



RESEARCH PAPER**The Discursive Construction of Identity in Camus' *The Stranger*: An Analytical Study**

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ABSTRACT

Albert Camus's *The Stranger* is an influential work of existential philosophy. The novel constructs themes of values, meanings, and individual freedom. Understanding the novel's construction of identity can help to understand the broader philosophical implications of Existentialism. Existentialism is a philosophical movement that puts strong emphasis on the notion that people are free and identify their purpose in life and own values. Existentialism rejects the idea of the supernatural in figuring out what makes a human (essence) (Macharia, 2022). This research uses Fairclough's critical discourse analysis approach, which helps researchers to uncover the meaning and inherent ideologies existing in the Novel under study. The researchers endeavor to reveal the complex layers of ideology and meaning present in the selected excerpts of *The Stranger*. The novel is open for future scholars to explore various research gaps, including stylistic analysis, psychoanalysis, and postcolonial perspectives for diving deep into the implicit meaning of the novel.

KEYWORDS Critical Discourse Analysis, Discourse, Identity, *The Stranger*

Introduction

Albert Camus lived during a period of global discontent, including two World Wars and the freedom movements of occupied nations like India and Algeria. The narrative of the novel takes place in Algeria from the opening page. The overall action and events in the novel take place in a colonized atmosphere. The narrator refers to the racial prejudices by telling the story of a small group of French residents of Algeria. The narrator of the novel, Meursault, is identified with French Algerians, and the only people he mentions are French Algerians. The novel's main focus is absurd individuality and life. Meursault acknowledges the reality of the meaninglessness of existence. He views life as only what one makes of it. Camus constructs that by doing so, an individual would preserve traditional human ideals that serve as a guarantee for life.

This paper uses Critical Discourse Analysis to explore identity construction in the novel. Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is the study of spoken and written texts with the purpose of exposing the discursive representation of prejudice, inequality, and power. It focuses on the maintenance and replication of these discursive sources in a particular political, social, and historical situation (Van Dijk, 1997). CDA is defined by Fairclough (1992) as a type of discourse analysis that attempts to methodically study the often-ambiguous causal relationships between (a) discursive events, practices, and (b) broader cultural and social structure processes and relations; it also examines as how power struggles and power relations ideologically shape these events, practices, and texts. It also

investigates how the ambiguity of these relationships between discourses, as well as society itself, plays a role in constructing domination and power.

The term Discourse is usually defined in social sciences, humanities, and discourse studies as the use of language as social practice (Fairclough, 2003). Language use or the use of language intended for communication is termed discourse. It is concerned with social change, structure, and social practice. Discourse and ideology have a dialectical connection. Discourse is a different notion from the Chomskyan or the structuralist outlook of language as a closed system. Van Dijk (2009) identifies discourse as multidimensionality and combines many dimensions, such as linguistic objects, social interactions, practices, mental representations, and cultural products. He acknowledges that a broad explanation of discourse would need theorizations of various key concepts, but he maintains that discourse is a multidimensional concept.

The concept of identity is defined as context-dependent, dynamic, and relational. Wodak et al. (2009) consider social identities flexible, multifaceted, fragile, and constantly changing. They oppose the idea of a single and stable identity. They include that the notion of identity “never signifies anything static, unchanging, or substantial, but rather always an element situated in the flow of time, ever-changing, something involved in a process” (p. 11).

Literature Review

The main themes of Camus's works are the investigation of universal ethics and the brutal representation of human inequity. Perhaps *The Stranger* is structured to suggest a corresponding example of the arguments that are discussed in *The Myth of Sisyphus* (Sartre & Priest, 2002). The novel encourages thinking of readers to think about their own mortality and to construct meaning in their lives. A critical analysis of Meursault's existential dilemma is conducted in Camus's *The Stranger*. Meursault is indifferent and unaffected by events in his own life or those around him (ibid).

The Stranger represents Camus' ideas on the transience of life, the certainty of death, and the awareness that existence is meaningless through the narrator, Meursault. He defies the sacrifices people make in the hopes of an afterlife and daily routines that have made living into a meaningless ritual. Camus also denounces the subjugation of the standard social structure that dictates how people should behave (Macharia, 2022).

According to Camus' absurdist philosophy, the struggle between nihilism and the human effort to discard it is at the core of human experience, instead of looking to transcendence or the divine for meaning, his lyrical answers to the absurd question of the possibility of affirming the struggle for social values instead of absurdity (Stefan, 2006). The novel *The Outsider* (The Stanger) focuses on his own perspectives and approach to life. Camus feels that the arts need to provide self-rescue skills to humans. He represents the notion of absurdity, which he created during the war in Paris and later incorporated into his novel *The Outsider* (PATEL, 2013).

