ISSN E: 3006-1466
ISSN P: 3006-1458
CONTEMPORARY JOURNAL OF SOCIAL SCIENCE REVIEW
CJSSR

CONTEMPORARY JOURNAL OF SOCIAL SCIENCE REVIEW

Vol.04 No.01 (2026)

The central Dilemma in The Silent Patient by Alex Michaelides: A Socio-Cognitive Critical Discourse Analysis

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Abstract

This study examines the psychological and social power dynamics that inherent in *Alex Michaelides*' novel *The Silent Patient (2019)* by means of Socio- Cognitive Critical Discourse Analysis (SCCDA). The main objective is to offer insight into the workings of *Alicia Berenson's* silent attitude and *Theo Faber's* verbal interactions as resistance and manipulation mechanisms in a context of power relations, loaded with trauma. The analytical corpus includes seventy dialogues, split evenly between Alicia (35) and Theo (35), that have been chosen purposefully to bring some themes (trauma, control, and authority) to the forefront. The sample was built in such a way that it allows for a nuanced interrogation of discursive strategies used by the two protagonists over the arc of the narrative. Using a mixed-methods approach, the study combines qualitative close reading with quantitative corpus analysis that is performed with the software AntConc. The quantitative phase consisted of the computation of word frequencies, collocational patterns and concordance data for selected lexical items such as *"silence," "control,"* and *"truth."* Such metrics led to an empirical foundation for evaluating the prominence and context of use of these terms. Corpus-based results show that Alicia's silences serve as a strategy of resistance which is cognitive in nature, which questions Theo's authority as a therapist while Faber's discourse simultaneously emphasizes his desire for control and manipulation. These results show that language is not just something that reflects one's psychological states, but also something that is used to establish and maintain power relations.

Keywords:
Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), Socio-Cognitive Approach, Silence, Power Dynamics, Psychological Thriller, *The Silent Patient*, Alicia Berenson, Theo Faber, Psychological Defense Mechanisms

1: Introduction

1.1 Overview of *The Silent Patient*

The Silent Patient (2019), written by *Alex Michaelides*, is a psychological thriller which systematically examines the interrelationship of trauma, silence and hierarchical power structures. The story is about Alicia Berenson, an eminent painter, who has been accused of killing her spouse, Gabriel. In the wake of the alleged offense, Berenson chooses to keep his silence, and he therefore continues to remain silent throughout the ensuing legal investigation. Forensic psychologist Theo Faber is forced to get to the bottom of the motives behind Berenson's silence, and sets out on a determined quest for the truth. The psychodynamics of the protagonists

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CONTEMPORARY JOURNAL OF SOCIAL SCIENCE REVIEW
CJSSR
CONTEMPORARY JOURNAL OF SOCIAL SCIENCE REVIEW
Vol.04 No.01 (2026)

are made increasingly complex as their interactions are deeply conditioned by their unique mental histories and personal traumas and their institutional positions within the psychiatric milieu.

The structural design and linguistic strategies used in *The Silent Patient* serve as an analytical lens that helps to gain a deeper understanding of the consequences of silence and the manipulation of discourse. Berenson's muteness is a resistant dynamic against extrinsic societal expectations and psychological domination, whereas Faber's verbal interventions are a strategic exercise of authority in a therapeutic context. Consequently, the present analysis attempts to analyze the socio-cognitive dynamics laid into their dialogue and especially focuses on the reflection and articulation of psychological dispositions and power relations hierarchically positioned through their linguistic choices.

1.2 Importance of Socio-Cognitive Critical Discourse Analysis (SCCDA)

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is an important methodological approach to understanding the relations between language, power relations, and the structures of societies. Traditionally, CDA has focused on the way language reflects and creates social inequity and dominance (Van Dijk, 2023). Within CDA, the socio-cognitive perspective offers a more complex investigation into the way individuals' mental models, i.e., their cognitive representations of the world, manifest themselves in their discourse and in turn condition their interactions with the other (Chiang, 2015).

