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Nonverbal Communication, Silence and Cultural expressions in Jean-Paul Sartre's literary Concept: A Philosophical Language and Art View

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Abstract. Existing scholarship on Jean-Paul Sartre's literary works predominantly discussed his overarching philosophy of existentialism with extra attention given to his political activism and reflections on Marxism, colonialism and social justice. However, the investigation of nonverbal communication in his literary creations remains a relatively unexplored area in

academic discourse. The study addressed this gap by analysing the symbolic meanings conveyed through characters' nonverbal cues, specifically, body language, gestures, facial expressions and spatial dynamics in Sartre's (1944) play "*Huis clos*". The research methodology entailed a comprehensive examination of nonverbal communication in the study's sample text. This analysis involved a combination of qualitative and textual approaches. Qualitative methods were utilised to interpret and understand the symbolic meanings conveyed through nonverbal cues such as body language, gestures, facial expressions, and spatial dynamics. Textual analysis involved a detailed examination of the play's dialogue and stage directions to identify instances of nonverbal communication and their significance within the context of the narrative. Grounded in semiotics and existentialist theory, the study aimed to assess cultural expressions and literary interpretations on how nonverbal cues and moments of silence contributed to character development, and thematic examination in the play. The study findings reveal that nonverbal communication, which included gestures, facial expressions, and body language, served as a significant source of meaning and symbolism in literature. The analysis identified ways in which nonverbal elements reinforced and articulated Sartre's philosophical perspectives, and exposed interpersonal dynamics among humans. Also, the study unravelled symbolic meanings and adds a unique layer to the assimilation of Sartre's concepts and its implications on human relationships. The study's contribution lies in its focused examination of nonverbal communication, which enriches scholarly discourse in contemporary society.

Keywords: Nonverbal communication, cultural interpretations, silent expressions, 20th century French literature, Jean-Paul Sartre, *Huis clos*.

Introduction

The development of French literature has followed a diverse and rich path, marked by distinct periods that reflected cultural, social, and philosophical changes both within France and globally (Agwu & Ashabua, 2024). To them, "From the medieval *chansons de geste*- which are typical epic poems of French literature, to the intellectual fervour of Renaissance humanism and the Enlightenment, this literary genre has functioned as a reflection of the collective consciousness of the nation" (p. 36). According to Elikwu and Agwu (2023), French literature, known for its rich tradition of innovation and influence has not remained untouched. It has ventured into uncharted territory that embraced the fusion of technology and narrative imagination to create a distinctive domain known as French digital literature. They affirm that "this new field represents a significant shift that merges traditional storytelling with modern technological advancements to expand the possibilities of literary expression".

Similarly, Duffy et al. (2021), examines the evolving field of French and Francophone studies focusing on the nineteenth-century. They highlight how the field has adapted to incorporate emerging critical theories and methodologies that reflect contemporary complexities and historical perspectives. The 20th century French literature has witnessed the emergence of a multitude of influential writers who explored profound themes and pushed the boundaries of literary expression. This era saw the rise of literary movements like existentialism, surrealism, and the Nouveau Roman, which challenged traditional narrative

structures and explored the complexities of the human experience. Among these remarkable writers, Jean-Paul Sartre stood as a towering figure, renowned for his philosophical ideas and his impact on both French literature and existentialist philosophy.

Furthermore, French literature at this period, gained from the remarkable works of other writers such as Marcel Proust, Albert Camus, and Simone de Beauvoir and a host of others. Proust's (1927) monumental novel *À la recherche du temps perdu* translated in English as *In Search of Lost Time*, explored themes of memory, love, and social mores, while Albert Camus communicated existentialist ideas through works like *L'Étranger* (*The Stranger*) published in (Camus, 1942) and *La Peste* (Camus, 1947). Simone de Beauvoir's (1949) feminist masterpiece *Le Deuxième Sexe* (*The Second Sex*) challenged societal norms and advocated for gender equality. These writers, along with many others, shaped the literary landscape of 20th century France, setting the stage for Jean-Paul Sartre's influential contributions (Beauvoir, 1949).

Jean-Paul Sartre, a philosopher, novelist, and playwright, emerged as a central figure in French intellectual and literary circles during the mid-20th century. He was a key proponent of existentialism, a philosophical movement that focused on the individual's freedom, responsibility, and the inherent meaninglessness of existence. Sartre's works not only influenced philosophy but also left an indelible impact on French literature. His writings examined the complexities of human existence, the struggle for authenticity, and the connection between freedom and social expectations. Among Sartre's notable literary works, the play *Huis clos* (*No Exit*) stands as a captivating example of his exploration of existential themes (Sartre, 1947).

Sartre's academic journey at the École Normale Supérieure and his philosophical partnership with Simone de Beauvoir were crucial in shaping his existentialist views. Influenced by German philosophers such as Edmund Husserl and Martin Heidegger, Sartre's pre-war writings delved into phenomenology and the nature of consciousness. His novel *La Nausée* (1938) and story collection *Le Mur* (1939) explored themes of existential absurdity and human action, setting the stage for the existential analysis he would later develop. According to Mambrol (2020), "*No Exit*" reflects these existential concerns, illustrating the torment of being constantly judged by others and the notion that individuals have the freedom to change their circumstances, yet often choose to remain in self-imposed hells". Through their dialogue and interactions, Sartre skilfully examined the nature of human relationships, the consequences of personal choices, and the absence of escape from oneself.

The philosophy of language and art investigates the link between human expression, perception, and interpretation, which often address questions of meaning, representation, and aesthetic experience. In this framework, language is understood not only as a means of communication but also as a medium through which reality is constructed and interpreted. Similarly, art is seen as a form of expression that embodies and communicates ideas, emotions, and experiences that transcends linguistic boundaries. Sartre's philosophy emphasizes the existential nature of human existence, asserting that individuals define themselves through their actions and choices. Language, for Sartre, is not merely a tool for communication but a fundamental aspect of human consciousness and freedom. In his literary works, such as *Nausea*

(1938) and *Being and Nothingness* (1943), Sartre portrays characters battling with the limitations of language to express their innermost thoughts and experiences.

