

Absurdity of human in *L'Etranger* by Albert Camus: the opposing view of life in society

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Abstract

This paper aims to analyze the meaning of absurdity, as the central theme of Camus's works. Absurdity is a thing that is extremely unreasonable or contrary to the rules of logic existing in society. The data are derived from a novel entitled *L'Etranger* (Stranger), by Camus. This paper examines the meaning of absurdity from the perspective of semiotics. Absurdity in this paper is then described as a meta-language or a concept of contradiction (dichotomy) between the state of being dominant and subdominant in a society, in which the dominant refers to social rules, while the sub-dominant refers to the opposing view of life in the society held by Meursault as the main character in this novel. The meaning of absurdity attributed to this romance is the alienation of life from society as a consequence of having an opposing way of life in society. The absurd human is an outsider from society.

Keywords

absurd human, meta-language, Stranger, semiotic, society

1. Introduction (Heading 1)

Albert Camus (1913-1960), a French author, is well known due to his works regarding life's problems that are regarded as full of contradictions. Camus discusses the absurdity (existentialism) theme. The ideas of absurdity as outlined in his works cause many criticisms and reactions (Hudon, 1960 and Gnanasekaran, 2014). Camus conveys his thoughts on absurdity using the main characters who have contrary attitudes and behaviour to social rules or values held in society. With his phenomenal works, he was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature at the age of 44 in 1957. His works have also been translated into many languages. One of them is a romance entitled *L'etranger* (the stranger) written in 1957. This romance presents the main character who holds absurdity as a constructive nature of his life. The character is described to have strange characteristics and behaviours (protagonist). The protagonist is characterized to have indifferent, contrary, stubborn, as well as apathetic behaviours in the view of the people in his community. Hence, the word *L'etranger* refers to the description of the behaviour of the main character, named Meursault, who experiences alienation in society.

L'Etranger questions about human existence with others in society. In this regard, Meursault has faced a conflict between his behaviour and social rules in his society, in which the behaviour is considered contrary to the prevailing social rules in the society. Other people consider that Meursault's behaviour is strange, contrasting and unusual behaviour. Therefore, they demand him to behave properly in line with the social rules applied in society. Meanwhile, Meursault himself does not recognize whether his behaviour is right or wrong. In this work, the issue of absurdity implies two things, i.e. the situation or condition of humans' existence is going through their life and if the life has any meaning to live in. The strength of this work lies in the main character named Meursault who frequently asked so many philosophical questions about life. This work does not give any clearer picture of the main character but simply describes him as a young and unmarried man, a French descent from Algeria, having a mother whom he has left in a nursing home, in his thirties, as well as working as an employee who has no ambition to develop his career (Guéguen, 2001).

Various studies on Camus' literary work have been carried out. L'Etranger has been researched with a psychological perspective (Guéguen, 2001), deconstruction theory (Hossain, 2017), existentialism (Islam, 2018), Shobeiri (2013), and Gibbons (2013), as well as communication theory (Wet, 2011). This paper analyzes L'Etranger by using a semiotic approach, which employs Barthes' meta-language as the semiotic method in this study. It is one of the sign theories which examines the development of meaning from the aspect of expression.

2. Absurdity in this context

The word absurd comes from the absurd Latin, *absurdus* which means *contraire à la raison, au sens commun, absurd raisonnement* (www.larousse.fr). In a philosophical view, absurd means *l'absurdité de sa conduite et l'existence humaine* (Rosset, 1964). Camus uses the absurd content as the central theme in his works to describe the human condition in living life and relating to others in society.