Material and Methods

The current study is qualitative in nature. It applies Norman Fairclough's approach of Critical Discourse Analysis for the analysis of the text (discourse). The analytical tools are Fairclough's (1989, 2003) Three-Dimensional Model (TDM). According to Norman Fairclough, CDA is a method for studying social and cultural changes that are used to resist the power and dominance that an elite group has over the poor people of society. He

concludes that these elements also affect our language, which in turn shapes our views, interactions, and social identities. He based his analysis on Halliday's systemic-functional grammar. He views his approach as correcting the prevalent ignorance about the role that language plays in preserving, establishing, and altering social relations of power (Ahmadvand, 2011).

He (1989) thinks that becoming conscious is the first step toward emancipation. Raising people's awareness is fundamental to achieving this objective. Fairclough supposes that participants in a discourse are not firmly aware of what they are performing or saying, nor are they aware of the possible social consequences of their practices; discusses Fairclough's (1989, 2015) three-dimensional model, which suggests a link between discourse, interactions, and situations.

1. Description: The first of the descriptions deals with the text's formal features.

2. Interpretation: This step focuses on the relationship between text and interaction. It sees the text as both a resource for interpretation and the production process of discourse.

3. Explanation: this step focuses on the relationship between social setting and interaction; that is, on the social aspects that affect the processes of production and interpretation and the social consequences that result from them.

Data Analysis

Fairclough (1995) focuses on self-identities that authors construct during the process of their academic writings, or what he previously termed the identity function of discourse. According to Wenger (1998), the concept of identity is a 'negotiated experience,' meaning that we identify ourselves by the ways in which others and we reify ourselves and through the ways in which we experience ourselves. Moreover, the ideologies that guide our use of spoken and written speech, as well as common sets of values and cultural understandings, form the foundation of these identities.

Text 1

I'd have liked to have kept him back and explained to him that I wanted to be friends with, not so that he'd defend me better, but, so to speak, in natural way... He didn't understand me, and he rather held it against me. I wanted to assure him that I was just like everyone else, exactly like couldn't be bothered (The Stranger).

The narrator, Meursault, is incapable of identifying with such institutions, which he considers meaningless and empty. He values relationships in their natural state over those established by society. His estrangement results in his incapacity to understand other members of society. The text supports this view by citing instances when the lawyer misinterpreted him.

Description

The protagonist of *The Stranger*, Meursault, is a sensitive character who has a psychological disconnection from his environment. Things like the passing of a mother or a marriage proposal do not matter to him, and most people give them extreme importance. To him, there is only pure existence, which is being and feeling in the world.

The selected discourse is informal as it is a general description of an event to the readers. We have rewording in the text as we observe repetition in the expressions like '*I'd*

have liked, 'I wanted to be', and 'I wanted to assure him.' These expressions have relational as well as metaphorical meanings in expressing the character's ideology of identity and natural existence.

The first sentence and the third one are complex sentences having their subordinate, coordinate, and main clauses. In contrast, the second sentence is a compound sentence that is connected by the logical connector 'and'. The excerpt is mainly declarative and persuasive in the sense that it gives the impression of an urge to do something. The expression '*so to speak, in a natural way*' is metaphorically significant as it has the narrator's main purpose he wants to express. Similarly, the expression '*He didn't understand me*' is significant for what the character wants people to understand him and the ideology behind the expression. The most significant pronoun, 'I', which is a first-person pronoun, has a deep meaning the producer of the text wants to convey through the narrator, Meursault. Logical connectors are used in the discourse to connect clauses, phrases, or the explanatory expression, 'and,' 'but', and 'that.'

Interpretation and Explanation

The selected extract discursively constructs self-identity and self-existence through language use. The narrative style of the novel, that is, the first-person pronoun 'I' constructs self-identity and existence. Here, existence means holding one's own ideology and purpose, as well as one's own way of living life. The narrator, Meursault, addresses the readers by narrating his own story with the help of the first person pronoun 'I', which discursively demonstrates his insistence on his own self and existence. The text producer constructs his own ideological discourse through his narrator, who repeatedly uses 'I' to put emphasis on his own way of living life. The expression '*I wanted to be friends with*' in the very first sentence of the discourse discursively represents that the narrator is a friendly man like others in society. Still, due to his identical and different way of living life, people do not take him as friendly. The narrator perceives the prevailing norms of society and life as absurd and meaningless. He constructs his own identity and existence in society, which he considers empty and absurd.