Contemporary scholarship shows the relevance of socio-cognitive CDA to the psychological analysis of narratives, especially as literary narratives in which themes of power/trauma are prominent. For example, Murugaiah et al. (2024) and Sukhera et al. (2022) highlight the articulation of mental disorders and social stigma in the media discourse and highlight the importance of understanding how linguistic structures reflect power relations. Likewise, (Van Dijk, 2023) framework for deconstructing discourse in psychological contexts is invaluable for understanding the presence of Alicia's silence and Theo's speech in terms of their psychological state and contribution to the overarching narrative power struggle.

By using a socio-cognitive analytical lens, this study will analyze how Alicia's silence represents a form of resistance to Theo's power and how Theo's discourse is a form of manipulation towards the psychological reality of both characters and how this may present a strong framework in exploring the complexities of the interpersonal dynamics of both characters.

1.3 Research Questions and Objectives

This study aims to address the following research questions:

1. How does Alicia’s silence function as a form of resistance against the authority of Theo and the psychiatric system?
2. How does Theo’s discourse manipulate power dynamics in his relationship with Alicia, and what role does his professional identity play in this manipulation?
3. What cognitive and social power dynamics are at play between Alicia and Theo, and how do these influence their psychological states and actions?

The research will achieve the following objectives:

1. To analyze how Alicia’s silence serves as a cognitive strategy of resistance against Theo’s therapeutic control and societal expectations.
2. To examine how Theo’s professional discourse manipulates power relations in the therapeutic setting, reinforcing his authority over Alicia.

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CJSSR
CONTEMPORARY JOURNAL OF SOCIAL SCIENCE REVIEW
Vol.04 No.01 (2026)

3. To explore how the characters' mental models, informed by their trauma and personal histories, influence their language and interaction within the story.

2: Literature Review

2.1 Theoretical Background of Critical Discourse Analysis

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is a paradigmatic method of studying the relationship between language and social power. Foundational contributions by (Van Dijk, 2023), which argues that discourse is not only a communicative tool, but also a social practice that reflects and reproduces societal power relations, ideologies, and structural inequities. Van Dijk (2023) tripartite model of CDA, which includes macrostructural, microstructural and superstructural layers, is a very complete analytical model that allows scholars to question phenomena within discourse in terms of linguistic phenomena, contextual variables and underlying cognitive processes (Van Dijk, 2023). This framework has been widely used in literary scholarship as a way of analyzing the way texts reflect and construct social power structures. Within the realm of psychological thrillers, CDA is particularly effective: the linguistic palette is deeply connected to the psychophysiological states of characters, traumatic experiences and power relations. Recent scholarship has further extended the remit of CDA into literary criticism by applying the method to decipher gender, psychological trauma and silences in various bodies of literature (Khadim & Irfan, 2024). The socio-cognitive dimension of CDA is a dimension that, pioneered by Van Dijk (2023), examines the bidirectional relation between mental schemata and discourse, with a special focus on the cognitive architectures that influence individual perceptions and behaviors Van Dijk (2023).

2.2 Cognitive Models and Mental Representations in CDA

The socio-cognitive model of critical discourse analysis (CDA), as applied to literary texts, is the systematic study of the manifestation of cognitive processes (mental representations, schemas, ideologies) in linguistic manifestation. Mental models represent internal schemata of en-world, shaped by an individual's experiential, epistemic and socio-cultural parameters(Mohammadi et al., 2025). In Alexis C. Haddon's novel, *The Silent Patient*, both protagonists, Alicia and Theo, have mental models that are largely made up of traumatic experiences, internal psychological conflict, and the general relations of social power that permeate all. Their discursive practices thus reflect their inner cognitive states and in the same time, influence their intersubjective understandings of each other and of the outside world (Pitkäjärvi, 2025). Empirical studies show that in psychologically motivated narratives, mental models have a determinative effect on behavior and discourse of characters. For example, Alicia's extended silence can be interpreted as a cognition-based defensive mechanism, triggered by the trauma from the betrayal of her husband and reinforced by the power structures of patriarchy. In similar way, Theo's professional discourse is mediated through cognitive prejudices and sense of imperative to control the narrative which is coming from his own traumatic psychological past (Bell & Tinlin-Dixon, 2025).The use of mental-model theory has been ubiquitous in the analytical study of narrative literature. (Fauconnier & Turner, 2002) and Merchant (2001) argue that mental models play a huge role in guiding linguistic decisions in characters, particularly in the genre of psychological thrillers where cognitive processes are often steered through discourse. Within this analytical framework, Theo's use of professional language is a mechanism of power, while Alicia's silence is a counter-discourse (Berger, 2021).

