes, the room is being shared. Socially, it really is not.

Now look at the speech acts. Aston says three things, and only three: "Sit down", "Just a minute", "Take a seat". In Searle's (1979) terms, every one of those is a directive. They sound neutral, polite even, the kind of thing any host might say. But strung together, they do something. Each one tells Davies what to do and where to be. And it is the cumulative pattern that matters, not the individual lines. Three directives inside one short exchange, and a clear shape comes through: the host is the one giving instructions, the guest is the one receiving them. Davies's side of the dialogue is just as revealing, in its own way. He never issues a directive of his own. He never asserts anything either. What he does instead is talk, and talk a lot, about how he could not find a seat back at the café, and how he hasn't had a proper sit down in ages. It is rambling, half-finished, almost compulsive. And the rambling does its own kind of work. Rather than claiming any standing in the room, it broadcasts the absence of standing.

So what about violation here? Strictly speaking, there is no overt threat in this extract. The hospitality is genuine. The chair is offered in good faith. Davies is grateful, in his way. And yet something is happening underneath. Across this short exchange, a steady, low-level form of territorial conditioning is being set up. Aston's directives are nowhere near impolite, that is true, but the cumulative effect of them is to position Davies as someone whose movements inside the room have to be cleared first. This is the softest version of gatekeeping. It comes wrapped in welcome, but the gate is still there. The reading complicates Mohsen and Abdullah's (2022) account of impoliteness in *The Caretaker*, which centres on overt face attack. The territorial work being done here is going on long before any

impoliteness shows up. It is happening through hospitality itself, shaping the face that any future attack will eventually take aim at.

**Extract No. 3:**

***The door opens. MICK comes in, puts the key in his pocket, and closes the door silently. He stands at the door and watches DAVIES.***

***(DAVIES climbs over the rolled carpet to the blue case.)***

***(He opens the case.) Nothing. (He shuts the case.)***

***MICK slides across the room. DAVIES half turns, MICK seizes his arm and forces it up his back. DAVIES screams.***

***Uuuuuuuhhh! Uuuuuuuhhh! What! What! What!***

***MICK swiftly forces him to the floor, with DAVIES struggling, grimacing, whimpering and staring. MICK holds his arm, puts his other hand to his lips, then puts his hand to DAVIES' lips. DAVIES quietens. MICK lets him go. DAVIES writhes. MICK holds out a warning finger. He then squats down to regard DAVIES. He regards him, then stands looking down on him. MICK slowly goes to the chair, sits, and watches DAVIES, expressionless.***

***Silence.***

***MICK. What's the game?***

***(Pinter, 1960/1977, p. 37)***

This extract is the climax of the first act. Davies has been alone in the room with Aston's key, locking himself in and going through the contents of the blue case. Mick walks in silently, pockets the key before doing anything else, watches Davies for a moment, and then forces him to the floor. The whole sequence requires almost no real dialogue, and that is exactly what gives it its force.

What is striking about this extract is how much territorial work gets done at once. Three separate violations, layered on top of each other. Take the key first. Davies had been holding it, and as long as he was, he had a kind of borrowed authority over the room. Before doing anything else, Mick pockets it. That ordering matters. The territorial marker needs to return to its rightful owner first, before the body of the offender can be put where it belongs. Then there is the watching. Mick stands at the door for a stretch of time, observing Davies, who has no clue he is being watched. In Goffman's (1971) terms, this is a violation of the informational preserve, and on the page it doesn't read as much until you start thinking through what it actually entails: the watcher already controls the encounter, before it has even begun, simply by knowing more than the watched does. Then comes the physical part. Mick grabs Davies, twists his arm up his back, and forces him down. In one motion, both personal space and the sheath are breached, and Davies ends up in a posture that makes his subordination unmistakable.