Research Problem

While extensive scholarship on Jean-Paul Sartre's literary works has thoroughly examined his existentialist philosophy, political activism and reflections on Marxism, colonialism and social justice, a significant gap remains in the assessment of nonverbal communication, silence and cultural expressions in his narratives. Sartre's body of work provides a fertile ground for exploring how these elements operate not only as literary tools but also as profound manifestations of his philosophical inquiries. This research sought to fill this gap by addressing ways in which nonverbal communication and silence conveyed existential themes, as well as how cultural expressions reflected and challenged societal norms in Sartre's literature. By shifting the focus to these underexplored dimensions, the study aimed to uncover new viewpoints into Sartre's artistic vision and its implications for the philosophy of language and art. This study enhanced a more comprehensive understanding of Sartre's literary contributions which showcased the rapport between verbal and nonverbal elements in articulating his existentialist thought.

Research Focus

This study focused on the theme of nonverbal communication and silence in French literature, with a specific emphasis on Sartre's play, *Huis clos* as sample text. The purpose of this research was to assess the cultural expressions and literary interpretations that arose from the utilisation of nonverbal signals and moments of silence within the play. To analyse this theme, a theoretical framework rooted in semiotics and existentialist theory guided the examination. Semiotics provided a framework for understanding the symbolic meanings conveyed through nonverbal communication, such as body language, gestures, and facial expressions. Concurrently, existentialist theory illuminated the existential themes present in Sartre's work and explored how silence and unspoken interactions contributed to the examination of these themes.

Research Aim and Research Objectives

The aim of this study was to investigate the roles and significance of nonverbal communication, silence, and cultural expressions in Jean-Paul Sartre's literary works, examining how these elements contributed to and enhanced the understanding of his existentialist philosophy. The objectives were:

1. To conduct a comprehensive analysis of the symbolic meanings conveyed through nonverbal cues in the interactions of characters.
2. To evaluate the cultural expressions embedded in the nonverbal communication of the characters, while placing a specific focus on their relevance within the broader context of French literature.

3. To explore the impact of nonverbal communication on character development, and showcase how these elements shape the narrative to the overarching themes presented by Sartre.
4. To apply relevant theoretical frameworks in order to interpret the nonverbal cues and moments of silence in Sartre's work.

Systematic Review of Related Literature

Nonverbal communication and silence play significant roles in human communication and literary expression. This narrative review aimed to explore the existing research and interpretations surrounding nonverbal communication and silence in the context of cultural expressions and literary interpretations. By examining a range of scholarly works, this review sought to shed light on the underexplored aspects of literary concepts and to highlight the gaps in the literature that necessitated the present study.

Akinbode (2023) gives a critical analysis of Jean-Paul Sartre's concept of existential freedom. He highlights Sartre's assertion that freedom is essential for authentic living, a common theme among existentialists. Akinbode (2023) posits that Sartre argues in *Being and Nothingness* that humans possess absolute freedom, meaning they are not constrained by external factors or predetermined essences. This freedom is fundamental to creating one's own meaning and purpose in life. Sartre freedom closely links with responsibility, suggesting that individuals are entirely responsible for their actions and the meanings they create. This notion serves as a moral compass for leading an authentic existence. The paper analysed potential conflicts between Sartre's notion of freedom and universal moral principles. Akinbode (2023) argues that Sartre's radical freedom might be at odds with the idea of universal moral norms, leading to ethical dilemmas. Akinbode's (2023) analysis focuses primarily on the philosophical aspects of freedom. The investigation does not consider how silence functions as a philosophical and literary device in Sartre's works. More so, Akinbode's (2023) article connects Sartre's ideas with contemporary philosophical debates but does not explore how these ideas align with modern theories on nonverbal communication and cultural expressions. Premised on the above research gap, the current study focused on the significance of silence in Sartre's narratives and its impact on existential and philosophical interpretations.

Siegler's (2022) article, discusses the relationship between action and technology in Jean-Paul Sartre's philosophical works. Siegler (2022) examines how Sartre's reflections on human action are consistently interconnected with considerations of technology to illustrate the philosopher's approach to the link between individuals and their sociotechnical environments. The article highlights how Sartre's concept of human action is inherently linked to the practical use of technological artefacts. Technology is seen as instrumental, serving as a means to achieve human ends while being shaped by the practical context of human existence. The study posits that while technology does not dictate human action, the material properties of technological artefacts influence their suitability for various purposes. Sartre's notion of "practical ensembles" refers to the societal structures that constrain individuals' choices and necessitate the use of available means to fulfil their needs and desires. The article briefly outlines how Sartre's thoughts on action and technology can contribute to contemporary debates in the

philosophy of technology. It underscores the relevance of Sartre's ideas in understanding the dialectical relationship between humans and their technological environment.

Siegler's (2022) article is a significant contribution to the understanding of Sartre's philosophy, particularly in the context of technology and action. By situating Sartre's reflections within contemporary philosophical debates, Siegler (2022) highlights the enduring relevance of Sartre's ideas. His examination of the dialectics of action and technology in Jean-Paul Sartre's philosophy highlights additional areas for further research. These gaps indicate the necessity for more studies delving into Sartre's literary concepts from the perspectives of philosophy, language, and art. Siegler's (2022) article does not address how nonverbal communication, such as gestures, facial expressions, and body language, is depicted in Sartre's literary works. The lacuna created validates the current research that examined how these nonverbal elements contributed to the philosophical themes and character interactions in Sartre's narratives.