Barnes (1968) defines absurd as the condition perceived by individuals. Absurdity does not carry the meaning of being "ridiculous". When the existentialist finds that he cut himself off from all traditional beliefs in past epical, ethical and religious concepts of the nature of man, he has arrived at the point where he sees life without hope. He then finds such a condition on absurdity. Thus, absurd is something that does not carry the meaning, desire, the purpose of human existence in the world. An absurd understanding is merely futile, without meaning and purpose in life

Camus considers that human existence in the face of an absurd world becomes futile, without meaning, hope and purpose. "Ce qui vient après la mort est futile, et quelle longue suite de jours qui soit vivant (1942). This absurd condition is caused by a conflict between human desires and hopes and the emptiness of the meaning of the universe in which humans live. L'Absurd naît de cette confrontation entre l'appel humain et le silence déraisonnable du monde (1942).

Camus believes that humans can only be meaningful if they survive for life. Life is absurd. The world as a whole is absurd because, in reality, humans do business or work that is in vain and has no purpose. Camus exemplifies the character narrated in his essay, *Le Mythe de Sisyphe* (1942), who was punished by a god for pushing a large rock to the top of a mountain. When the stone arrived at the top, the stone returned to the base of the hill, he had to push it back to buds, and so on (Svandra, 2011). That is Sisyphus's work. He does vain, hollow and aimless work. The absurdity of Sisyphus's business does not mean that he is desperate to solve the problem of emptiness by committing suicide. This action is not the best solution to get out of the absurd. Life, according to Sisyphus, is not giving up on fate but still doing something even though it is absurd.

According to Camus, one way out of the absurd world is to do a revolt. Revolt is a consequence of an absurd attitude. He said that *monde n'a pas de sens superieur. Mais je sais que quelque chose en lui a du sens et c'est l'homme, parce qu'il est le se à exiger d'en avoir* (world has no superieur meaning. But I know that something in him has meaning and it is the man because he is the one to demand to have it, (1942). An example of a revolting attitude is illustrated in his work, *La Peste* (plague), the shop of Dr Rieux tried to fight tyranny, the plague that plagued the people of Oran. The epidemic is an absurd symbol that has the meaning of conflict between hopes for life and the arrival of the plague that causes people to die young. Oran residents die in vain (Tuffuor & Payne, 2017).

According to Camus, humans rebel against absurdity, meaning humans have a goal, which is to determine their values and live according to the pattern that humans embrace. Man must go his own way and decide on his destiny. Camus said that in determining the human future, God did not have the power to interfere in human affairs. "*Peut-être vaut-il mieux pour Dieu q'on ne crois pas en lui et q'on lutte de toutes ses forces contre la mort, sans lever les yeux le ciel où il se tait* (Perhaps it is better for God that we do not believe in him and that we fight with all our might against death, without raising our eyes to the sky where he is silent, Camus, 1947).

3. Semiotic

Semiotics is the science of signs in social life (Hasyim, 2017). According to Saussure (1967) semiology (semiotics) shows what constitutes signs and regulates the laws of signs. Something is called a sign if it contains two elements, a sign and a sign. The relation between the two elements gives birth to the meaning of the sign and the laws governing the sign become conventional in society. Whatever is called a sign as long as it refers to the laws that shape it and is conventionally accepted. Peirce (1966) said that humans only think in signs through the relations between representamen signs, objects and interpretants.

The interpretant is the relationship of the sign to the sign itself; the object is the relationship of the sign with the object being referred to and the interpretant is the relationship of the sign to the interpreter of the sign. Chandler (2018) considers that semiotics examines how meaning is made and how the reality of the sign is represented as Saussure men-

tioned that semiology is rooted in linguistics (Goharipour, 2019). However, in its development, the study of semiotics includes media, photography, fashion (Barthes), culinary studies (Levi-Strauss), architecture (Eco), narrative structure (Greimas and Todorov), cultural studies (Lotman). Semiotics has also been included in the study of the narrative structure by Greimas, analysis of poetry in the relationship between text and reader (Riffaterre).

Barthes developed Saussure's theory in the study of media culture. According to Barthes (1968), in the development of meaning, signs do not only reach the first level, which is called denotation, as the basis for signification. The relation of expression (sign) and content (sign) at the primary level produces a broader meaning of the sign, which has entered the cultural realm, namely connotation and meta-language. The connotation is the development of signs in terms of signifier and meta-language, in terms of content (Arafah & Hasyim, 2019).