Speech acts, in this scene, are mostly something Mick's body does, not something his mouth says. The silent entry, the long stretch of watching, the takedown, all of these together work as something close to what Searle (1979) calls a complex declaration. The point is not that Mick describes a new territorial order. The point is that he brings it into existence by acting it out. By the time he finally speaks, the words almost do not matter. "What's the game?" is, on the surface, a question. Grammatically, sure. But pragmatically? It is doing something else. Mick is not asking for information. The verdict has already been handed down by what his body just did. The question is just there to put a verbal stamp on it. An assertive in directive's clothing.

So when we talk about modality of violation here, this extract gives us the play's clearest example of physical encroachment running alongside identity-territory contestation. Davies is not just being thrown to the floor. He is being demoted, in real time, from the man who locked the door a moment ago to the figure on the carpet who is whimpering and writhing. The hand Mick puts on Davies's lips is the detail that does the most work in the scene. It silences Davies at the level of voice, yes, but also at the level of body. In a single gesture, the conversational preserve has been claimed too. Whether and when Davies speaks again is now Mick's decision to make. Khafaga (2023) argues that face threats in dramatic dialogue actually build power relationships rather than just mirror them, and that reading fits well here. But the extract pushes the argument a little further still. Power isn't being exercised through the face threat itself; the face threat is just the visible damage left behind. The territorial claim has already been settled in silence, the body moved, the space retaken, and Mick's question only puts a name to what the action has already finished doing.

***Extract No. 4:***

***MICK. How do you like my room?***

***DAVIES. Your room?***

***MICK. Yes.***

***DAVIES. This ain't your room. I don't know who you are. I ain't never seen you before.***

***MICK. You know, believe it or not, you've got a funny kind of resemblance to a bloke I once knew in Shoreditch.***

***Pause.***

***Did you sleep here last night?***

***DAVIES. Yes.***

***MICK (pointing to DAVIES' bed). That's my bed.***

**DAVIES. What about that, then?**

**MICK. That's my mother's bed.**

**DAVIES. Well she wasn't in it last night!**

**MICK (moving to him). Now don't get perky, son, don't get perky. Keep your hands off my old mum.**

*(Pinter, 1960/1977, p. 41)*

Act Two opens with a question whose grammar does the entire territorial argument's work. Mick has claimed the room through a single possessive pronoun before Davies has had a moment to register what's happening. The exchange that follows is Davies trying to push back, but by then the structure of the language has already put him at a disadvantage.

The question "How do you like my room?" is what Goffman (1971) would describe as a possessional claim that arrives already settled. That little word "my" is not asserting ownership; it is taking it for granted. Davies is being invited to comment on the room as if the question of who owns it had long since been closed. His reply, "This ain't your room. I don't know who you are", misreads what is actually happening at the linguistic level. Davies handles territorial title as if it needed mutual recognition to take effect, when Mick has already gone around that requirement by tucking the claim inside the grammar itself. The follow-up assertions, "That's my bed" and "That's my mother's bed", carry the same pattern across the furniture. One by one, the objects in the room are named and pulled into a chain of Mick-controlled ownership, which somehow stretches even to the absent mother, whose territorial presence gets summoned despite her not being there at all.

At the level of speech acts, the extract is built almost entirely from assertives in Searle's (1979) sense, though assertives of a particular kind. What each one does is run a territorial inventory. "That's my bed" is grammatically just a simple statement of fact, but pragmatically it strips the bed of any competing claim Davies might still be hoping to make. The opening question, "How do you like my room?", is technically a directive that asks for an opinion, yet its directive function comes second to the assertive work buried inside the possessive pronoun, the question being only the wrapper, the actual claim sitting inside it. Even the apparent digression about Shoreditch is doing interactional work: it claims the right to steer the topic, drifting from territorial confrontation to casual reminiscence without giving Davies any chance to gather himself.

In terms of modality of violation, this is the clearest case of identity-territory contestation through linguistic possession that the play offers. There is no physical force, no directive, and yet by the end of the exchange Davies has been displaced from the room without anyone having laid a hand on him. The violation gets done through grammar rather than gesture, and that is exactly what makes it so difficult

to resist. Pushing back against a presupposition would force Davies to deny something the question has already treated as settled. The reading extends Murtaza, Shafiq, and Saleem's (2020) argument that Pinter's language stages a battle of social space and image. But the battle here is not really about who gets to speak more or less. What is at stake is whose grammar establishes the terms of the room, and Mick wins that contest in a single possessive pronoun, before Davies has even worked out that a contest was on.

