

REVIEW OF TEMPORALITY IN ROMANIAN EDITIONS OF THE STRANGER BY ALBERT CAMUS

Amelia-Diana MAROIU

Universitatea din Craiova
E-mail: amelia_maroiu@yahoo.com

REVIEW OF TEMPORALITY IN ROMANIAN EDITIONS OF THE STRANGER BY ALBERT CAMUS

Abstract: The *Stranger* novel, published in 1942 by Gallimard Publishing House, Paris, is a philosophical novel that shows the perspective of an absurd character, of the man alienated by himself and the others. From a linguistic perspective, what draws the attention in this novel is the construction of the speech regarding the expression of time. In this study we aim to analyse the manners in which temporality is expressed in the Romanian editions of *The Stranger* novel (editions of 1968 and 2019) from the perspective of Modes of Discourse, a theory broadly presented by Carlotta Smith in her study, *Modes of Discourse* (2003).

Keywords: tenses, temporality, *The Stranger*, discourse modes, semantics.

Citation suggestion: Maroiu, Amelia-Diana. "Review of Temporality in Romanian Editions of *The Stranger* by Albert Camus." *Transilvania*, no. 5 (2022): 46-51.
<https://doi.org/10.51391/trva.2022.05.06>.



1. Introduction

The Stranger novel, published in 1942 by Gallimard Publishing House, Paris, is a philosophical novel that shows the perspective of an absurd character, of the man alienated by himself and the others. The novel is structured in two parts. The first one briefly presents the existence of the character, his lack of aspirations, and his personality, which is not distinguished by anything special. The burial of the mother (the scene with which the novel opens), the renewal of a sentimental relationship with Maria, the friendship with Raymond and the visit to the seaside, which culminates with the time when Meursault kills an Arab, are described succinctly in the first part of the book. The second part, dedicated to introspection and the trial of the character, ending with the death sentence by beheading, outlines the portrait of Meursault from a different perspective, that of an ill-adjusted man, unsatisfied with his fate, but unable to do something in order to change it.

From a linguistic perspective, what draws the attention in this novel is the construction of the speech regarding the expression of time. Overall, the text seems to be a narration in which Compound Past (logo in text PC), in which are inserted forms of Imperfect (logo in text IMP), Pluperfect (logo in this text MMCP) or Present (logo in this text PR), as well. When reading it lightly, the narrative discourse of *The*

Stranger seems plain, with no special narrative techniques. However, the reader does not feel monotony or passivity even in the second part, when the Meursault is detained and the narrative perspective changes, with the emphasis on analysis and introspection. On the contrary, the use of verbal times, completed by other operators of time-expression (adverbs and constructions with temporal meaning), forms, on the one hand, an active support to capture the reader's attention and, on the other hand, portray the mental state of the absurd man, who is always on the move, while he is not aware of the fact. In this study we aim to analyze the manners in which temporality is expressed in the Romanian editions of *The Stranger* novel (editions of 1968 and 2019) from the perspective of Discourse Modes, a theory broadly presented by Carlota S. Smith in her study, *Modes of Discourse*¹.

2. Discourse modes theory

The discursive mode represents the set of ways in which a writer presents his material. A narrative or descriptive mode can be found in a text, depending on the author's intention and the typology of the text. The change in discursive mode is one of the most frequently used technique in literature.



Table 1: Tenses in discourse modes

Tenses	Interpretation	Short characterization	Discourse Mode
Present tense	Contemporaneous with time of narration, universal truths	The narrator presents the states of affairs in relation to his own point in time	<i>Report</i>
Perfect tense	Anterior to time of narration		
Future tense	Posterior to time of narration		
Present tense	Contemporaneous with time of narration (only)	The narrator relates what he experiences in his immediate environment	<i>Registering</i>
Perfect tense	Bounded in reference time (in past of narrator)	The narrator tells a story	<i>Narrative</i>
Imperfect tense	Unbounded in reference time (in past of narrator)		
Pluperfect tense	Anterior to reference time (in past of narrator)		
Present tense	Contemporaneous with time of narration	The narrator gives the visible characteristics of an object or location	<i>Description</i>
Imperfect tense	Unbounded in reference time		

Tab. 1: after Smith, C. (2003)

The semantic value of a verbal time directly influences the discursive mode of the text. Narrator's choice to use a verbal time at the expense of another will influence both narration and reader's perception. The Present Time, for example, will draw the reader's attention precisely because the semantic values of this time associate it with the general-valid truths and the real action. The use of a Past, on the other hand, will change the perspective by entering a temporal distance between the moment of the statement and the moment implicated by the verb.