Leung's (2022) article provides thought-provoking comparative study of Sartre and Marion to demonstrate the continued relevance and depth of Sartre's phenomenology in contemporary philosophical and theoretical contexts, especially his treatment of the viscous slime in *Being and Nothingness*. The study also offers viewpoints on Jean-Luc Marion's later phenomenological concepts, particularly his notion of the saturated phenomenon. Leung (2022) frames Sartre's ideas within Marion's 'phenomenality-oriented' phenomenology, contrasting it with the 'subject-oriented' perspective. This comparison aims to underscore the phenomenological depth in Sartre's treatment of the viscous slime, which contemporary theory has frequently interpreted in speculative or metaphorical terms rather than through a phenomenological perspective. Leung (2022) concludes by discussing how Sartre's atheistic phenomenology can illuminate aspects of Marion's supposed theological turn. The article also suggests that Sartre's analysis of nonhuman phenomena like the viscous slime can contribute to current social and cultural theories, especially those concerned with the agency of inanimate objects. However, while Leung's (2022) article focuses on the viscous slime, it does not address how nonverbal communication such as gestures and body language is depicted in Sartre's phenomenological framework. Therefore, further research is needed to explore how Sartre's phenomenology addresses nonverbal communication and silence. Investigating how silence functions as a philosophical and existential element in Sartre's writings provide new perspectives into his treatment of human consciousness and interaction.

Duffy et al.'s (2021) article presents a comprehensive and insightful overview of the dynamic shifts in nineteenth-century French studies, demonstrating the field's responsiveness to contemporary critical approaches. The integration of diverse areas such as postcolonial studies, ecocriticism, and disability studies illustrates the discipline's expansion beyond traditional literary analysis to encompass broader cultural and social inquiries. Their discussion on ecocriticism and the blue humanities highlights a growing academic and public interest in environmental issues and human interactions with natural spaces. By highlighting the historical roots of these concerns, the authors effectively bridge past and present, showing how nineteenth-century French literature can inform current environmental discourse. While Duffy et al.'s (2021) article provides a comprehensive overview of the dynamic shifts in nineteenth-century French studies, it also opens several avenues for further research. These

gaps underscore the need for continued exploration into less examined areas, particularly in the area of nonverbal communication, silence, and cultural expressions in literature.

Sullivan's (2021) article, discusses and outlines how Sartre's ideas prefigure modern theoretical turns in the humanities by focusing on four main themes: agentic qualities of matter, unintended consequences of human activity, capitalism and passive exigency and biological alteration through practical activities. Sullivan posit in the study how Sartre posited that matter is not passive but reacts to human actions and can influence the course of these actions. Also, Sartre highlighted that human activities in the material world lead to unintended and cumulative consequences. The study equally demonstrates how Sartre's capitalism creates relationships where human subjects become passive entities, functioning like machines within the system. These notions aligns with new materialist views that emphasize the active role of non-human entities in shaping human experiences and social realities. Sullivan's article provides an overview of new materialism, noting both its affinities and divergences with Sartre's Critique. It further explores Sartre's social theory of ensembles or assemblages of human actors, demonstrating the relevance of his theory to contemporary biopolitical and post-structuralist discussions on revolutionary collective action.

No doubt, this article makes innovative connections between Sartre's existentialism and modern theoretical frameworks, showing how Sartre's insights remain relevant and can inform current academic debates. However, the work opens up several avenues for further research, particularly in the context of nonverbal communication, silence, and cultural expressions in Sartre's literary concepts. These gaps underscore the need for a deeper examination of how Sartre's philosophical ideas are expressed through nonverbal means and cultural elements in his literary works. Premised on the above, further research focusing on identifying and analysing these nonverbal elements in Sartre's novels and plays is necessary.

McDonnell's (2020) work, *Jean-Paul Sartre the European*, challenges the common perception of Sartre as an intellectual hostile to Europe, primarily fuelled by his famous 1961 preface to Frantz Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth*. This article re-evaluates Sartre's multifaceted engagement with the idea of Europe throughout various decades. McDonnell (2020) examines Sartre's critical concept, and positive considerations of Europe and being European within the context of his evolving philosophical project and the socio-political landscape. This includes the impact of fascism, the Second World War, post-war international relations, and the emergence of the Third World. McDonnell (2020) believes that Sartre's contribution is framed as an exploration of a "knotted Europe," which reflects the tension between provincialisation and a commitment to universalism, that position Europe as an on-going project rather than a static identity. Though, McDonnell's (2020) work provides background to Sartre's complex relationship with Europe, there is a lacuna created, in relation to Sartre's philosophical considerations, particularly regarding freedom and facticity, manifest in the nonverbal aspects of communication and silence.

Lamola's (2018) essay, *Jean-Paul Sartre and the Agenda of an Africanist Philosophy of Liberation*, has a dual focus. The theoretical aspect aims to establish the logical connection between the implications of a contextual African philosophy and the necessity of committing to an emancipatory discourse. At a practical level, the essay addresses the pertinent subject

matter or agenda of this African emancipatory discourse. Lamola (2018) builds on theoretical foundations to advocate for the liberation of mainstream philosophy from denigration of non-Euro-American epistemological traditions and methodological shifts seen in Latin American philosophers of liberation, particularly Enrique Dussel. Lamola (2018) contends that a contextual African philosophy should critically reflect on the pain, humiliations, chaos, anger, and aspirations of post-colonial Africa. While Lamola (2018) argues about the socio-philosophical challenges facing African identity, there is still a need to understand the extent to which nonverbal communication and silence manifest in the psycho-philosophical sphere of African Selfhood.

This review highlighted the significance of nonverbal communication and silence in cultural expressions and literary interpretations. Through the identification of research gaps in existing works, it became evident that there was limited attention given to the intersection between nonverbal communication, silence, and specific cultural contexts in various literary traditions. This study proposed to address these gaps in order to clarify how nonverbal cues and silence conveyed cultural differences, identities, and power dynamics in African, Latin American, East Asian, and postcolonial literature.