*Extract No. 5:*

*ASTON. You could be ... caretaker here, if you liked.*

*DAVIES. What?*

*ASTON. You could ... look after the place, if you liked ... you know, the stairs and the landing, the front steps, keep an eye on it. Polish the bells.*

*DAVIES. Bells?*

*ASTON. I'll be fixing a few, down by the front door. Brass.*

*DAVIES. Caretaking, eh?*

*ASTON. Yes.*

*DAVIES. Well, I ... I never done caretaking before, you know ... I mean to say ... I never ... what I mean to say is ... I never been a caretaker before.*

*Pause.*

*ASTON. How do you feel about being one, then?*

*(Pinter, 1960/1977, p. 51)*

The caretaker offer comes at a moment when Davies has been pushed out of every territorial claim he tried to build in Act One. Mick has caught him with the key, contested the room, and reduced him to the floor. Aston's offer arrives as a kind of rescue, but the language of the offer says something more interesting. This is not the return of territorial standing. It is a substitute for it.

The offer, looked at territorially, creates a qualitatively different kind of position. Up to this point, Davies has been an occupant, someone given a place to sleep. The caretaker role moves him from being someone with a residence to being someone with a function. In Goffman's (1971) terms, this is a shift from residential standing to functional standing, and the difference matters more than it might first appear. Residential standing is grounded in being given a place. Functional standing is grounded in performing a duty. The first is harder to take away than the second, because the second can be revoked the moment the duty is judged unsatisfactory. The duties Aston names, looking after the stairs and the landing, polishing the bells, are scattered tasks at the edges of the property. None of them

is located inside the room itself. Davies, in other words, is being offered authority over the perimeter, not over the centre.

When it comes to speech acts, Aston's opening utterance is a commissive in Searle's (1979) sense, an offer that creates obligation if it is accepted. But the way the offer gets delivered weakens the commitment built into it. The repeated "if you liked" softens the edges of the proposal until almost no obligation remains. The false starts ("You could be ... caretaker here"), the pauses, the conditional construction, all of this turns what could have been a clear commissive into something much closer to a tentative suggestion. The word "caretaker" itself appears once, at the start of the offer, and then disappears. When Aston elaborates the duties, he uses different verbs ("look after", "keep an eye on", "polish") but never returns to the role's name. A role named once but never defined is a role that can later be redefined. Davies, for his part, produces a long stretch of self-narration ("I never been a caretaker before") that fills the space without committing to anything. He accepts the role by failing to refuse it, which is perhaps the weakest form of commissive uptake possible.

In terms of modality of violation, this extract does not stage an obvious violation, but it does set up the conditions for one. Aston offers Davies a position whose terms are deliberately vague, which means Davies's territorial standing in any future dispute will depend on a definition he never received. This is what makes the caretaker offer the trap of Act Two. Davies enters the role believing it gives him a place. In reality, it gives him a duty whose specifications can be adjusted, at any point, by the person who assigned them. The contestation of identity territory will come later, but its mechanism is built right here. A role accepted without clarity cannot defend itself when its boundaries are redrawn. The reading complicates Mhayyal and Sabi's (2018) account of communication breakdown in the play. The breakdown here is not really a failure of communication. It is its calculated incompleteness. Aston communicates exactly enough to secure Davies's acceptance, and exactly little enough to retain control over what was accepted.