2.1 Narrative Mode in the 1968 Romanian Rendition of *The Stranger*

The narrative mode, based on the alternation of PC, IMP and MMCP, may be defined as the manner the narrator uses to an episode of his own past. In the novel *The Stranger* this is one of the main ways in which Meursault, both a narrator and a character, tells his story. It is the PC that gives the idea of advance narration, while IMP intervenes as a break in speech. Is eloquent the passage at the morgue:

“În clipa aceea, portarul a apărut în spatele meu. Alergase pe semne. S-a cam bâlbâit: ‘Am acoperit-o, dar trebuie să deşurubez capacul ca s-o puteţi vedea.’ Se apropia de sicriu când l-am oprit. Mi-a spus: ‘Nu vreţi?’ Am răspuns: ‘Nu!’ El s-a oprit şi eu mă simţeam prost, pentru că îmi dădeam seama că n-ar fi trebuit să spun asta.”²

“Just then the keeper came up behind me. He'd evidently been running, as he was a little out of breath. ‘We put the lid on, but I was told to unscrewy it when you came, so that you could see her’. While he was going up to the coffin I told him not to trouble. ‘Eh? What's that?’ he exclaimed. ‘You don't

want me to...?’ ‘No,’ I said. He put back the screwdriver in his pocket and stared at me. I realizes then that I shouldn't have said ‘No’, and it made me rather embarrassed.”³

In order to define the concept of narrative mode, it is necessary to link issues such as the timeline of a text, its reference time, the degree in which the events report to the reference time and the change of reference time. About the text chronology, it may be viewed as the central line of any narration, on which the reported events will be placed. Depending on how the action is ordered on the narrative line, it leads to the concept of reference time. Each text has a reference time, which is not always the time of the report. Also, during the development of the narration, several reference times can be further introduced, in which case the reference time is advancing, changing along with the narration. Reporting events to a reference time results in the use of certain verbal times. The previous relationships with the reference time will be shown in a form of perfect, a future action in a form of future, while expressing a simultaneous action with the reference time will be marked by the present time. Advancing the reference time is a specific aspect of narrative mode. Generally speaking, the advance of the reference time, related to the semantics of the verbal times, is dependent on the used verbal time. Thus, the forms of perfect will move the reference time forward, while an imperfect will keep the reference time static.

From a linguistic perspective, the advancement of the reference time leads to the division of the actions expressed by verbs into two categories: actions that are dependant on the reference time to define their time limits, and actions that extend indefinitely without reference to the reference point. The next example will illustrate both types of actions:

“Afară, totul era liniștit, am auzit mersul lin al unui automobil care trecea. Am spus: ‘E târziu’. Raymond socotea și el la fel. A făcut observația că timpul trece repede și, într-un sens, era adevărat. Mi-era somn, dar îmi venea greu să mă ridic în picioare.”⁴

“The street was quite quiet, except when now and again a car passed. Finally, I remarked that it was getting late, and Raymond agreed. ‘Time’s gone mighty fast this evening’, he added, and in a way that was true. I wanted to be in bed, only it was such an effort making a move.”⁵

The verbs with imperfective form bear the meaning that their action will last even after the moment of speaking, while the PC forms indicate actions that were completed in the past, so they have both starting and ending point within their meaning. The reference time reporting classifies the actions denoted by the verbs into events and situations. Events are the actions that have a fixed duration of deployment, while situations do not have an established time frame.

