LEXICONS INDEXING SOCIAL ISOLATION AND TREATMENT: A DISCOURSE ANALYSIS OF MEURSAULT'S LANGUAGE USAGE IN '*THE STRANGER*' BY ALBERT CAMUS

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Abstract

The increasing prevalence of social isolation and its link to depression has drawn significant scholarly attention globally. Economic instability and shifting social structures have exacerbated these issues, leading to growing concerns about mental well-being. Previous studies define isolation as an aversive psychological state associated with poor mental and physical health outcomes. However, this study analyzes the lexicon in Albert Camus' The Stranger' to examine how language reflects existentialist and absurdist themes with a view to investigating how economic instability can contribute to distress and social isolation today. Qualitative research method was used for the study. To buttress this point, interviews were conducted with twenty (20) families to investigate how economic instability might have contributed to distress and social Isolation. The paper concludes by recommending strategies for fostering psychological resilience and reducing the impact of isolation on mental health.

Keywords: Language, Isolation, Depression, Absurdity, Existentialism, Alienation

Introduction

This study examines Meursault's language in *The Stranger* through discourse analysis, focusing on lexicon indexing, social isolation, and his treatment by society. By analyzing his emotionally detached and minimalistic speech, this paper argues that Meursault's linguistic patterns reflect his alienation and contribute to his condemnation. Drawing on critical discourse analysis and existentialist linguistic theories, the study explores how his language—or lack of conventional emotional expression, shapes his identity and social perception in respect to what obtains in families today. Albert Camus' *The Stranger* (1942) is a seminal work of existentialist literature that portrays Meursault, a protagonist whose detachment from societal norms is evident in his speech. His linguistic choices—characterized by brevity, emotional neutrality, and rejection of conventional grief—underscore his existential alienation. This study employs discourse analysis to examine how Meursault's language contributes to his outsider status, leading to his rejection and eventual execution.

Theoretical Framework

This study is grounded in three key theoretical perspectives that offer insight into Meursault's linguistic patterns and their implications for social isolation, perception, and existential detachment. These theories include Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), Existentialist

Linguistics, and Social Isolation and Communication Theories. Each provides a lens through which Meursault's speech can be analyzed in relation to his rejection by society and the broader existential themes of *The Stranger*.

1. Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) (Fairclough, 1989)

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is a framework developed to examine how language constructs social reality, reinforces power structures, and influences societal perceptions. According to Fairclough (1989), language is not merely a neutral means of communication but a tool that shapes ideology, maintains hierarchies, and reflects social norms. CDA emphasizes the interplay between language, power, and ideology, examining how linguistic choices influence and are influenced by sociocultural contexts. In the context of *The Stranger*, CDA is instrumental in analyzing how Meursault's speech—or lack of adherence to conventional expressions—becomes a means by which society judges and ultimately condemns him. Meursault's linguistic patterns disrupt social expectations, positioning him as an outsider whose detachment and indifference are seen as subversive.

CDA and Meursault's Trial

During Meursault's trial, language becomes a tool of manipulation, used by the prosecution to frame him as a moral outcast. The discourse surrounding Meursault's behavior at his mother's funeral—his failure to cry, his detachment, and his decision to watch a movie with his lover the following day—demonstrates how language constructs public perception. The prosecutor's rhetorical strategies highlight how discourse reinforces societal expectations and labels those who deviate as threats to social order.

Lexical Choices and Power Dynamics

Meursault's speech is marked by brevity, neutrality, and an avoidance of performative emotional expressions. In contrast, the courtroom's discourse is loaded with moral judgments, emphasizing emotion, duty, and societal norms. CDA helps reveal the power dynamics at play—Meursault's rejection of conventional discourse diminishes his agency, making him an easy target for condemnation.

By applying CDA, this study examines how Meursault's linguistic minimalism clashes with dominant discourse structures, leading to his isolation and ultimate execution.

2. Existentialist Linguistics (Sartre, 1943)

Existentialist linguistics stems from existentialist philosophy, which argues that language is a reflection of individual freedom, personal choice, and subjective meaning-making. Sartre (1943) posits that individuals define themselves through actions and language, shaping their existence rather than conforming to predefined societal meanings. Existentialist linguistics explores how linguistic choices reflect authenticity, alienation, or conformity to societal constructs.