**Extract No. 6:**

**MICK.** *I could turn this place into a penthouse ... this room you could have as the kitchen. Right size, nice window, sun comes in. I'd have teal-blue, copper and parchment linoleum squares. I'd have those colours re-echoed in the walls. I'd offset the kitchen units with charcoal-grey worktops. Plenty of room for cupboards for the crockery ... You could put the dining-room across the landing ... Venetian blinds on the window, cork floor, cork tiles ... Then the bedroom. What's a bedroom? It's a retreat. It's a place to go for rest and peace ... Deep azure-blue carpet, unglazed blue and white curtains ...*

*(MICK sits up.) it wouldn't be a flat it'd be a palace.*

**DAVIES.** *I'd say it would, man.*

*MICK. A palace.*

*DAVIES. Who would live there?*

*MICK. I would. My brother and me.*

*Pause.*

*DAVIES. What about me?*

*(Pinter, 1960/1977, p p. 69-70)*

Mick's penthouse vision is one of the strangest moments in the play. He sits in a cluttered, leaking room and describes, with the precision of an interior designer, what it could become. The colours are specific. The materials are named. The layout is organised right down to the position of the dining room. Davies follows along, agrees admiringly, and then asks the one question that brings everything down: "Who would live there?"

The extract introduces a form of ownership that Goffman's (1971) framework does not name explicitly but can certainly accommodate, the ownership of what a space is going to be, rather than what it is. The room as it stands is shabby and contested. The room as Mick describes it has already been claimed in advance. This is the kind of authority that belongs to someone who relates to a space through its potential, the developer's relationship rather than the resident's. Look at the design choices Mick reels off, one after another. Teal-blue linoleum. Charcoal-grey worktops. Venetian blinds. Azure-blue carpet. None of this is just about taste. Each colour, each material, is a tiny act of possession, thrown forward into the future. Mick is not just picturing a room in his head. He is laying down, in advance, the terms on which that room will exist, for himself and for anyone who happens to be in it later, including the ones who do not even know they are part of the picture yet.

Turning to the speech acts, the whole monologue is built on first-person future assertives in Searle's (1979) sense, though they are assertives of a slightly peculiar kind. On the surface, "I'd have teal-blue, copper and parchment linoleum squares" looks like a conditional. Pragmatically, however, the utterance behaves nothing like one; it is a confident statement about something due to happen. The constant recurrence of "I" and "I'd" ensures that every detail of the imagined room loops back to Mick. Davies, by contrast, is given the smallest possible slice of the conversation. One supportive remark ("I'd say it would, man"), one question ("What about me?"), and that is it. The conversational preserve has been almost completely taken over by Mick. When Davies's question finally arrives, the shape of it is worth listening to. It isn't the assertion of a right but a request to be included. Rather than saying "I will be there too", he asks whether there is any room for him at all in someone else's plan.

So what about violation? This is, arguably, the most refined form of identity-territory contestation in the play. It isn't that Mick denies Davies exists; he simply

does not place him in the future he is building. Exclusion through omission rather than rejection, and that is precisely what makes it impossible to argue against. When Davies puts his question, "What about me?", Mick's reply is brief and final: "I would. My brother and me." Two pronouns, and the door closes. Davies has not been refused. He has been left out of the count. The reading extends Tutaş and Demirkol Azak's (2014) account of impoliteness as a verbal weapon in Pinter's plays, but the weapon here is not really impoliteness in any usual sense. Mick does not insult Davies. He just describes a future that does not contain him, and the description, on its own, is enough to do the work.

*Extract No. 7:*

*ASTON. I ... I think it's about time you found somewhere else. I don't think we're hitting it off.*

*DAVIES. Find somewhere else?*

*ASTON. Yes.*

*DAVIES. Me? You talking to me? Not me, man! You! You better find somewhere else!*

*ASTON. What?*

*DAVIES. You! You better find somewhere else!*

*ASTON. I live here. You don't.*

*DAVIES. Don't I? Well, I live here. I been offered a job here. ... I'm staying on here as caretaker! Get it! Your brother, he's told me, see, he's told me the job is mine. Mine! So that's where I am. I'm going to be his caretaker.*

*ASTON. My brother?*

*DAVIES. He's staying, he's going to run this place, and I'm staying with him.*

*(Pinter, 1960/1977, p. 77)*

After two acts of negotiation, accommodation, and slow contestation, the territorial question collapses into a single exchange. Aston tells Davies to leave. Davies tries to turn the request back on him. Aston answers in five words. The architecture that took the play two acts to build comes apart in less than a minute.