Regarding the advance of the reference time, the situations do not change its position, precisely because they do not have a clear time frame. On the contrary, events will advance the reference time. It can be observed that two or more events, together within one sentence, will advance the action, as can be seen in the next example:

“Am lucrat bine toată săptămâna, Raymond a venit și mi-a spus că a trimis scrisoarea. M-am dus de două ori la cinema cu Emmanuel...”⁶ “I had a bust time in the office throughout the week. Raymond dropped in once to tell me he’d sent off the letter. I went to the pictures twice with Emmanuel...”⁷

The event indicated by *am lucrat* [I worked] is earlier than the one reported by the verb *a venit* [came]. There is a coordination report between the verb *a venit* [came] and the verb *mi-a spus* [told me], which indicates that they took place almost in the same time. About the next form of PC, although it indicates a completed action, it can be inferred from the context that it happened before the time suggested by the previous verbs. The verb *am mers* [I went], unrelated to those in the preceding phrase, indicates the advance of the action, and the shift of the reference time (after Raymond’s arrival).

When it comes to situations, they are static, without changing the reference time. They do not have a clear starting point, so it can be said that they started at an indefinite time in the past, and it is not possible to specify when they will end. The narrative mode is also characterized by the existence of starting situations, which are derived from the categories of situations and events. Starting situations are not defined by their end point, as they have a very strong starting point. They are accompanied by the adverbs as “suddenly” or “then”, who give details of when the action starts. There are also situations when is necessary to use a starting situation when the context requires it in order to switch to another category of situations. A sequence of starting situations, with the effect of progressing the action, can be seen in the following paragraph:

“Azi-dimineață Maria a rămas la mine și eu i-am spus că vom lua masa împreună. Am coborât ca să cumpăr carne. Pe când urcam înapoi, am auzit o voce de femeie în camera lui Raymond. Puțin după aceea, bătrânul Salamanșo și-a certat câinele, am auzit zgomot de pași și de gheare pe treptele de lemn ale scării...”⁸

“Marie said she was free next morning, so I proposed she should have luncheon with me. She agreed, and I went down to buy some meat. On my way back I heard a woman’s voice in Raymond’s room. A little later old Salamanșo started grumbling at his dog and presently there was a sound of boots and paws on the wooden stairs...”⁹

2.2 Foreground and Background in the 1968 Romanian Rendition of *The Stranger*

Another linguistic perspective on advancing the reference time divides narrative text into foreground and background. The opposition between these two leads to two levels of perception of the text. The first layer would include the text as a whole, and as sub-levels, it would be the foreground of the central narrative line of the text, and the background would include the indications, comments, supporting information, etc. The second level proposes a linguistic analysis of the text, centered on the identification of textual modes (narrative, descriptive, etc.), as it reviews oppositions such as events/situations, progressive/finished actions, as well as starting situations. Thus, static situations, which do not advance the reference time, are considered as background, while events and starting situations are in the foreground, since they change the reference time.

Alternating all of these narrative modes will lead to the fluid progress of narration in a text. In the novel *The Stranger*, the account is located in the past, as such, the narrative mode used in the text is distinguished by the use of past times: PC, IMP and MMCP. As said, IMP is used for stationary situations, while PC will be used to advance narrative time.

“A bătut la ușă și s-a făcut tăcere. A bătut mai tare și, după puțin timp, femeia a plâns și Raymond a deschis. Avea o țigară în gură și o expresie dulceagă. (...) ‘Numele’, a spus polițaiul. Raymond a răspuns. ‘Lasă țigara când vorbești cu mine’, a spus polițaiul. Raymond a șovăit, s-a uitat la mine și a tras un fum. (...) În acest timp, femeia plângea.”¹⁰ “When he banged on the door the noise stopped inside the room. He knocked again, and, after a moment, the woman started crying, and Raymond opened the door. He had a cigarette dangling from his underlip and a rather sickly smile. (...) ‘Your name? Raymond gave his name. ‘Take that cigarette out of your mouth when you’re talking to me’, the policeman said gruffly. Raymond hesitated, glanced at me, and kept the cigarette in his mouth. (...) Meanwhile the girl went on sobbing...”¹¹



2.3 The Description Mode in the 1968 Romanian Rendition of *The Stranger*

The description mode is defined by the lack of temporal progression. It is used to describe the environment, characters, and features, as well as to transmit certain feelings of the narrator or the characters. A descriptive text contains more verbs that do not have a defined reference point; also, temporal adverbs are not encountered in this type of text. The specific tense of this mode is IMP, especially the descriptive IMP. This tense is specific for descriptive paragraphs. Its progressive feature doesn't allow to locate the temporal length of the action it implies. These situations described with this tense take place before the moment of speaking and, also, before the reference time, but they don't have a specific starting or ending point. The paragraph that describes a Sunday evening on the streets of Algiers is an example of descriptive mode, with a distinctive use of IMP:

“Copiii plângeau sau se lăsau târâți spre casă. (...) Printre aceștia, tinerii aveau gesturi mai hotărâte ca de obicei și m-am gândit că văzuseră un film de aventuri. (...) Fetele din cartier, cu capul descoperit, se țineau de braț. Băieții potriviseră așa ca să se întâlnească față în față cu ele și le aruncau glume de care fetele râdeau întorcând capul.”¹²

“Children were whimpering and trailing wearily after their parents. (...) I noticed that the young fellows coming from them were taking longer strides and gesturing more vigorously than at ordinary times; doubtless the picture they'd been seeing was of the wild-West variety. (...) A group of girls came by, walking arm in arm. The young men under my window swerved so as to brush against them, and shouted humorous remarks, which made the girls turn their heads and giggle.”¹³

The descriptive paragraphs play an important role in the narrative discourse, as they outline some features of the environment or of the characters. It's the tense that makes the moment indefinite long, and the effect is one of overlasting oppressive atmosphere.

“Soarele cădea aproape vertical pe nisip și strălucirea lui pe mare îți lua ochii. Nu mai era nimeni pe plajă. În vilizoarele care mărgineau platoul și care dominau marea se auzea zgomot de farfurii și de tacâmuri. Abia puteai respira în căldura de piatră pe care o degaja solul.”

“The light was almost vertical and the glare from the water seared one's eyes. The beach was quite deserted now. One could hear a faint tinkle of knives and forks and crockery in the shacks and bungalows lining the foreshore. Heat was welling up from the rocks, and one could hardly breathe.”¹⁴

3. Modes of Discourse in the 2019 Rendition of *The Stranger*

The 2019 Romanian edition of the novel *The Stranger* by Albert Camus contains about 1930 PC uses, while only 1770 were

encountered in the first edition of the same novel in 1968. As regards the number of forms of IMP, there are around 1260 uses of IMP, compared with the almost 1450 forms encountered in the first edition of the same Romanian edition from 1968. Also, the 2019 edition contains about 350 MMPC uses, compared to the almost 310 that were found in the first edition of the same novel in 1968.

The modes of discourse are based on certain rules that guide the progress of speech, rules relating to the organization of the text and the involved grammatical structures. Progression of a text is achieved through changes in the time or spatial location. Narrative mode and reporting mode make the advancing of the text possible. The descriptive mode involves static action.

3.1 Narrative Mode in the 2019 Romanian Rendition of *The Stranger*

The narrative mode, broadly used in the discourse, has the same role of advancing narrative and changing the reference time. It can be said that the differences from the 1968 edition of the same novel are more of a translational nature (aimed at adapting the translation to the current requirements). However, we will illustrate with examples how the narrative mode is rendered, at the textual level, especially by using PC, IMP or MMCP verbal times. The paragraph that replays the meeting between Meursault, Raymond and old Salamano is an example of narrative mode, based in particular on the use of several verbs that indicate starting situations, advancing the reference time:

“Raymond a râs și a intrat în clădire. L-am urmat și ne-am despărțit pe palierul etajului. După câteva clipe am auzit pașii bătrânului, care apoi mi-a bătut în ușă. Când am deschis, a rămas în prag și mi-a spus: ‘Scuzați, scuzați’. L-am poftit să intre, dar m-a refuzat.”¹⁵ “Raymond gave a laugh and turned into the hall. I followed him upstairs, and we parted on the landing. A minute or two later I heard Salamano's footsteps and a knock on my door. When I opened it, he halted for a moment in the doorway. ‘Excuse me... I hope I'm not disturbing you’. I asked him in, but he shook his head.”¹⁶

The alternation of several narrative-specific time plans is also visible in the discussion between Salamano and Meursault:

“L-am găsit pe bătrânul Salamano chiar în pragul ușii mele. L-am poftit să intre și m-a înștiințat că potaia dispăruse, fiindcă nu era la ecarisaj. Hingherii îi spusese că poate fusese călcată de vreo mașină. Îi întrebese dacă ar putea să-i dea de urmă prin comisariatele de poliție. I-au răspuns că asemenea lucruri nu sunt păstrate în evidențe...”¹⁷

