

PSYCHOLINGUISTIC CONFLICTS IN THE SPEECH OF LITERARY CHARACTERS IN FRENCH LITERATURE

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Abstract

This article explores psycholinguistic conflicts manifested in the speech of literary characters in French literature. The study focuses on the discrepancy between internal psychological states and external verbal expression, as well as the linguistic representation of unconscious processes and social constraints. Drawing on selected works by Gustave Flaubert, Albert Camus, Marcel Proust, and Jean-Paul Sartre, the paper applies qualitative discourse analysis and psycholinguistic interpretation to literary texts. The findings demonstrate that characters' speech functions not only as a means of communication but also as a reflection of inner conflicts, emotional alienation, and identity fragmentation. The study highlights the relevance of psycholinguistic approaches for literary analysis and contributes to interdisciplinary research at the intersection of linguistics, psychology, and literary studies.

Keywords: psycholinguistics; literary discourse; inner speech; unconscious processes; French literature; speech conflict

Introduction

In contemporary linguistic and literary studies, increasing attention is paid to the analysis of fictional discourse from a psycholinguistic perspective. Literary characters' speech often reflects complex psychological states, internal contradictions, and unconscious motivations. French literature, particularly from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, provides rich material for investigating the interaction between language, consciousness, and social norms. Psycholinguistic conflict in literary discourse arises when a character's verbal expression does not fully correspond to their internal emotional or cognitive state. Such conflicts may manifest as semantic ambiguity, syntactic fragmentation, emotional neutrality, or pragmatic inconsistency. This phenomenon is especially evident in works shaped by realism, existentialism, and modernism.

The aim of this article is to identify and analyze the main types of psycholinguistic conflicts in the speech of literary characters in French literature and to demonstrate how linguistic structures reveal psychological tension and inner contradiction.

Literature Review

The theoretical foundation of this study is grounded in classical and modern linguistic thought. Ferdinand de Saussure's distinction between *langue* and *parole* provides a conceptual basis for understanding individual speech as a site of variation and psychological expression. Émile Benveniste's theory of subjectivity in language emphasizes the role of personal pronouns and enunciation in constructing the speaking subject.

From a psychological perspective, Sigmund Freud's concept of the unconscious and Jacques Lacan's assertion that "the unconscious is structured like a language" are particularly relevant. These ideas have significantly influenced literary theory and discourse analysis, especially in the interpretation of narrative voice and inner speech.

Previous studies on French literary discourse have addressed internal monologue (Cohn, 1978), narrative subjectivity, and existential language use. However, psycholinguistic conflict as a systematic analytical category remains insufficiently explored, particularly in relation to linguistic form rather than thematic content. This study seeks to fill this gap by focusing on speech structures as indicators of psychological tension.

Methodology

The research adopts a qualitative methodological framework combining discourse analysis and psycholinguistic interpretation. The corpus consists of selected excerpts from canonical French literary works: *Madame Bovary* by Gustave Flaubert, *L'Étranger* by Albert Camus, *À la recherche du temps perdu* by Marcel Proust, and *La Nausée* by Jean-Paul Sartre.

The analysis proceeds in three stages. First, relevant passages are identified where characters' speech reveals emotional tension or inconsistency. Second, linguistic features at lexical, syntactic, and pragmatic levels are examined. Third, these features are interpreted in relation to the characters' psychological states and socio-cultural contexts.

The study prioritizes qualitative depth over quantitative measurement, as the objective is to uncover latent psychological meanings embedded in linguistic forms.

Results and Discussion

One of the most prominent psycholinguistic conflicts in French literature is the discrepancy between inner speech and external dialogue. In *Madame Bovary*, Emma Bovary's spoken language often conforms to social expectations, displaying politeness and romantic clichés. In contrast, her inner monologues reveal dissatisfaction, boredom, and emotional despair.

This contrast illustrates how language functions as a social mask. Psycholinguistically, the conflict emerges from the tension between genuine emotional experience and socially regulated verbal behavior. Lexical choices in Emma's external speech are conventional, while her internal discourse is marked by evaluative and emotionally charged vocabulary.

Emotional Neutrality and Alienation

Albert Camus's *L'Étranger* presents a different type of psycholinguistic conflict. The protagonist Meursault speaks in short, simple sentences with minimal emotional coloring. This linguistic simplicity contrasts sharply with the dramatic events of the narrative, including death and violence.

From a psycholinguistic perspective, this emotional neutrality reflects alienation and detachment rather than emotional absence. The conflict lies between the expected emotional response and the character's linguistic behavior. Pragmatically, Meursault's speech violates social norms, thereby intensifying the perception of psychological and moral conflict.

Unconscious Processes and Linguistic Complexity

In Marcel Proust's *À la recherche du temps perdu*, psycholinguistic conflict manifests through complex syntax and associative semantic shifts. Long sentences, embedded clauses, and metaphorical expressions mirror the workings of memory and unconscious thought.

These linguistic structures represent a continuous negotiation between conscious narration and unconscious recollection. The conflict is not overt but structural, embedded in the very form of language. Such discourse exemplifies Lacan's notion of language as a medium of unconscious expression.

Social Identity and Existential Tension

Jean-Paul Sartre's *La Nausée* portrays a protagonist whose philosophical discourse clashes with his existential anxiety. The character's speech is intellectually structured and abstract, yet it coexists with profound emotional discomfort and a sense of meaninglessness.

Here, psycholinguistic conflict arises between rational articulation and affective experience. The language of philosophy fails to resolve existential tension, revealing the limits of verbal rationalization. This conflict underscores the role of language as both a tool and a barrier in expressing inner reality.

Conclusion

The analysis demonstrates that psycholinguistic conflicts in French literary discourse are multifaceted and linguistically grounded. Characters' speech reflects internal contradictions, emotional struggles, and social pressures through lexical choice, syntactic structure, and pragmatic behavior.

The study confirms that literary language serves as a privileged site for observing the interaction between psychological processes and linguistic form. By applying a psycholinguistic lens, researchers can gain deeper insight into character construction and narrative meaning.

This research contributes to interdisciplinary scholarship by integrating linguistic analysis with literary interpretation. Future studies may expand the corpus or incorporate quantitative methods to further explore psycholinguistic phenomena in literary texts.

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