Aston's reply, "I live here. You don't", is the most stripped-down territorial declaration the play contains. In Goffman's (1971) terms, the two sentences set out the basic distinction between home territory and visitor presence in its irreducible form. The first sentence asserts residence as the ground of right. The second denies it as the ground of exclusion. There is no argument here. No justification. No appeal to law or custom. Aston does not say "you have no right to be here" or "you have to leave". He states a fact about himself, then states a contrasting fact about Davies. The territorial claim is performed through the

simple alignment of a positive and a negative sentence, and the alignment is the argument. Davies's attempt to respond reveals just how deep his territorial collapse runs. He invokes the caretaker offer, invokes Mick's authority, invokes the offer of the job, but each one of these depends on permissions granted by others. He has no first-person territorial claim of his own to make.

At the level of speech acts, Aston's "I live here. You don't" is technically two assertives in Searle's (1979) sense, but their illocutionary force exceeds their grammatical category. They function effectively as a declaration, the speech act type Searle reserves for utterances that bring a state of affairs into being just by being uttered in the right conditions. By the time Aston completes the second sentence, the territorial relation between the two men has been redefined. The earlier invitation has been withdrawn. The implicit terms of cohabitation have been cancelled. The asymmetry of standing has been made explicit for the first time. What was concealed by hospitality is now declared. Davies's response, by contrast, is built almost entirely from desperate assertives that try to construct a position out of borrowed authority. The repetition of "I'm" ("I'm staying on", "I'm going to be", "I'm staying with him") performs the form of self-assertion without its substance. Each "I'm" depends grammatically on what comes after it, and what comes after refers, every time, to someone else's decision.

So when we talk about modality of violation, this extract gives us the play's clearest case of identity-territory contestation in its final form. Aston is not contesting any specific claim Davies has tried to put forward. He is doing something much harder to come back from. He pulls the ground out from under any claim Davies could possibly make. The two-sentence structure does what a long argument could never have done: it shuts the conversation down. Davies cannot push back against a flat statement of fact about Aston's residence, because the only thing he has to push back with is Aston's residence. That is what makes Aston's wording so quietly devastating. It is not the kind of claim that needs defending. It is a description, and a description does not need a defence. Looking back, the earlier territorial work of the play has been quietly building toward this moment all along, Mick's silent sovereignty in the opening scene, the caretaker offer dangled in front of Davies in Act Two, the penthouse vision that left him out of the picture entirely. By the time Davies hits the expulsion, he has been without real standing for a long time. Aston's two sentences just name, finally, the position he has been occupying all along. The reading sits well alongside Khafaga's (2023) argument that face threats in dramatic dialogue actually build power relationships rather than just reflect them, but it pushes that argument a little further.

***Extract No. 8:***

***DAVIES. What am I going to do?***

***Pause.***

***What shall I do?***

*Pause.*

*Where am I going to go?*

*Pause.*

*If you want me to go ... I'll go. You just say the word.*

*Pause.*

*I'll tell you what though ... them shoes ... them shoes you give me ... they're working out all right ... they're all right. Maybe I could ... get down....*

*ASTON remains still, his back to him, at the window.*

*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.*

*Curtain.*

*(Pinter, 1960/1977, p. 86)*

The play closes with a sequence in which Davies asks three questions and offers a series of partial sentences, while Aston stands silently with his back turned at the window. The curtain falls on a "Long silence" that may be the most precise stage direction in the play. After everything that has happened, the territorial argument ends not with a final word but with the deliberate withdrawal of words altogether.

This extract presents the inverse of the play's opening. The first scene showed Mick alone in the room, exercising silent sovereignty over a space he owned. The final scene shows Davies pleading in the room, addressing a figure who has turned his back on him. In Goffman's (1971) terms, Aston's silence is not the absence of communication but the active withholding of interactional response. Aston is still in the room, still within hearing, still capable of replying. But he refuses to ratify Davies as a participant in any further exchange. The withholding is itself an exercise of conversational preserve, deciding not who may speak but who is owed a response. Davies is still allowed to talk. He is just no longer being heard. This is, in fact, a more complete form of expulsion than the verbal one in Extract 7. Aston has already told Davies to leave. Here, he removes Davies from the conversational space before Davies's body has even left the room.