“As I was turning in at my door I ran into old Salamano. I asked him into my room, and he informed me that his dog was definitely lost. He'd been to the pound to inquire, but it wasn't there, and the staff told him it had probably been run

over. When he asked them whether it was any use inquiring about it at the police station, they said the police had more important things to attend to than keeping records of stray dogs run over in the streets.]¹⁸

The remote, distant plan of MMCP tense can be noticed (vanished, said, had been, asked), with actions completed in an indefinite past, followed by the PC tense plan (invited, notified, responded), the IMP's tense plan, without any temporal markers, and a fourth time plan, that of PR tense (are not).

Foreground and Background in the 2019 Romanian Rendition of *The Stranger*

Reporting the actions to the reference time results in the division of the text into foreground and background. Actions that advance the reference time are considered as foreground, while predictions that indicate an uncompleted action without advance of the reference time are part of the background. An example of situations where the foreground and background interfere can be seen in the following paragraph:

“Mi-a explicat atunci că de asta are nevoie de un sfat. A făcut o pauză, ca să potrivească fitilul lămpii care fumea. Eu continuam să-l ascult. Băusem aproape un litru de vin și mi se înfierbântaseră tâmplele.”¹⁹

“He explained that it was about this he wanted my advice. The lamp was smoking, and he stopped pacing up and down the room, to lower the wick. I just listened, without speaking. I'd had a whole bottle of wine to myself and my head was buzzing.”²⁰

In this example, it strikes the progressive aspect of the verbs in IMP, as well as their lack of specific temporal location. Also, there are no other semantic means to give further information about their duration or their starting point. On the other side, advancing the reference time is made with the verb in PC or MMCP. Their interaction generates three temporal levels in the text, all of them belonging to the past area: MMCP—the most distant one, PC—the intermediate, and IMP—the closest to the moment of speaking, but an indefinite, progressive one.

3.3 The Descriptive Mode in the 2019 Romanian Rendition of *The Stranger*

In the narrative speech of Albert Camus's novel *The Stranger*

(2019 edition), there are many examples of using the descriptive mode. The second part of the book, centered on introspection, has such situations:

“Îmi stăruiau neîntrerupt în minte și alte două lucruri: ivirea zorilor și acțiunea mea de recurs. Totuși mă stăpâneam și încercam să le dau uitării. Mă lungeam la orizontală, priveam cerul și mă străduiam să-l cercetez cu atenție. Dacă se făcea verde era seară...”²¹ “There were two things about which I was always thinking: the dawn and my appeal. However, I did my best to keep my mind off these thoughts. I lay down, looked up at the sky, and forced myself to study it. When the light began to turn green I knew that night was coming.”²²

The lack of dynamics in the narration can, also, be observed in the description of Meursault's inner thoughts and feelings, when he's analyzing the time spent in prison: “cât era ziua de lungă, mă gândeam la recurs. Nici că se putea să folosesc mai bine o asemenea idee. Îmi calculam șansele și obțineam cel mai bun randament de pe urma reflecțiilor mele.”²³ “Then all day there was my appeal to think about. I made the most of this idea, studying my effects so as to squeeze out the maximum of consolation.”²⁴

Conclusions

The novel *The Stranger* by Albert Camus, as a philosophical novel, presents difficulties in translation, both from a stylistic point of view (because it is intended to preserve the effect of the text on the reader), but also from a semantic point of view (it aims at finding closest equivalent possible of a verbal tense, starting from the French (source) language, and ending in the Romanian (target) language. The 1968 Romanian edition uses the semantic translation model, with fidelity toward the text and the author's intention. Using certain tenses, along other means of expressing temporality, creates, on one side, an active support to draw reader's attention, and, on the other side, it creates a portrait of the mental state of an absurd character. Summarizing all these aspects, we can conclude that the alternation of verbal tenses constantly influences the reader's perception of characters and narration, they become truer as the action takes place. It can therefore be said that the time expressed by so many different means determines both the narration and the typology of the characters.