Theoretical framework: Semiotic and Existentialist Theories

The semiotic theory, also known as semiotics, developed by the Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure (2011), is the study of signs and symbols and their meaning in communication. It is a branch of semiotics that examines how signs function as a system of communication and representation. The theory examines how both verbal and nonverbal signs convey meaning and shape human understanding. At its core, semiotic theory posits that signs consist of two essential components: the signifier and the signified. The signifier refers to the physical form of the sign, such as a word, image, or gesture. It is the perceptible aspect that represents the sign. The signified, on the other hand, refers to the concept or meaning associated with the sign. It is the mental or abstract representation that the signifier evokes. The relationship between the signifier and the signified is arbitrary and culturally determined. This means that there is no inherent connection between the physical form of a sign and its meaning. Instead, meaning is assigned through social conventions, language systems, and shared cultural understandings. For example, the word “dog” is a signifier that represents the concept or signified of a four-legged, domesticated animal. However, in a different culture or language, a different word or signifier may be used to represent the same concept. Semiotic theory examines how signs function within different contexts and how they are used to communicate and convey meaning. It analyses various sign systems, such as language, visual signs, gestures, and symbols, to understand how they are constructed, interpreted, and negotiated within a given culture or society. By studying signs and their meaning, semiotics provides insights into the processes of communication, representation, and interpretation in human interactions and cultural expressions.

The existentialist theory on the other hand, is a philosophical perspective that focuses on the subjective experience, freedom, and individual existence of human beings. It emerged in the 19th and 20th centuries and examined fundamental questions about the nature of human existence, meaning, and the individual's relationship with the world. Existentialism emphasises

the idea that individuals are responsible for creating their own values and defining their own existence in a world that may be inherently devoid of inherent meaning or purpose. It rejects the notion of predetermined essence or human nature and instead emphasises the unique and autonomous nature of each individual. Existentialists argue that individuals are not born with a predetermined essence or purpose. Instead, they exist first and then define their essence through their actions, choices, and experiences. Also, Existentialism emphasises the importance of personal freedom and the responsibility individuals have in making authentic choices. It encourages individuals to act in accordance with their own values and beliefs rather than conforming to societal expectations or external influences. Existentialists recognise that the freedom to define one's existence can lead to feelings of anxiety and anguish. The recognition of one's mortality and the obligation to make significant choices frequently result in existential angst. Additionally, existentialists delve into the quest for meaning and purpose in life. They question whether life has inherent meaning and argue that individuals must create their own meaning through their actions, relationships, and personal projects. Prominent existentialist philosophers include Jean-Paul Sartre, Albert Camus, Søren Kierkegaard (1986), and Friedrich Nietzsche (1969).

By analysing nonverbal cues and silence within the context of French literature, the paper drew upon the theoretical foundations of semiotics and existentialism to understand how cultural expressions and literary interpretations were conveyed. Semiotics provided a framework to examine the signs and symbols employed in nonverbal communication, while existentialism offered insights into the individual's subjective experience and the existential dilemmas that underlie human interactions. Furthermore, this analysis helped illuminating the profound existential questions raised by Sartre and the ways in which nonverbal communication served as a vehicle for exploring these philosophical concepts.

Research Methodology

A suitable methodology for the current study topic was a qualitative analysis with a hermeneutic approach. This methodology allowed for a deep exploration and interpretation of the textual evidence, focusing on the understanding of the cultural expressions and literary interpretations associated with nonverbal communication and silence. A hermeneutic approach was deployed in order to analyse the collected textual evidence. This involved a close reading and interpretation of the selected passages, paying attention to the cultural expressions, emotional nuances, and underlying meanings conveyed through nonverbal communication and silence. The theoretical framework was used to direct the analysis and examine the cultural and literary interpretations connected with these elements. Also, the study collected textual evidence from the selected texts that showcased instances of nonverbal communication and silence. This evidence included quotes, descriptions, and actions of the characters that demonstrated nonverbal cues and moments of silence.

Furthermore, a reflection on the implications and significance of the findings within the broader context of French literature and cultural expressions was accomplished. More so, the study discussed how the analysis contributed to the understanding of nonverbal communication, silence, and their cultural significance. The limitations of the study and suggest areas for further research were addressed. Conclusively, a qualitative analysis with a

hermeneutic approach allowed for a nuanced and deep exploration of the text, going beyond surface-level observations and delving into the complexities of meaning-making. By embracing interpretation, context, and theory, this approach provided a holistic understanding of the cultural expressions and literary interpretations related to nonverbal communication and silence in French literature.

Textual Analysis: The Role of Nonverbal Communication and Silence in *Huis clos*

In this existentialist play titled *Huis Clos*, three characters, Garcin, Inez and Estelle are trapped together in a room in the afterlife, and their interactions heavily rely on nonverbal cues and the power of silence. The play explores into the complexities of human relationships, communication, and the unspoken tensions that exist between individuals. By analysing the nonverbal communication and silence within the sample text, one can assess the cultural expressions and literary interpretations presented in the text, examining how these elements contribute to the overall meaning and themes conveyed in the work. In the sample text, nonverbal communication and silence play significant roles in conveying the characters' emotions and underlying meanings. Through the use of semiotic and existentialist theories, we can examine deeper into the textual evidences that highlight the significance of nonverbal communication and silence in the play.

Firstly, the play employs various nonverbal gestures and expressions to depict the characters' inner states. Garcin's nervous lip-biting in Act I, (line 8), reveals his anxiety and internal struggle. In (line 38), when Garcin clenches his fists while discussing his past, it signifies his frustration and anger. Estelle's clasped hands in her lap while talking about her life project an image of composure and innocence. These nonverbal cues provide insights into the characters' emotions, desires, and tensions, adding depth to their portrayal. Additionally, the play employs pauses and silences to create tension and emphasise the unsaid. These moments of silence are strategically placed throughout the dialogue, allowing the characters contemplating, reflecting, and let the weight of their words sink in. For instance, Inez's silence in response to Garcin's question about her presence highlights her secretive nature and inner turmoil. The silence before Estelle responds to Inez's confession of love in (line 66) intensifies the dramatic impact of the revelation. Furthermore, in Act II, (line 86), the silence following Garcin's desperate plea to be let out of the room reinforces the inescapable nature of their situation and the futility of their attempts to escape. (line 155). In the final scene of Act III, Garcin shouts, "Let me out of here!" (line 234). The subsequent silence that follows his outburst reflects the futility of his attempt to escape and the inescapable nature of their situation