At the level of speech acts, Davies's three opening questions, "What am I going to do? What shall I do? Where am I going to go?", are directives in Searle's (1979) sense, requests for guidance addressed to the only person present who could provide it. The pauses that follow each question are answers in their own right. They are not refusals to engage so much as refusals to grant the question the status of a question worth answering. Davies's later utterances disintegrate as the silence continues. The fragmented final speech, "if I ... got down ... if I was to ... get my papers ... would you ... would you let ... would you ...", shows the breakdown of

conditional grammar under interactional pressure. Each conditional needs a response to complete it, and each pause confirms that no response will come. The speech act type collapses with the speech itself. Directives become requests. Requests become pleas. Pleas trail off into incompleteness.

In terms of modality of violation, this is the play's most complete form of identity-territory contestation, but it works through omission rather than through any positive act. Aston does not insult Davies. He does not dismiss him verbally. He does not even turn around to acknowledge him. He simply remains "still, his back to him, at the window". The territorial verdict that Extract 7 declared is enforced here through a silence that lasts long enough to become final. The "Long silence" that closes the play is the inverse of the thirty-second silence that opened it. Mick's opening silence asserted ownership without contestation. Aston's closing silence enforces exclusion without explanation. Together the two silences bracket the play's territorial argument: the room belongs to those whose silence carries authority, and never belonged to those whose words have to beg for response. The reading extends Abd Aliwie's (2025) analysis of conversational silence in *The Birthday Party* as a strategic speech act. The silence here goes a step further. It is not only strategic. It is structurally final. Davies's last fragmented words trail into a silence that is no longer an interactional move within an exchange, but the closure of any exchange that could ever have happened.

## Discussion

Looking across the eight extracts as a single unit rather than as separate analyses, a clearer picture starts to come through about how territorial violation actually works in *The Caretaker*. The first thing the data makes plain is that violation in the play does not show up in one shape only. It moves across three overlapping kinds, and each kind tends to belong to a particular character. Spatial-physical encroachment is mostly Mick's territory, in both senses of the word. His silent inspection of the room in Extract 1 and the violent takedown of Davies in Extract 3 are the clearest examples, and in both cases the territorial work gets done by the body before any word arrives. Linguistic-discursive dispossession, on the other hand, also sits with Mick, but in a different register. The possessive grammar of Extract 4 ("my room", "my bed", "my mother's bed") and the string of first-person future assertives in Extract 6 show how a single character can shift from physical force to grammatical control without losing any of his hold over the space. With identity-territory contestation, the dominant figure is Aston. He sits back, plays host, makes the caretaker offer on deliberately incomplete terms (Extract 5), and then, when the time comes, closes the door with five words in Extract 7 and a silence in Extract 8. Davies, the third character, never quite manages to claim anything in his own name. He does resist, of course, but his resistance always relies on borrowed authority, and that is much of the reason why each attempt of his comes apart.

The more interesting finding, though, is that linguistic strategies don't just accompany physical violations; they arrive ahead of them. Mick's "my room" in Extract 4 settles the territorial question before a hand has been laid on Davies, and by the time the penthouse vision unfolds in Extract 6, the room has been claimed in the future tense with everyone still seated. So the relationship between linguistic and physical territorial moves is not really one of equal partners. The grammar does the heavier work first, and the body then either confirms what the grammar has done or, in some scenes, doesn't need to act at all. Extract 7's two-sentence formulation, "I live here. You don't", makes the point most sharply. The exchange contains no physical force, no raised voice, and yet the territorial verdict is final, because the grammar of residence has been laid down so absolutely that nothing further has to be said. The linguistic move, in this sense, is the older sibling of the cruder physical one, the move that has already done most of the work before the visible action even begins.