Language as a Reflection of Absurdism

Camus, a key figure in existentialism and absurdism, presents Meursault as a character who resists traditional linguistic frameworks that impose meaning on life. Unlike most individuals

who use language to assert emotions, values, and beliefs, Meursault's speech reflects his rejection of imposed meaning. His linguistic detachment embodies the absurdist perspective; that life lacks inherent purpose and attempts to impose meaning; especially through language is futile.

"Since we're all going to die, it's obvious that when and how don't matter."

This statement encapsulates Meursault's existentialist detachment, challenging the societal expectation that one should fear or resist death. His language does not conform to conventional narratives of regret, salvation, or moral redemption.

Linguistic Minimalism and Authenticity

Existentialist linguistics also examines how Meursault's minimalistic and emotionally neutral language reflects his commitment to authenticity. Sartre (1943) argues that many individuals engage in "bad faith" by adopting socially constructed language to fit into predefined roles. Meursault, however, refuses to use language performatively, he does not feign emotions he does not feel, nor does he engage in rhetoric that seeks to justify or explain his actions in conventional moral terms.

This authenticity, however, comes at a cost. Society demands a specific kind of language—one that adheres to moral norms, expresses prescribed emotions, and reinforces shared values. By rejecting this, Meursault isolates himself, and his linguistic nonconformity becomes a key factor in his condemnation.

Thus, existentialist linguistics helps explain how Meursault's speech patterns function as an assertion of personal freedom but also contribute to his alienation and societal rejection.

3. Social Isolation and Communication Theories

Social isolation and communication theories examine how individuals use language to either establish connections with others or signal detachment. These theories explore how linguistic behaviors influence social inclusion, relationships, and identity construction. In Meursault's case, his linguistic choices contribute to his alienation, reinforcing his role as an outsider.

Social Isolation through Linguistic Deviance

According to social communication theories, shared language norms create bonds between individuals. Conversational rituals, emotional affirmations, and conventional expressions of sympathy or grief reinforce social cohesion. Meursault, however, does not engage in these linguistic behaviors. His refusal to express conventional grief at his mother's funeral, his indifferent responses to marriage proposals, and his unemotional courtroom statements create a barrier between him and society.

"He asked me if I loved her. I told him it didn't mean anything but that I didn't think so."

(Page 44)

This statement, which disregards emotional conventions, alienates those around him. The inability or unwillingness to conform to expected linguistic behavior marks him as emotionally detached and socially deviant.

Communication Breakdown and Perceived Inhumanity

Communication theorists argue that individuals judge others based on the emotional content of their speech. Meursault's trial serves as a case study in how linguistic minimalism can be interpreted as moral deficiency. The prosecutor does not focus solely on Meursault's crime; instead, he weaponizes his linguistic behavior to construct an image of a man devoid of human emotion.

"Gentlemen of the jury, the day after his mother's funeral, this man was out swimming, starting up a liaison, and going to the movies."(Page 100)

The use of emotive language frames Meursault as a moral transgressor, reinforcing his outsider status. His inability to respond in expected ways exacerbates his isolation, demonstrating how language functions as a tool of social exclusion.

The Psychological Toll of Linguistic Isolation

Psychological studies on isolation suggest that prolonged social rejection due to communication differences can lead to internalized alienation. Meursault, however, embraces his isolation rather than attempting to mitigate it through performative language. His final acceptance of his fate—without seeking religious comfort or societal validation—reinforces his rejection of language as a means of connection.

"I laid my heart open to the benign indifference of the universe."(Page 179)

Here, Meursault fully embraces his linguistic and existential detachment, accepting that language does not alter fate.

These frameworks provide insight into how Meursault's linguistic patterns both reflect and reinforce his existential detachment and social rejection.

Methodology

This study employs qualitative discourse analysis to examine Meursault's direct speech, internal monologues, and courtroom interactions. In addition to this, twenty (20) families were interviewed to investigate the economic situation of their families and the rate at which it has affected their social behavior. Key elements of analysis include: Lexical Frequency and Patterns: Identifying recurring words and phrases that signify detachment and nonconformity. Contextual Analysis: Examining how Meursault's language is perceived by others and used as a basis for his condemnation. Thematic Coding: Categorizing linguistic expressions that reflect existentialism, absurdity, and social isolation.

The study focuses on Meursault's speech in pivotal moments of the novel, particularly those that highlight his rejection of societal norms.

