1. In at least two works you have studied, **explore specific techniques** by which dramatists shape and pattern the speech in their plays and with what significant effect.   (November 2009)

Samuel Beckett in Waiting for Godot and Athol Fugard in Sizwe Bansi is dead both various and differing techniques like topic loops, non-sequiturs, breaking the fourth wall, elliptical sentences, pauses, and repetitions for differing effects. Fugard uses speech patterns to increase audience rapport with his characters while Beckett uses speech to reflect on the audience Estragon and Vladimir’s situation. Both use speech patterns to emphasize certain themes and reveal more about their characters.

Fugard uses speech to build audience rapport with his characters. At the beginning of the play, Styles breaks the fourth wall and directly speaks to the audience. He repeatedly refers to the audience as “friends” which creates the subconscious impression that the audience as a good friendly relationship with him. Style’s use of vernacular (like “cunt” “bastard” “shit”) Afrikaans expressions (like “Ya” and “Yo”), and elliptical sentences (“Makes me fed up”) give what is basically a monologue from Styles, a more conversational and relatable tone and feel. It also serves to make Styles more realistic as he speaks as a normal human would in everyday conversation.

In Waiting for Godot, Beckett does not use speech to create audience rapport. In fact, his speech patterns actually distant his characters from the audience. The constant use of non-sequiturs make the dialogue difficult to follow and make the speech seem less realistic and relatable. Also, Beckett uses speech to frustrate the audience and make them join in Estragon and Vladimir’s waiting for Godot. Beckett constantly and clearly indicates that his characters must pause at certain places in their dialogues. Also, Beckett often places ellipsis, further adding more pauses to the speech patterns of the characters. There are often silent moments on stage when absolutely nothing is happening and the characters just stare silently at each other, the audience, or their props. Here, unlike in Sizwe Bansi is dead, it is what the characters do not say that is the main technique being used. This forces the audience to wait in a similar way to Estragon and Vladimir waiting for Godot. And similar to their wait, the audience (who are likely waiting for a plot of some sort) are never given one. Also Estragon and Vladimir often use short declarative statements to suggest that they are about to do something: “Let’s go” “I’m going”. But these statements are always followed by inaction, further frustrating the audience and making them wait for something that will never occur.

Fugard uses speech patterns to highlight the disparity in social class hierarchy between the blacks and the whites in apartheid Africa. Blacks are always refered to as “boy” or “monkey” while the whites are always called by rank followed by name as in “Baas Bradley”. Even the “rank” attributed to them is telling of the disparity in class. Baas if Africaans for master. The constant robotic referring to the white’s as Baas serves to highlight this hierarchy and even suggests that it has become engrained into the culture of the blacks that it becomes second nature to call all the whites “master”, as if they were directly accepting the fact that they were slaves. It is also interesting to note that Black people are never called by name. This effectively strips the blacks of their identities and homogenizes them into a single slavery entity. Whenever Styles imitated a white man, the sentence structure becomes more rigid and formal. He speaks always in full sentences and likely even changes his accent to a less playful and less comical one than what he uses with the audience. This change in speech uses the rapport he has built with the audience, thus making the white people seem distant and less relatable in relation to Styles.

Beckett also uses speech to highlight a special theme. He patterns speech to emphasize the cyclical nature of life, and at the same time it’s futility. Estragon and Vladimir often use topic loops and return again and again to the topic of waiting for Godot, killing themselves, and nothingness. They always repeat the exchange: “let’s go” “we can’t” “why not” “we’re waiting for godot” or the phrases: “let’s hang ourselves” and even “nothing to be done.” Beckett constantly returns to these topics to emphasize their importance in the play, as if the audience did not understand the first, second or third time it was said. But instead of just being repetitions, where a phrase or word is said many times, entire conversations are repeated and this topic looping gives the impression that the characters are forever trapped in a predictable cycle. We can expect that at the end of the play, Estragon and Vladimir continue to talk about Godot, suicide, and nothingness.

Both pattern their speech to reflect the level of education or intelligence of their characters. In Sizwe Bansi is Dead, Sizwe often speaks in short simple sentences with the common Subject-Verb sentence structure, if he speaks in sentences at all. He is constantly unable to form words and has to resort to using his hands to communicate ideas. His struggle in speaking gives the impression that Sizwe is not that educated and this contrasts to Buntu who often has extended speeches which are actually monologues when answering Sizwe’s questions. He uses complex sentence structures and obviously has a large vocabulary. Buntu is clearly educated and this is emphasized with his detailed knowledge of the legal system of the area.

The characters in Waiting for Godot are also very educated. Despite the constant pauses, Estragon and Vladimir sometimes have very rapid exchanges, completing each others sentences and the topic of conversation is sometimes very philosophical: “We always find something … to give us the impression that we exist?” The rapid back and forth is very similar to the sophisticated rapid exchanges in greek dramas and this relation only serves to heighten the sophistication and intelligence of Estragon and Vladimir the latter of which even mentions that he “was once [a poet].”

Beckett and Fugard pattern their speech using a variety of techniques and because speech is such an integral part of theater, especially in barren plays like Sizwe Bansi is Dead and Waiting for Godot, where there are only simple props and simple stage design, the speech patterns create a multitude of effects ranging from audience impact, characterization, and theme.