Meta-language is the signification of the sign at the second level emphasizing the aspect of expression (form). The relation between the signifier (form) and the signified (concept) produces the meaning.

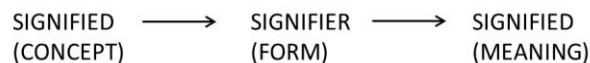


Figure 1: meta-language signification

Meta-language works by constructing new meanings in a sign (Hasyim et al., 2019). Signs are built by logical extension of the relation between the signifier (expression) and signified (concept). An expression is a form of the sign that results from the sign (concept). The expression refers to something that produces new meaning. One example is the concept of simplicity as a leader. The form (marker) of the concept of simplicity is displayed in various expressions; for example wearing a shirt and cheap cloth pants, owning a car that most people have, eating in food stalls, not in fancy restaurants. This sign expression produces a sign (new meaning) of a popular leader. At the level of interpreters of signs (society), through the process of meta-language semiosis, the community interprets individual and universal meanings. The dominant meanings spoke in society then become universal (natural) signs. Of course, the significance is a dynamic process, product, and event. All members of the community are interpreters and decipherers of signs (Goharipour, 2019). The ability to interpret and decipher signs and understand signification is based on the competence of sign systems and cultural settings giving birth to diverse and universal sign meanings.

4. Method

Descriptive research methods are used to answer the purpose of this paper. Researchers analyzed the attitudes and behaviours of key figures with a semiotic (meta-language) approach. Thus, the researchers focused on the analysis of the main data, the roman text *L'étranger*. The method of data collection is to map absurd attitudes and behaviours that, in the public view, are contrary to social rules in society. The absurd attitudes and behaviours of the main character can be examined through the relationship of the main character, Meursault with other characters directly involved in the story (Meursault's relationship with her mother, the director of the nursing home, Marie, her employer, Raymond, the judge, the defence and the pastor).

Table 1. Attitudes and behaviours of the main character

Concept	Attitudes and behaviours
Death	Meursault does not care about his mother's death and is not sad and does not want to see his mother's body.
Wedding	Meursault doesn't want to get married
Career	Meursault does not want to develop his career as an employee
God	Meursault doesn't believe in God
death penalty	Meursault rejected the court's decision because he considered himself innocent.

Data analysis is done using semiotics theory by linking the conflict between the absurd attitudes and behaviours of the main figures with society. Based on the results of the data analysis, found the attitude and behaviour of the main character absurd (table 1).

5. Result and Discussion

Camus tried to offer a view of alienation illustrated through the figure of Meursault by having attitudes and behaviour that were contrary to the rules in society. Absurd attitudes and behaviour (indifference) cause him to be alienated from society. The concept (view) of transcendence is expressed through the attitudes and behaviour of characters. The absurd concept, hopelessness of life, is a significant process that gives birth to the expression of the absurd concept through attitudes and behaviours that are contrary to the rules in society. Absurd expressions can be analyzed through Meursault's relationship with other figures.

Meursault and His mother

Society excluded Meursault because of the attitudes and behaviours that were considered strange and unacceptable by the community. Meursault's absurd attitude and behaviour can be seen in the news received by telegram about the death of his mother.

Aujourd'hui, maman est morte. Ou peut-être hier, je ne sais pas. J'ai reçu un télégramme de l'asile : « Mère décédée. Enterrement demain. Sentiments distingués. » Cela ne veut rien dire. C'était peut-être hier. (Today, my mother is dead. Or maybe yesterday, I don't know. I received a telegram from the home: "Mother deceased. Funeral tomorrow. Distinguished feelings." It does not mean anything. Maybe it was yesterday, Camus, 1942: 9)

Meursault says that "Ou peut-être hier, je ne sais pas" (Or, maybe, yesterday; I'm not sure) and *Cela ne veut rien dire* (Or, maybe, yesterday; I'm not sure) show the absurd human figure depicted by Camus.