Notes:

1. Carlota S. Smith, *Modes of Discourse. The Local Structure of Texts* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).
2. A. Camus, *Străinul*, trad. Georgeta Horodincă (București: Editura pentru Literatură, 1968), 6.
3. Camus, *The Stranger* (New York: Vintage Books, 1954), 6.
4. Camus, *Străinul*, 28.
5. Camus, *The Stranger*, 41.
6. Camus, *Străinul*, 28.



7. Camus, *The stranger*, 42
8. Camus, *Străinul*, 29-30.
9. Camus, *The Stranger*, 44.
10. Camus, *Străinul*, 30-31.
11. Camus, *The Stranger*, 45-46.
12. Camus, *Străinul*, 20.
13. Camus, *The Stranger*, 28-29.
14. Camus, *The Stranger*, 66-67.
15. Camus, *Străinul* 2019, 59-60.
16. Camus, *The Stranger*, 49.
17. Camus, *Străinul* 2019, 73-74.
18. Camus, *The Stranger*, 56.
19. Camus, *Străinul* (2019), 52.
20. Camus, *The Stranger*, 38-39.
21. Camus, *Străinul* (2019), 182.
22. Camus, *The Stranger*, 141.
23. Camus, *Străinul* (2019), 184.
24. Camus, *The Stranger*, 142.

Bibliography:

- *** *Gramatica Limbii Române* (GALR) [The Grammar of the Romanian Language]. vol. I, vol. II, Bucharest: Editura Academiei Române, 1963.
- Becker, Martin G., and Eva-Maria Remberger, eds. *Modality and Mood in Romance: Modal Interpretation, Mood Selection and Mood Alternation*. Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter & Co, 2010.
- Bidu-Vrănceanu, Angela, Cristina Călărășu, Liliana Ionescu-Ruxăndoiu, Mihaela Mancaș, and Gabriela Pană Dindelegan. *Dicționar de științe ale limbii* (DSL) [Dictionary of Language Sciences]. Bucharest: Editura Nemira, 2001.
- Cabillau, Jean-François. "L'expression du temps dans 'L'Étranger' d'Albert Camus" [The Expression of Time in 'The Stranger' by Albert Camus]. *Revue Belge de philologie et d'histoire*, no. 49 (1971): 866-874.
- Camus, Albert. *Străinul* [The Stranger]. Iași: Editura Polirom, 2019.
- Camus, Albert. *Străinul* [The Stranger]. Translated by Georgeta Horodincă. Bucharest: Editura pentru Literatură, 1968.
- Camus, Albert. *The Stranger*. New York: Vintage Books, 1954.
- Corre, E. "The Expression of Tense, Aspect, Modality and Evidentiality in Albert Camus's 'L'Étranger' and Its Translations." *Linguisticae Investigationes, Supplementa*, no. 35, (2017): 161-183.
- Hogeweg, Lott, Helen de Hoop and Andrej Malchukov, eds. *Cross-linguistic Semantics of Tense, Aspect and Modality*. Amsterdam and Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2009.
- Metzeltin, Michael. *Gramatica explicativă a limbilor române. Sintaxă și semantică* [Explanatory Grammar of Romance Languages. Syntax and Semantics]. Iași: Editura Universității "Alexandru Ioan Cuza", 2011.
- Palmer, F. R. *Mood and Modality*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986.
- Popescu, Cecilia-Mihaela. *Exprimarea potențialului și a irealului în latină, franceză și română*, [Expressing Potential and Unreal in Latin, French and Romanian]. Craiova: Editura Universitaria, 2015.
- Popescu, Cecilia-Mihaela. *Viitorul și condiționalul în limbile române. Abordare morfosintactică și categorizare semantică din perspectivă diacronică* [The Future and the Conditional in Romance Languages. Morphosyntactic Approach and Semantic Categorization from a Diachronic Perspective]. Craiova: Editura Universitaria, 2013.
- Reinheimer-Rîpeanu, Sanda. *Linguistica romanică. Lexic, morfologie, fonetică* [Romance Linguistics. Lexicon, Morphology, Phonetics]. Bucharest: Editura All Universitar, 2001.
- Smith, S. Carlota. *Modes of Discourse*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003.
- Uricaru, Lucia. *Temporalitate și limbaj* [Temporality and Language]. Bucharest: Editura ALLFA, 2003.