The third research question concerned how territorial violation tracks the shifting balance of power across the three acts, and here the extracts trace a fairly clear arc. Act One opens with Mick alone in the room (Extract 1), where silent ownership gets established before any conflict has even been named, and ends with the climactic seizure of Davies in Extract 3 that returns the territorial marker to its rightful holder. Act Two is where the trap is set: the caretaker offer of Extract 5 packages dispossession as opportunity, while the penthouse vision in Extract 6 sketches out a future from which Davies has been quietly excluded. By Act Three, the territorial groundwork is fully in place, so that Aston's "I live here. You don't" merely names the position Davies has been occupying all along. The closing silence of Extract 8 reverses the play's opening: Mick's thirty-second silence in Extract 1 asserted ownership without anyone contesting it, while Aston's "Long silence" now enforces exclusion without explanation of any kind. The findings sit alongside the existing scholarship on Pinter, but they also nudge it in a particular direction. They support Khafaga's (2023) argument that face threats in dramatic dialogue build power relations rather than simply reflect them, but they also suggest that face is not where the action begins. Mhayyal and Sabi's (2018) reading of silence as deeply communicative is borne out by the data, but the present study extends their position by showing that silence in *The Caretaker* is also doing territorial work, claiming and enforcing ownership without articulating either. Tutaş and Demirkol Azak's (2014) account of impoliteness as a verbal weapon in Pinter is complicated by Extract 6, where exclusion happens through omission rather than insult, and Murtaza, Shafiq, and Saleem's (2020) suggestive vocabulary of "social space" is given a more systematic grounding once Goffman's (1971) territorial categories are brought to bear.

What all of this points to, ultimately, is a single theoretical claim that runs underneath the analysis. Territorial violation in *The Caretaker* is not the result of face threats. It is what makes face threats possible in the first place. Face threats,

when they do appear in the play, are the visible damage left behind once a territorial claim has been settled, not the mechanism through which power is exercised. This is why the play feels the way it does: the violence in the dialogue is rarely overt, and yet the sense of one man being slowly emptied out of the room is unmistakable. By the time someone in the play says something cutting, the work of dispossession has long since been done. Read this way, bringing Goffman's (1971) territorial framework together with Searle's (1979) speech act taxonomy is doing more than offering a methodological convenience; it is the move that makes legible, in linguistic terms, the slow, almost wordless cruelty that runs through the play.

## Conclusion

The aim of this study has been to examine how power gets enacted through territorial violations in Harold Pinter's *The Caretaker*, drawing on Goffman's (1971) territoriality framework alongside Searle's (1979) speech act taxonomy as its main analytical tools. Three research questions guided the inquiry, and the analysis of eight purposively selected extracts has provided answers to each of them. Territorial violation in the play falls into three overlapping kinds, spatial-physical encroachment, linguistic-discursive dispossession, and identity-territory contestation, and these kinds are not evenly distributed among the three characters. Linguistic strategies do not simply accompany physical violations. They precede them and often make them unnecessary. And the shifting balance of power across the three acts tracks closely with the territorial groundwork that has been laid down, so that by the time Davies is told to leave, his expulsion has already been accomplished long before it is named.

The principal contribution of the study is the demonstration that territorial violation is, in a sense, analytically prior to face threat. Face threats in *The Caretaker* are not the mechanism through which power gets exercised. They are the interactional damage that surfaces once a territorial claim has been successfully contested. Bringing Goffman's (1971) *Relations in Public* together with Searle's (1979) speech act taxonomy turns out to be more than a methodological convenience, then. It is what makes the play's quiet, almost unspoken cruelty legible in linguistic terms.

The study has its limits. It works with a single play and with eight extracts, which means the patterns identified here would benefit from being tested against a larger corpus of dramatic texts. Future research could extend the integrated Goffman-Searle framework to other plays within the Theatre of the Absurd, or apply it to institutional discourse contexts, courtrooms, classrooms, hospital wards, where territorial claims operate but tend to be far less visible than they are in the compressed, deliberate language of the stage.

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