The attitude and strange behaviour in Meursault, which is considered to deviate from social rules are shown when he has left his mother in a nursing home. During his mother in a nursing home, he never saw her. He considers that he and his mother do not need each other. In a nursing home, she questioned the reason for leaving her mother.

„Je ne sais pas que encore, pourquoi, que j'ignorais jusqu'ici qu'on ma jugeait mal à cet égard, mais que l'asile m'avait paru une chose naturelle parce que je n'avais pas assez d'argent pour garder maman. D'ailleurs, i y avait longtemps qu'elle s'ennuyait toute seule (I do not know that yet, why, that I did not know until now that I was judged badly in this respect, but that the home seemed to be a natural thing because I did not have enough money to keep my mother. Besides, she had been bored on her own for a long time, Camus, 1942: 75)

So even when he attended his mother's funeral. At the trial of the Meursault Arab murder case, residents of nursing homes testified to Meursault's strange attitude and behaviour because he did not look sad, did not want to see the dead body of the mother last time. After the funeral, he immediately returned to his home.

The testimony of the residents of the nursing home in court stated that while in the nursing home to attend the burial ceremony of the mother's body, Meursault was seen not sad and crying and did not want to see her mother. It happened when a doorman came to see him in the burial chamber to reopen the coffin that had been tightly closed so that Meursault could see his mother's body.

Il s'approchait de la bière quand je l'ai arrêté. Il m'a dit : « Vous ne voulez pas ? » J'ai répondu : « Non. » Il s'est interrompu et j'étais gêné parce que je sentais que je n'aurais pas dû dire cela (He was approaching the beer when I stopped him. He said to me: "You don't

want to? "I replied," No. He paused and I was embarrassed because I felt I shouldn't have said, Camus, 1942: 4).

Meursault's strange attitude and behaviour were also shown when Meursault did not join the night watch together with the residents of the nursing home. Because he is tired and sleepy after a long journey to the nursing home, he prefers not to take part in front of his mother's corpse as is usually done by caregivers of nursing homes.

His behaviour is considered bad by the community. "Les instructeurs avaient appris que j'avais fait preuve d'insensibilité le jour de l'enterrement de maman (Camus, 1942: 101). After the burial of his mother, Meursault immediately returned to the city where he lived.

Meursault dan Marie

Meursault had a girlfriend named Marie Cardona, a former office typist. Relationships as close friends were established when Meursault spent his day off at the beach, and there he met Marie again. The discovery made them close. They swam together, promising to watch movies at the cinema and eat together at Meursault's apartment or the restaurant. But there are differences in views between them about marriage. Marie sees their relationship as something serious that can lead her to marriage. On the contrary, Meursault showed indifference.

„Un moment après, elle m'a demandé si je l'aimais. Je lui ai répondu que cela ne voulait rien dire, mais qu'il me semblait que non. (A moment later, she asked me if I liked her. I replied that it didn't mean anything, but that it seemed to me that it didn't, Camus, 1942: 36)

Meursault has the view that marriage is not essential in his life. He refused Marie's offer to marry him because marriage meant nothing to him. "Je lui ai expliqué que cela (le mariage) n'avait aucune importance" (I explained to her that it (marriage) didn't matter, Camus, 1942: 69).

Meursault's strange attitude and behaviour were shown when Marie asked to marry Meursault. However, Meursault refused. Marriage is not essential to him. Meursault's attitude and behaviour are not uncommon in society. Marriage is a process of bonding marriage according to religious norms, legal norms, and social norms.

Meursault and Employer

Meursault's strange attitude and behaviour can also be illustrated through his relationship as an employee working in a private company in Algeria with his em-

ployer. The event of the relationship was his refusal to work in Paris offered by his employer. The head of the company has plans to expand its business ventures by opening a new office in Paris. So, he also provided Meursault to work in a new office in Paris.