Drawing from semiotic theory, these nonverbal gestures and silences can be seen as signifiers that convey meanings beyond the spoken words. They serve as symbolic actions that enrich the character development and deepen the thematic exploration of the play. The clenched fists, the clasped hands, the pauses, and the silences all contribute to the semiotic tapestry of the play, allowing the audience to interpret the characters' intentions, emotions, and struggles. From an existentialist perspective, the use of nonverbal communication and silence in the play reflects the limitations of language in expressing true intentions and capturing the complexities of human interactions. Existentialism emphasizes the subjective experience, the freedom of choice, and the inherent isolation of the individual. Through nonverbal cues and

silences, Sartre explores the existential predicament of the characters, their struggles to communicate authentically, and the underlying tension between their freedom and their confinement. The gain of analysing these textual evidences lies in a deeper understanding of the intricacies of nonverbal communication and silence in conveying cultural expressions and literary interpretations. By focusing on these elements, we gain insights into the characters' inner lives, the power dynamics at play, and the existential themes explored in the play. Jean-Paul Sartre skilfully employs this concept to convey cultural expressions and literary interpretations. Through semiotic and existentialist lenses, the significance of these elements becomes evident as they enrich the character development, emphasize the intricacies of man's existence and interactions, and explore existential themes.

The Ambiguity of Perception Associated with Nonverbal Communication in Huis clos

The use of nonverbal communication introduces an inherent ambiguity of perception, which aligns with semiotic and existentialist theories. This ambiguity arises from the subjective interpretations of nonverbal cues and the existential predicament of human existence. The semiotic theory suggests that signs and symbols, including nonverbal gestures and expressions, carry meaning and rely on interpretation. However, the interpretation of these signs is subjective and influenced by individual perspectives, cultural backgrounds, and personal experiences. In *Huis clos*, the characters' nonverbal communication creates a web of signs that are open to multiple interpretations, leading to ambiguity in understanding and perception.

Existentialist theory, on the other hand, emphasises the subjective nature of human existence and the inherent isolation of individuals. It posits that each person's reality is shaped by their own consciousness and experiences, leading to a fragmented and ambiguous understanding of the world. In *Huis clos*, the characters are confined together in a room, and their interactions are characterized by deception, manipulation, and hidden motives. This existential predicament further contributes to the ambiguity of perception in nonverbal communication. The characters' nonverbal gestures and expressions can be interpreted in different ways, leading to conflicting perceptions. For instance, hinging on textual evidence still, Garcin's nervous lip-biting may be seen as a sign of anxiety or as an attempt to hide something. Estelle's clasped hands in her lap can be seen as a sign of innocence or as a facade to mask her true intentions. These different interpretations create uncertainty and ambiguity in how the characters are perceived by each other and the audience.

More so, he pauses and silences in the play also contribute to the perceptual ambiguity. Silence can be seen as an absence of communication, but it can also be pregnant with meaning and intention. In the play, the characters' silences often leave room for interpretation, allowing each individual to construct their own understanding of what is left unsaid. This ambiguity adds complexity to the relationships and dynamics between the characters. Additionally, the ambiguity of perception in nonverbal communication is further influenced by cultural and personal perspectives. Each character brings their own background, biases, and preconceptions, shaping how they interpret and respond to nonverbal cues. For example, Inez's silence in response to Garcin's question about her presence may be perceived as mysterious or suspicious depending on the individual's perspective. Semiotic and existentialist theories highlight the multiplicity of meanings and the fragmented nature of human existence, which

contribute to the uncertainty and ambiguity in understanding nonverbal cues. By delving into this uncertainty, the play prompts viewers to re-examine their perspectives, question their preconceptions, and contemplate the intricate dynamics of human interaction and understanding.

The Relevance of Nonverbal Communication and Silence to French Literature

Nonverbal communication and silence play a crucial role in French literature when it comes to evaluate its role in evaluating cultural representations and analytical readings. Their relevance includes cultural expressions and literary interpretations. Nonverbal communication and silence serve as powerful cultural expressions in French literature, allowing authors to convey deeper meanings and cultural nuances beyond words. French culture places significance on nonverbal expressions such as gestures, facial expressions, and body language. These nonverbal elements reflect societal norms, values, and emotions that may not be explicitly expressed in dialogue. By incorporating nonverbal communication into their works, French authors can provide readers with a richer understanding of the characters, their relationships, and the cultural context in which the story unfolds. Nonverbal communications facilitate a deeper understanding of French culture, providing readers with insight into the intricacies and nuances that may not be readily apparent in the text.

As for literary interpretations, nonverbal communication and silence also invite literary interpretations and analysis. The absence of verbal communication can be just as significant as dialogue itself. Silence can convey tension, uncertainty, hidden emotions, or the inability to express oneself. In French literature, silence often serves as a tool for investigating existential themes, inner conflicts, or the limitations of language in capturing the complexity of human experiences. Analysing the concept of nonverbal communication and silence in French literature allows readers to penetrate the subtext and symbolism of the text. It provides an opportunity to interpret characters' motivations, relationships, and internal struggles that may be left unsaid. By paying attention to nonverbal cues, readers can uncover hidden meanings, thematic elements, and social commentary that contribute to a more comprehensive literary analysis. Furthermore, these concepts offer a means to examine cultural expressions, understand the intricacies of human interaction, and delve into deeper layers of meaning and symbolism within the text. They provide a window into the unspoken aspects of characters' lives and the cultural context in which they exist, enriching the reader's interpretation and appreciation of the work.