The expression '*but, so to speak, in a natural way*' discursively reveals that the narrator takes the society and all the social institutions as empty; he insists on living and behaving naturally. Here, the adjectival phrase '*natural way*' constructs the way that is free from all fabricated conventions and customs. He means to live life with one's own established morals and ethics. Similarly, the expression '*...I was just like everyone else*' again, constructing self-identity as he was also a human being like the other people in the society. Here, again, he constructs his existence and insists on his own stance.

Text 2

Throughout the whole absurd life I'd lived, a dark wind had been rising toward me from somewhere deep in my future, across years that were still to come, and as it passed, this wind leveled whatever was offered to me at the time, in years no more real than the ones I was living. (The Stranger)

The text is the narration of Meursault's alienation which starts to waver when the death sentence is announced to him for the murder of an Arab. In the last part of the novel, while waiting for his execution and the chaplain wants to talk to him, he realizes his dilemma. The sentence to death has forced him to break free from his apathy. He is ambitious and very goal-oriented and regrets his earlier indifference and apathy.

Description

The text is a long, complex sentence with a main clause, coordinate, and subordinate clauses, as well as some explanatory sentences. The text is declarative narration in which the narrator states about his situation behind bars in prison. The pronouns 'I', 'me,' and 'my' used several times in the text represent that the action takes place exclusively. The clauses are generally connected with the help of the use of 'commas,' 'that,' and 'and.' The discourse is informal in nature; it has all the grammatical, experiential, and expressive values of vocabulary. Ideologically significant words, sentences, and clauses are the adjectival phrase 'dark wind,' the phrase 'deep in my future,' and the expression 'more real than the ones I was living.'

Interpretation and Explanation

The except discursively constructs existence as the narrator realizes his dilemma in life. He does not regret how he lived life and is indifferent toward it and the way he lived life, but how he lived life is more real and perfect, and is going to end with his death sentence. Here, again he insists on his existence and identity. The phrase '*dark wind*' discursively depicts the impending calamity of the death sentence on Meursault. Here, the narrator constructs his inner feelings and mind and thinks his time to be punished. It is also used metaphorically which means death.

The expression '*deep in my future*' again, constructs the coming hours of his doomed fate. Here, the text producer constructs insistence on his character's insistence on existence and life, which is dear to everyone. Similarly, the expression '*more real than the ones I was living*' represents Meursault's stance on life and existence. He takes his living life as real and complete as it is free from all the conventions and conventional ethics.

Camus discursively constructs Meursault's place in life as a stranger and calls him an ideal character. He constructs Meursault as a man who declines to participate in the game. Meursault fears the day of his persecution and has no illusions about his awaiting execution. Due to his individual nature, Meursault is discursively constructed as unique. He is reserved and isolated, content to live in his own world and indulge in its physical delights.

When he realizes that his time of execution comes near, he thinks back on the years of his life he lived as have been significant. Meursault knows how valuable and precious life is. He is indifferent to death, as he believes that everyone has to die. These justifications would lend credence to his worldview. This is untrue, though, because, in his final moments of consciousness, he voiced some degree of sadness and had profound realizations about how wonderful life is.

Discussion

The Stranger's first-person narrative constructs that the narrator, Meursault does not consider life as purposeful. He dismisses both religious and secular interpretations of life. The concept of the meaninglessness of life is a central theme of the novel *The Stranger*. The main themes of the novel are existentialism, alienation, identity, and sadness. The main character, Meursault, constructs self-alienation, alienation from society, and the way people live. He detaches himself from society because he is unable to create a meaningful connection with it. He always comes out as uncomfortable or different from what people around him anticipate.

Camus's novel, *The Stranger*, is a philosophical work that addresses the pointless, absurdist ideology of the character Meursault. The story examines how others perceive him as 'other' due to his peculiar and dispassionate behaviors. His approaching death is a result of the novel's primary events, which subsequently disclose his genuine views on the beauty of life. The novel's characters refer to him as the 'other' since he is unable to express his feelings to them. The historical context also has a significant impact on Meursault's approach to encounters. Arguably, one of the best philosophical books of the contemporary era is *The Stranger*.

This study discursively constructed Meursault's identity and his association with the world around him. The novel primarily concludes with a summary of all the topics, such as existence, alienation, identity, and absurdity. The main aim of the research was to explore identity construction in the novel under study.

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