Vous êtes jeune, et il me semble que c'est une vie qui doit vous plaire. » J'ai dit que oui mais que dans le fond cela m'était égal. Il m'a demandé alors si je n'étais pas intéressé par un changement de [64] vie. J'ai répondu qu'on ne changeait jamais de vie, qu'en tout cas toutes se valaient et que la mienne ici ne me déplaisait pas du tout. (You are young, and it seems to me that this is a life that must please you. I said yes, but basically, I didn't care. He then asked me if I was not interested in a change of [64] life. I replied that we never changed our lives, that in any case all were equal and that mine here did not displease me at all, Camus, 1942: 68).

Meursault's strange attitude and behaviour are displayed when the employer offers him to work in Paris. This refusal was not because he did not obey his boss's orders, but he did not want to change his life. He felt his life in Algeria was good without any difficulties. "Dans le fond cela m'est égal (Camus, 1942: 68). He considers that developing a career as an employee does not mean anything to him.

Meursault and Raymond

Raymond, who has a problem with his woman, an Arab woman, asked Meursault for advice and wanted to be friends with her. What Raymond meant by being friendly with her was that he could help her, give information or advice on Raymond's problems, which had beaten up her lover to cause hostility with the woman and her sister.

Meursault's attitude and behaviour were strange and indifferent to Raymond. Meursault considers that friendship is not important. "Il (Raymond) m'a demandé si je voulais être son copain. J'ai dit que cela m'était égal (He (Raymond) asked me if I wanted to be his boyfriend. I said I didn't care, Camus, 1942: 49). Meursault has the view that being friendly or not is meaningless to him. For him, the same. "Ça m'était égal d'être son prochain (I didn't care to be his neighbor, Camus, 1942: 55).

Meursault, Judge and Defender

Meursault was put in jail after he shot an Arab to death when he was invited by Raymond, a neighbour of the apartment, to spend a day off on the beach. This event occurred when two Arabs, one of whom was an enemy of Raymond, had followed them to the beach. Unintentionally, Meursault, who intended to take a walk along the beach, met again with the enemy Raymond. And that's when, with

the scorching heat of the sun, like a rain of fire on Meursault's face, he unknowingly shot the Arab.

From Meursault's relationship with judges and defenders, it can be seen that Meursault's attitude and behaviour were indifferent to the murders he committed. Meursault did not pay much attention to her case. Meanwhile, the judge and the defence see Meursault as an accused who must be examined seriously. However, Meursault did not judge himself guilty. According to him, the beach shooting incident happened by chance. Meursault blamed the sun. Because of the sun, he shot the Arab man. Meursault considered that the shooting incident was an ordinary and simple event. Therefore, he did not seem serious about the issue and did not regret his actions. Judges and defenders viewed Meursault's attitude and behaviour as strange and contradictory to the general perspective of crime.

„Il a murmuré: je n'ai pas jamais vu d'âme aussi endurcie que la vôtre. Les criminels qui sont venus moi ont toujours pleuré devant cette image de douleur““He whispered: I have never seen a soul as hardened as yours. The criminals who came to me have always cried in front of this image of pain”, Camus, 1942: 109)

Through Meursault's relationship with judges and defenders, it can be seen that Meursault does not know anything about bad grades, right or wrong of the deeds that have been done. He does not understand that his actions which have eradicated human life are of incorrect value, whose actions must be legally processed.

Meursault and Priest

From Meursault's relationship with the priest, Meursault's view of religion can be seen. This relates to the death sentence "guillotine" which was handed down to him. The death sentence against Meursault was not emphasized on his actions that killed the Arabs, but his strange behaviour which contradicted the social rules that prevailed in the society. Witnesses blamed Meursault's attitude and behaviour, which he considered bizarre and inhumane.