In the context of the sample text of our study, the relevance of nonverbal communication and silence aligns with the broader themes and intentions of the work. Sartre utilizes these concepts to reflect the cultural expressions and norms of the French society. The play explores existentialist themes and the absurd human condition in his relationships within a confined space. Through these concepts, Sartre conveys the characters' internal struggles, anxieties, and hidden desires. These nonverbal expressions help to clarify the characters' emotional states and provide a deeper understanding of their cultural background. For example, Garcin's nervous lip-biting, Estelle's composed hand-clasping, and Inez's moments of silence all illustrate the characters' attempts to navigate their own guilt, shame, and desires within the confines of the room. These nonverbal expressions shed light on their individual emotional

landscapes and cultural expectations, enhancing the readers' understanding of the characters' experiences and the French society they represent.

Similarly, *Huis clos* invite literary interpretations and analysis, aligning with Sartre's existentialist philosophy. The moments of silence and nonverbal gestures serve as symbolic representations of the characters' inner conflicts, interpersonal dynamics, and the limitations of language in capturing their existential dilemmas. The pauses and silences throughout the play create tension, emphasizing the unsaid and allowing readers to explore the subtext and hidden meanings. The characters' silence after significant statements, such as Inez's declaration of love or Garcin's desperate plea for escape, adds depth and complexity to their interactions and motivations. By analysing these notions, readers can engage in a literary interpretation that goes beyond the surface-level dialogue. They can uncover the characters' existential struggles, the power dynamics at play, and the underlying themes of existentialism and human nature that Sartre sought to convey. The use of nonverbal communication and silence in Sartre's text aligns with the broader relevance of these elements in French literature. They serve as cultural expressions, reflecting the societal norms and emotional landscapes of the characters. Additionally, they invite literary interpretations by highlighting the subtext, symbolism, and existential themes present in the play.

Research Findings and Interpretation

Drawing on the first objective which was to assess an in-depth analysis to the symbolic meanings conveyed through nonverbal cues in the characters' interactions, the findings of this study illuminated the significant role played by nonverbal communication, including gestures, facial expressions and body language in conveying symbolic meanings in the sample text *Huis clos*. The characters' interactions extend beyond spoken words which revealed varying angles of meaning that contributed to the overall thematic analysis of the play. Their body language and spatial dynamics in the confined setting of the room reflected the struggle for dominance and control that emphasised the symbolic importance of these nonverbal cues. Hinging on the second objective that insisted on evaluating the cultural expressions embedded in the nonverbal communication of the characters, while placing a specific focus on their relevance in the broader context of French literature, the study identified how nonverbal communication served as a cultural expression that reflected the societal norms and expectations prevalent in Sartre's contemporary France. The characters' gestures and expressions became a microcosm of the existential struggles faced by individuals in a society marked by existentialist ideals.

Furthermore, rooted in the third objective that was to explore the impact of nonverbal communication on character development and showcase how these elements shaped the narrative to the overarching themes presented by Sartre the study identified that nonverbal communication significantly impacted the character development in *Huis clos*, which shaped the narrative and reinforced the overarching themes in the play. The use of silence became a powerful tool in highlighting moments of tension and existential crises which contribute to the overall atmosphere of claustrophobia and inevitability. The characters' gestures and expressions are not mere embellishments but integral components that enhance the understanding of existential themes such as freedom, authenticity and the inescapability of one's choice. In the last objective which was to apply relevant theoretical frameworks in order

to interpret the nonverbal cues and moments of silence in Sartre's work, this study showed that when examined through a hermeneutic lens grounded in semiotics and existentialist theory, nonverbal communication served as a rich source of meaning and symbolism in French literature, particularly in Jean-Paul Sartre's play *Huis clos*. The results of this study enriched the comprehension of Sartre's philosophy by exploring the links between nonverbal cues, cultural expressions, and existential themes. This offered fresh insights into interpreting his work and broadens the scope of possibilities for analysis.

Discussion

Critical Evaluation of Recent Scientific Papers Related to Research Problem

Recent literature concerning Sartre has primarily concentrated on his existentialist themes and political ideologies. However, emerging studies have started to address nonverbal communication and cultural expressions in his narratives, though these remain relatively sparse. This critical evaluation focused on recent research that investigated these underexplored dimensions, drawing insights from Diadori's (2024) study on nonverbal communication in educational contexts to provide a comparative analysis. Diadori's (2024) study investigates the role of nonverbal communication in Italian L2 classrooms, focusing on teachers' and students' gestures. By analysing video-recorded interactions (CLODIS), the study assessed how native Italian teachers' nonverbal behaviours impact international students. The findings highlighted the use of multiple semiotic modes, pedagogical gestures, and culturally specific emblems. The study emphasised the need for multimodal awareness in teaching to avoid misunderstandings and enhance learning outcomes. While Diadori's (2024) study is situated in the context of language teaching, its insights into nonverbal communication and cultural expressions can be extrapolated to literary analysis. Sartre's works rich in nonverbal cues and cultural variations benefit from a similar multimodal perspective. The methodological rigor and cultural sensitivity demonstrated in Diadori's (2024) research offer an important framework for analysing nonverbal communication in Sartre's literature.

Expanding upon Diadori's (2024) methodology, contemporary literary analyses have commenced integrating multimodal perspectives, exploring the role of gestures, silence, and spatial dynamics in character development and thematic exploration within Sartre's literary oeuvre. These studies recognise that nonverbal elements are not mere embellishments but integral to understanding Sartre's philosophical inquiries. Future research should continue to integrate multimodal analysis, cultural sensitivity, and methodological rigor to fully unravel the complexities of Sartre's literary oeuvre. This approach will not only enhance academic discourse but also deepen our appreciation of the rapport between verbal and nonverbal elements in articulating philosophical concepts.