Themes Explored in *The Stranger*

Absurdism and the Meaninglessness of Life

Camus' philosophy of the absurd suggests that life has no inherent meaning and that humans struggle to find purpose in an indifferent universe. Meursault embodies this philosophy through his detached outlook and lack of emotional engagement.

"I laid my heart open to the benign indifference of the universe."(Page 179)

This realization at the end of the novel underscores Meursault's acceptance of life's absurdity.

Emotional Detachment and Indifference

Meursault's indifference to significant life events, such as his mother's death and his own trial, reinforces his alienation.

"Mother died today. Or maybe yesterday, I don't know."(Page 9)

His lack of grief distances him from societal expectations, leading to his condemnation.

Society's Expectations vs. Individual Freedom

Meursault defies traditional moral expectations by refusing to conform emotionally or socially. Society judges him not only for his crime but also for his perceived lack of humanity.

"He asked me if I loved her. I told him it didn't mean anything but that I didn't think so."(Page 44)

His rejection of romantic and emotional conventions reinforces his outsider status.

Death and the Inevitability of Fate

Death is a central theme in the novel, from Meursault's mother's passing to his own impending execution. He ultimately accepts death without seeking solace in religion or hope.

"Since we're all going to die, it's obvious that when and how don't matter."(Page 179)

This statement aligns with the absurdist philosophy that life lacks inherent meaning beyond what individuals assign to it.

The Judicial System and Social Hypocrisy

Meursault's trial focuses more on his perceived moral failings than on his actual crime, illustrating society's preference for conformity over truth.

"Gentlemen of the jury, the day after his mother's funeral, this man was out swimming, starting up a liaison, and going to the movies. Do you not see the abyss that separates this soul from us?"(Page 100)

His lack of grief becomes a justification for his execution rather than his actual actions.

Isolation and Alienation

Meursault is an outsider, disconnected from those around him. His indifference isolates him, leading to his ultimate rejection by society.

"I had only a little time left and I didn't want to waste it on God."(Page 169)

His rejection of religion in his final moments reinforces his estrangement from conventional human experiences.

Table 1: Economic situation of families vis a vis distress and social isolation

Family	Responsibility carrier	Number in the family	Number of children	breakfast	lunch	dinner	%regular	%irregular
I	mother	3	2	regular	regular	regular	100%	nil
Ii	Father and mother	4	2	regular	regular	regular	100%	nil
Iii	Father	6	4	regular	regular	regular	100%	nil
Iv	Father and mother	8	6	irregular	irregular	irregular	Nil	100%
V	Father and mother	5	3	irregular	irregular	irregular	Nil	100%
Vi	Father	4	2	regular	regular	regular	100%	nil
Vii	Father and mother	6	4	irregular	irregular	irregular	Nil	100%
viii	Father and mother	3	1	regular	regular	regular	100%	nil
Ix	Father and mother	10	8	irregular	irregular	irregular	Nil	100%
X	Father and mother	4	2	regular	regular	regular	100%	nil
Xi	Father and mother	3	1	regular	regular	regular	100%	nil
Xii	Father and mother	13	11	irregular	irregular	irregular	Nil	100%
xiii	Father and mother	4	2	regular	regular	regular	100%	nil
Xiv	Father and mother	3	1	regular	regular	regular	100%	nil
Xv	Father and mother	6	4	irregular	irregular	irregular	Nil	100%
xvi	Father and mother	7	5	irregular	irregular	irregular	Nil	100%
xvii	Father and mother	5	3	irregular	irregular	irregular	Nil	100%
xviii	Father and	6	4	irregular	irregular	irregular	Nil	100%

	mother							
Xix	Father and mother	**7**	**5**	irregular	irregular	irregular	Nil	100%
Xx	Father and mother	**8**	**6**	irregular	irregular	irregular	Nil	100%

Family Size, Meal Regularity, and Social Isolation: An Analysis

Social isolation refers to the lack of social interactions, emotional support, and a sense of belonging, which can negatively impact an individual's well-being (Cacioppo & Cacioppo, 2018). The data provided in the table highlights key family characteristics such as family size, number of children, responsibility carriers (parents), and meal regularity. These factors influence social isolation in various ways. Also, family structure plays a significant role in determining social connectivity and emotional support. According to Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems theory, the family serves as the primary microsystem where socialization occurs. Families with both parents present tend to have more structured routines, including regular meal patterns. This stability fosters stronger emotional bonds, reducing feelings of isolation among family members (Amato, 2010).In contrast, single-parent households, particularly those where only the father is responsible, may experience emotional gaps. Studies show that children in such households are more vulnerable to loneliness and social withdrawal due to the reduced presence of a caregiver (Katz et al., 2011).