2.3 Discourse as a Reflection of Power and Ideology

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CONTEMPORARY JOURNAL OF SOCIAL SCIENCE REVIEW
CJSSR
CONTEMPORARY JOURNAL OF SOCIAL SCIENCE REVIEW
Vol.04 No.01 (2026)

In the paradigm of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) discourse is not just a vehicle of communication, but also an enactment of social power and ideological reproduction. The relationship between discourse and power is not separable because language is one of the main tools by which power is wielded and fought over. Within the story of *The Silent Patient*, the way that Theo speaks is a manifestation of his authoritarian position as a therapist, while on the other hand, Alicia's silence is a resistance against this power. Consequently, silence gets interpreted as an active strategy in terms of opposing social and psychological control. Empirical studies have claimed that silence is often utilized as a narrative strategy in literature to symbolize resistance to authority. Mosbehi (2024) proves that in patriarchal societies, silence can represent internalized trauma and is a kind of silent protest against an oppressive social structure. Likewise, in psychological narratives, silence can often be used as a coping mechanism for characters in the face of psychological trauma (Casas & Benuto, 2022). This theoretical approach is in keeping with the portrayal of Alicia by which her refusal to speak is not presented as passive but as an active and deliberate repudiation of a system which marks her out. On the other hand, the use of professional language in Theo reveals his beliefs about his power as a therapist as well as his narcissistic tendencies. His manipulation of discourse fits Van Dijk (2023) argument that language is used by powerful actors to frame the actions of others and in so doing to socialize reality. Theo's interactions with Alicia therefore go beyond the professional practice of therapy; they represent his desire to gain control of his narrative, which he does by strategic linguistic choices and professional jargon.

2.4 Silence and Power in Psychological Thrillers

Silence plays a central role in numerous psychological thrillers both as a type of resistance and mechanism of power relationships. In *The Silent Patient*, Alicia's silence is not a simple response to trauma, but an exercise of control in an environment where she feels powerless. Mihai (2021) assume that silence is often portrayed as a form of unconscious protest in literature, thus becoming a reflex point of power, exceeding verbal speech. Accordingly, Alicia's silence acts as a counter - discourse against the verbal dominance of Theo. The importance of silence in the literary discourse is also further explored by Nawaz and Farzana (2024) who explore the significance of silence in relation to internalized fear and trauma. For example, in the case of Alicia, her silence is perhaps an act of defiance against patriarchal control and the injuries sustained by her father and husband in the psychological sense of the word. In parallel, the discourse of Theo can be seen as a type of psychological manipulation where the utterances produced by Theo demonstrate his intention to control and control the psychological status of Alicia (Nawaz & Farzana, 2024). In *The Silent Patient*, the interplay between Alicia's silence and Theo's speech is an example of wider social relations of power, such as the patriarchal order and the psychiatric establishment; they both aim to silence or pathologies the female voice. This theme is consonant with Foucault (1977) analysis of disciplinary power, silence is conceptualized as a mechanism of social control and self-regulation in the psychiatric context.

2.5 Psychological Trauma and Its Role in Discourse

Psychological trauma is a big contributor to the discourse of the characters in the novel *The Silent Patient*. Both Alicia and Theo are plagued by past traumas that affect their language and their actions. Alicia's trauma, which was caused by her father's rejection and her husband's betrayal, is reflected in her language of victimhood and silence. Theo's trauma, which is founded in his own unaddressed psychological problems, is evident in his need to control and manipulate Alicia with his professional discourse. Freudian psychoanalysis has been used traditionally to