Furthermore, the study by Farkas (2024), discussed nonverbal communication through the lens of early childhood development. This evaluation drew parallels to the research problem in context-specific to this study. Farkas's (2024) research investigated the impact of early interventions aimed at promoting symbolic gestures on the language skills of at-risk Chilean children. The study involved 69 children, aged 5–9 months at the start, who were assessed again at 18 months. The intervention trained teachers in half of the participating nurseries to encourage symbolic gestures. The findings revealed that children in the

intervention group had a significantly greater gestural vocabulary and better expressive language skills at 18 months compared to the control group. However, the intervention's effectiveness varied depending on the initial language development of the children, with those already at an adequate level benefiting more than those at risk. Sartre's works often explore existential themes through both verbal and nonverbal communication. Farkas's (2024) research offers empirical support for the significance of nonverbal communication, particularly symbolic gestures, in the development of language and cognitive abilities, mirroring the symbolic utilisation of nonverbal elements evident in Sartre's narratives. Just as gestures enhance communication and understanding in children, nonverbal cues in Sartre's literature deepen the philosophical and existential layers of his characters and themes.

The study highlighted the importance of cultural context in interpreting and utilising nonverbal communication. This was particularly relevant to Sartre's exploration of cultural expressions in his works. Farkas's (2024) findings that culturally specific gestures could lead to misunderstandings or mirroring effects underscore the necessity of cultural awareness, which is critical when analysing Sartre's portrayal of societal norms and existential dilemmas. Sartre often challenges cultural conventions, and understanding the nonverbal communication within these contexts can offer deeper perspectives into his critique of society. Similarly, Farkas's (2024) study on symbolic gestures aligned with the examination of silence and nonverbal communication in Sartre's literature. In Sartre's plays and novels, silence often speaks volumes, conveying existential angst, isolation, and unspoken tensions. The study's emphasis on the significant impact of nonverbal communication in early development suggests that silence and gestures in Sartre's works are not mere literary devices but essential elements that communicate profound philosophical ideas. Farkas's (2024) study assesses the role of nonverbal communication in language development to present a parallel to the analysis of nonverbal elements in Sartre's literary works. This evaluation underscores the need for a multifaceted approach in both educational interventions and literary analyses, acknowledging the impact of nonverbal communication across different contexts.

Méndez-Guerrero and Camargo-Fernández's (2024) research examined the use of silence as a communicative tool among six young Spanish university women, analysing 9 hours of spontaneous conversations. The study identified various communicative functions of silence and established a relationship between the duration of silence and its communicative role. The researchers also found that women used silence differently depending on the gender of their interlocutor, using it as a strategic interactive element more frequently when conversing with other women than with men. Silence plays a significant role in Sartre's literary works, often functioning as a vital nonverbal element that conveys existential angst, tension, and the unspoken complexities of human relationships. The findings of Méndez-Guerrero and Camargo-Fernández (2024) highlighted the multifaceted nature of silence in communication, paralleling the way Sartre used silence to deepen the philosophical and existential dimensions of his narratives. This study reinforces the idea that silence is not merely an absence of speech but a powerful communicative tool that can express complex emotions and social dynamics.

In Sartre's literature, cultural norms and societal expectations often shape characters' behaviours and interactions. The study's findings that silence could vary in meaning based on contextual, social, and cultural factors resonated with Sartre's portrayal of how cultural

expressions reflect and challenge societal norms. This provided a deeper knowledge into how silence can be used to critique or conform to cultural expectations in Sartre's works. The study's focus on silence as a pragmatic, nonverbal communicative resource aligned with Sartre's use of nonverbal elements to convey existential themes. Just as the researchers identify silence as a plurifunctional tool that requires contextual interpretation, Sartre employed nonverbal cues and silence to communicate underlying philosophical messages and character motivations. This highlighted the necessity of understanding the broader context to fully grasp the significance of nonverbal communication in both Sartre's literature and real-life interactions. Méndez-Guerrero and Camargo-Fernández's (2024) study gave clarifications to the role of silence as a communicative tool, reinforcing its importance in both pragmatic and cultural contexts. By examining how silence functions among young Spanish women, the study offered parallels to the analysis of nonverbal communication and silence in Jean-Paul Sartre's literary works. This evaluation reinforced the complex nature of silence as a means of communication.

Fornés Pallicer and Puig Rodríguez-Escalona (2024) investigated the communicative significance of eyebrow movements in Roman culture through an analysis of Latin literary texts. This research contributed to the broader field of non-verbal communication by focusing on a specific and often overlooked aspect of facial expressions in historical contexts. This evaluation critically assessed the study's relevance to understanding nonverbal communication, particularly in relation to Jean-Paul Sartre's literary evaluation of nonverbal cues and cultural expressions. They categorised four primary eyebrow gestures—contracting, raising, relaxing, and lowering—and associate these gestures with specific emotional expressions such as arrogance, humility, anger, and seriousness. The study also discussed how these gestures were used to convey disapproval and assent, thus functioning as a substitute for verbal communication in certain contexts.

By focusing on eyebrow gestures, the study filled a gap in the literature on nonverbal communication in ancient Rome. This specific focus provided an enhanced understanding of how nonverbal cues were used in historical contexts, adding depth to our knowledge of Roman communication practices. This aligned with the broader field of nonverbal communication studies, which examined how various physical cues contributed to interpersonal interactions. The study's findings that eyebrow gestures conveyed complex emotions and social signals parallel modern understandings of nonverbal communication's role in conveying divergence messages.

However, Sartre's literary works frequently utilised nonverbal communication to express existential themes and character dynamics. The detailed analysis of eyebrow gestures in ancient Rome enhanced the interpretation of similar nonverbal cues in Sartre's literature. For instance, understanding the communicative power of subtle facial expressions in a historical context can address Sartre's use of silence and body language to convey deeper philosophical messages. This intersection emphasised the universality and timelessness of nonverbal communication as a tool for expressing complex human emotions and relationships.

The study's emphasised on cultural expressions in ancient Rome and brought parallels to Sartre's examination of cultural norms and societal expectations. Just as Roman authors used eyebrow gestures to reflect and challenge social dynamics, Sartre's works often examined how

cultural expressions shaped and were shaped by individual and collective identities. The research highlighted the importance of context in interpreting nonverbal communication, a principle that was equally applicable to Sartre's literary analysis. In relation to Jean-Paul Sartre's literary examination of nonverbal cues, the study underscored the enduring significance of nonverbal communication in expressing complex emotions and cultural dynamics. This critical evaluation highlighted the study's contributions to the field and its potential to inform and enhance interpretations of Sartre's literary works.