In the same vein, the size of a family influences both the availability of resources and the emotional well-being of its members. Larger families (e.g., households with 6–13 members) often struggle with meal regularity, as seen in the table where families with more children tend to have irregular meal patterns. This could indicate financial strain or a lack of parental presence, which may lead to neglect and social isolation (Conger et al., 2010).Smaller families (e.g., those with 3–4 members) tend to report more regular meal patterns, suggesting better care and stronger family bonds, which can reduce social isolation (McLanahan & Sandefur, 1994).

Food security is a fundamental factor in social well-being, as it influences participation in social activities and mental health. Food insecurity, reflected in irregular meal patterns, may force children and family members to withdraw from social interactions due to embarrassment, low energy, or stress (Gundersen & Ziliak, 2015). A lack of proper nutrition can also impact cognitive and emotional development, making it harder for children to engage with peers (Cook & Frank, 2008).Families that experience meal irregularity are more likely to face economic hardships, which can limit social outings, participation in community events, and peer interactions—key elements in preventing social isolation (Martin et al., 2016).Regular family meals provide an opportunity for bonding, communication, and emotional support. Families with consistent meal patterns (100% regular) foster stronger connections, as shared meals serve as a time for bonding and communication (Fulkerson et al., 2006).Families with irregular meal patterns (100% irregular) may experience weaker social ties, as mealtime togetherness is reduced. This can lead to emotional detachment and an increased sense of isolation (Neumark-Sztainer et al., 2010).

In addition**,** parental involvement plays a crucial role in reducing social isolation among children. When both parents are involved, there is a higher chance of social interaction within the family,

reducing isolation. Research indicates that children with active parental engagement exhibit higher levels of self-esteem and social competence (Steinberg, 2001).In families where only one parent (especially the father) is responsible, children may experience reduced emotional engagement, leading to loneliness and social withdrawal (Hofferth & Goldscheider, 2010).

Analysis and Discussion

The table above shows the economic situation of selected families. Irregularities in feeding is mostly discovered in the families. Distress set in which may lead to societal isolation and eventually suicide if not well attended to.

Lexical Patterns and Emotional Detachment

Meursault's speech is characterized by emotional neutrality and rejection of traditional expressions of grief.

"Maman died today. Or maybe yesterday, I don't know."(Page 9)

His detachment disrupts expected emotional responses, leading to further alienation.

Social Alienation through Language

Meursault's interactions with others reinforce his outsider status. His refusal to conform to conventional emotional language makes him incomprehensible to those around him.

"It didn't matter to me, but if she wanted to, we could get married." (Page 59)

His indifference to marriage exemplifies his social nonconformity.

Treatment of Meursault Based on Linguistic Deviance

During his trial, the prosecutor weaponizes Meursault's lack of emotional expression against him.

"For the first time in a long time I thought about Maman. I felt as if I understood why at the end of her life she had taken a 'fiancé,' why she had played at beginning again."

This realization mirrors his own existential acceptance and the absurdity of societal expectations.

Conclusion

Economic instability and shifting social structures have exacerbated depression issue, leading to growing concerns about mental well-being. The table used suggests a strong correlation between family structure, meal regularity, and social isolation. Irregular meal patterns, especially in larger families, may indicate financial difficulties and reduced parental involvement, both of which contribute to increased social isolation. On the other hand, families with stable meal routines tend to exhibit stronger social bonds, providing children with the emotional security needed to form connections outside the home. Addressing food insecurity and strengthening parental involvement can help mitigate the effects of social isolation, fostering a healthier, more connected environment for children. Improvement in social and general well-being of individuals in the society must be paramount in the minds of our political leaders. On the other hand,

Camus' *The Stranger'* illustrates the absurd nature of life, questioning traditional values, morality, and justice. Meursault's linguistic detachment reinforces his social alienation and ultimately determines his fate. This study underscores how discourse analysis reveals existentialist themes, demonstrating the profound impact of language on identity and societal perception.

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