Because of Meursault's guilt and sentence of death, the priest was sent to make forgiveness of sins for Meursault before the execution. Meursault did not want to do anything that did not attract his attention. According to him, talking about God is not essential. The priest tried to revive Meursault to return to God. However, according to Meursault, he was innocent and talking about God did not attract his attention.

En tout cas, je n'étais peut-être pas sûr de ce qui m'intéressait réellement, mais j'étais tout à fait sûr de ce qui ne m'intéressait pas. Et justement, ce dont il me parlait ne m'intéressait pas Anyway, I might not be sure what interested me, but I was quite sure what didn't interest me. And precisely what he spoke to me did not interest me (Camus, 1942: 179)

Dieu vous aiderait alors, a-t-il remarqué. Tous ceux que j'ai connus dans votre cas se retournaient vers lui.(God would help you then, he noticed. Everyone I knew in your case turned to him, Camus, 1942: 179).

The priest looked at Meursault's strange attitude and behaviour from most of the defendants who were to be sentenced to death. The relationship between the Pastor and Meursault shows a conflicting perspective on God. The pastor represents the community with the view that people guilty of a crime must be forgiven of sins, and the accused can return to God. On the contrary, Meursault has a different perspective and is contrary to the opinions of the general public.

The word 'L' Etranger ', as the roman title, comes from the adjective 'etranger' which means strange, and magical. The word became a noun, l'étranger, which means stranger, strange person. Other sources say that etranger is person who does not belong to a family, a social group (www.le-dictionnaire.com). Thus, L'étranger refers to the main character Meursault who has an attitude and behaviour that is strange, foreign in the view of the community, and he is considered not a member of the city.

Camus uses the absurd term as the basis of his philosophical thinking which is expressed in his works. In L'étranger, the absurd concept in question is the alienation of a person from the community because his views are contrary to the general view in society. Meursault's viewpoint is considered outside of the social rules of society, so he becomes an outsider and alienated from the community.

In a semiotic perspective, absurd is the concept level (content) that has the meaning of alienation. Then, the level of expression (form) of the absurd is a form of attitude and behaviour that is considered strange and not part of community members. The relation between the level of content and expression results in the meaning of human being alienated from members of the community.

Table 2. Meta-language signification

Signified (concept)	Signifier (form/expression)	Signified (meaning)
Absurd (alienation)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Death: Meursault was indifferent to the death of his mother and was not sad and did not want to see his mother's body. 2. Love (married): Meursault does not want to get married 	Meursault is an outsider from society (alienation).

	<p>3. Career: Meursault did not want to develop his career as an employee</p> <p>4. God: Meursault does not believe in God</p> <p>5. Death sentence: He rejects the court's decision because he considers himself innocent</p>	
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Absurd is a concept to describe human alienation from society because its behaviour is contrary to the social rules of society. Camus offers a view of the absurdity of life expressed through the figure of Meursault. The absurd human concept provided by Camus is a modern thought that wants to try to get out of the power of society. Absurd humans are people who want to be free from all social ties or rules. The trial of the Meursault case is a community court, which punishes Meursault, as a member of the community, who does not want to obey the social rules of society. He was sentenced to death not because of a crime committed, but a social crime committed with no regard for the general view of society.

Conclusion

Absurdity is a meta-language that depicts humans (Meursault) alienated from their society. Meursault's expression that is displayed is attitudes and behaviour that are outside the social rules of society. Meursault was confronted with a society that obeyed social rules. Meursault was alienated from her community because of her behaviour that did not recognize moral values, so her attitudes and behaviour were not accepted in the community. Meursault is a human figure who is banished from society.

Absurdity is a picture of a human figure who hopelessness of life. Absurdity is a conflict between people who want to live freely and people whose members must obey the rules that apply. For Meursault, life is absurd, something that has no meaning. On that basis, he also did ignorance of all social rules that apply in society. On the other hand, this work shows the power of the community whose members cannot get out of the prevailing public view. What the community wants, is the reality that must be obeyed by its members.

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