Comparison of the Obtained Results with the Findings of Other Researchers' Studies

After reviewing the articles by Akinbode (2023), Siegler (2022), Leung (2022), Duffy et al. (2021), and Sullivan (2021), their findings were compared with each research objective outlined in the provided review.

Objective 1. Analysing the significance of freedom in Sartre's works, Akinbode (2023) focused on Sartre's concept of existential freedom, emphasising its importance for authentic living. He discussed Sartre's assertion that humans possessed absolute freedom, which was fundamental for creating meaning and purpose in life. Also, Sullivan (2021) examined Sartre's ideas about the agentic qualities of matter, unintended consequences of human activity, and capitalism's effect on human passivity. While not directly addressing freedom, Sullivan's discussion aligned with Sartre's emphasis on individual responsibility and the influence of external factors on human agency.

Objective 2. Examining the relationship between action and technology in Sartre's philosophy, Siegler (2022) discussed how Sartre's reflections on human action were interconnected with considerations of technology. He highlighted the practical use of technological artefacts in fulfilling human needs and desires, emphasising the influence of sociotechnical environments on individual actions.

Objective 3. Providing comparative studies to demonstrate the relevance of Sartre's ideas, Leung (2022) offered a comparative study of Sartre and Marion in order to demonstrate the continued relevance of Sartre's phenomenology. While his study did not directly address freedom or technology, Leung's discussion on phenomenological concepts aligned with Sartre's emphasis on individual consciousness and the interpretation of human experience.

Objective 4. Addressing shifts in nineteenth-century French studies, Duffy et al. (2021) presented an overview of shifts in nineteenth-century French studies, highlighting the integration of diverse critical approaches such as postcolonial studies and ecocriticism. While not specifically addressing Sartre's philosophy, their discussion underscored the importance of examining cultural expressions and societal norms in literary analysis.

In comparison to these studies, the current research focused on the significance of silence in Sartre's narratives and its impact on existential and philosophical interpretations. While the reviewed articles offered important analysis on various aspects of Sartre's philosophy and its relevance to contemporary debates, they did not specifically address the role of silence and nonverbal communication in Sartre's literary works. This study filled this gap by providing a detailed analysis of how these elements contributed to the philosophical themes and character interactions in Sartre's narratives.

Research Limitations

While this study aimed to address significant gaps in the assessment of nonverbal communication, silence, and cultural expressions in Jean-Paul Sartre's narratives, it is important to recognise certain limitations. They include: the scope limitation, interpretative challenges and methodological constraints. The study did not cover all aspects of Sartre's extensive literary oeuvre. The current research has potentially overlooked the uses of nonverbal communication, silence and cultural expressions in certain works. Also, analysing nonverbal communication, silence and cultural expressions in literature involves subjective interpretation, which vary among researchers. This subjectivity could lead to diverse and sometimes conflicting interpretations of Sartre's texts. More so, the access to primary materials, such as original manuscripts or archival documents related to Sartre's writing process is often limited, potentially constraining the depth of analysis. The study may equally face methodological challenges in quantifying or objectively measuring nonverbal communication and silence in literary texts, as these elements are inherently qualitative and subjective. Mitigating these limitations necessitates meticulous attention and transparency in research methodology, interpretation, and discussion. Additionally, future studies may benefit from interdisciplinary approaches, comparative analyses with other literary works or authors, and empirical investigations to mitigate these limitations and enhance the robustness of findings.

Conclusion

The aim of this study was to explore the role of nonverbal communication and silence in French literature, with the specific focus on the cultural expressions and literary interpretations associated with these elements. Rooted in a qualitative research approach with a hermeneutic framework, this study assessed Jean-Paul Sartre's literary plays *No Exit* to uncover the diverse ways in which nonverbal cues and silence contributed to the conveyance of emotions, subtext and deeper meanings in the literary context. Through the analysis of the textual evidence, this study revealed the significance of nonverbal communication in French literature. The use of gestures, facial expressions and body language served as potent tools for conveying emotions, desires and interpersonal dynamics that surpassed the limitations of spoken language. These nonverbal cues provided readers with new perspectives about the characters' inner thoughts, motivations and cultural identities.

More so, silence emerged as a powerful literary device employed by authors to create tension, evoke introspection, and convey existential themes. The intentional use of silence allowed for moments of contemplation, reflection, and a deeper engagement with the text. Silence served as a means of expressing the inexpressible, capturing moments of ambiguity, and emphasising the unsaid. This theoretical framework facilitated a deeper understanding of the complexities of these elements and their impact on the overall meaning and aesthetic experience of the literary works analysed. The gain of this study lies in its contribution to knowledge and scholarship. The study adds to the understanding of the artistic techniques employed by authors to enhance the richness and depth of storytelling. The findings provide insights into the cultural expressions associated with nonverbal cues and silence, shedding light on the intricate interplay between language, literature, and human communication. Overall, this study expanded the appreciation for the multifaceted nature of communication in French

literature and emphasised the importance of considering nonverbal communication and silence as significant components of literary interpretation.

Suggestions for Future Research

The study proposes the following avenues for future research:

1. Future research could undertake comparative studies between Sartre and other existentialist authors such as Albert Camus, Simone de Beauvoir and Franz Kafka on the utilisation of nonverbal communication, silence, and cultural expressions in various existentialist works and philosophies.
2. Assessing nonverbal communication, silence and cultural expressions in Sartre's works contrasting them with literature from other cultural contexts, such as Eastern philosophy or African existential literature, could offer fresh perspectives on the universality of these themes.
3. Future research could employ digital humanities tools for a quantitative analysis of nonverbal communication and silence in Sartre's texts. Software such as NVivo or Atlas.ti can be used for coding and categorising instances of nonverbal communication to enable a systematic analysis.

By pursuing these future directions and employing new methods, researchers can continue to expand the understanding of these concepts in Sartre's literary works.

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Conflict of Interest

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