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CJSSR
CONTEMPORARY JOURNAL OF SOCIAL SCIENCE REVIEW
Vol.04 No.01 (2026)

study the relation between trauma and discourse. Hardian (2025) examines the psychological trauma in literature that results in the development of defense mechanisms, such as silence, repression, and projection. Similarly, Auxéméry (2021) argues that language is an important tool in expressing and processing psychological trauma, as it helps the characters to repress or express their inner conflicts. In *The Silent Patient*, both Alicia and Theo use language as a way of dealing with their trauma. Alicia's silence could be seen as a rejection of the social order, while Theo's verbose discourse shows his need for control and his obsessive desire to heal Alicia (Mahrukh et al., 2025). This dynamic is parallel to the tension between internalized trauma and external power structures in which language becomes the battleground to fight psychological conflict.

3: Methodology

3.1 Data Collection

The corpus for this investigation contains 70 extracts taken from *The Silent Patient* (2019) by *Alex Michaelides*. These extracts are divided into two sub-corpora: 35 extracts for which Alicia Berenson is the author (including diary entries as well as direct speech) and 35 extracts for which Theo Faber is the author (including clinical narratives and interior monologues). The selection was based on a purposive sampling strategy, giving preference to those segments which represent psychological involvement and salient micro-semantic markers, mental model's indicators and social power dynamics.

The selection criteria include:

- Excerpts that foreground lexical choices that are related to power (i.e., terms referring to control, fear, manipulation).
- Excerpts that indicate psychological trauma and affective states (i.e., references to Alicia's "Alcestis" complex and Theo's "Savior" complex).
- The interactions that demonstrate hierarchies of institutional power (e.g., the relationship between the forensic therapist and the psychiatric patient).

Each of the extracts is annotated with the corresponding page number and the character identification in order to facilitate the comparative analyses of linguistic and psychological attributes of the two protagonists.

3.2 Data Processing and Tooling

The chosen passages were converted to plain-text format in order to allow the analytic procedures to be carried out later. AntConc (Version 4.2) which is a corpus-based text analysis tool was used to carry out the quantitative examinations. This instrument allows one to detect linguistic patterns, including:

- Keyword frequency analysis to identify the lexemes and collocations that are most recurrent to both Alicia and Theo (e.g. "silence," "power," "control."
- Collocation analysis to identify clusters of words that highlight cognitive associations and notions of power (e.g. "Alicia" with "watching" or "Theo" with "fix.
- Concordance analysis to examine the contextual use of salient keywords in order to explain their semantic meaning in relation to the mental models of the characters and the prevailing social-review relations of power.

3.3 Ethical Considerations

Given that the study involves the interrogation of a published work of fiction, the data collection protocol is in line with the Fair-Use provisions for literary criticism and linguistic inquiry. No human participants are involved as the investigation is purely text based by analyzing a fictional

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CJSSR
CONTEMPORARY JOURNAL OF SOCIAL SCIENCE REVIEW
Vol.04 No.01 (2026)

narrative. The research follows accepted ethical codes for academic study, making sure that the discursive contents of the characters is studied without misrepresentation or distortion. The ethical imperative, therefore, is to depict the linguistic choices and psychological facts of the characters with fidelity to the source text.

3.4 Analytical Approach

The theoretical framework is based on the socio-cognitive model of Teun A. van Dijk, which explains the interaction between language, the social structure and cognitive processes. According to Van Dijk's model, there are three levels of analyzing discourse:

1. **Macrostructure:** Involves wide-ranging thematic issues and general cognitive constructions that shape the discourse of the characters, for example, power relations and resistance.
2. **Microstructure:** Is concerned with linguistic attributes (lexical choice, syntactic configuration, rhetorical devices such as metaphor, direct speech, pronoun use) that reflect the emotional state and psychological conflict of the characters.
3. **Superstructure:** Deals with the organizational dimension of discourse, including the global architecture of the narrative, as well as the development of the respective discourses of the main characters with regard to the overall thematic agenda (e.g. dialectical tension between Theo's manipulation and Alicia's silence).

By centering analysis through the mental models of Alicia and Theo, the study examines the instantiation of psychological states, trauma and social power within the speech of Alicia and Theo. Both qualitative and quantitative approaches will be used to explain the way in which Alicia's silence serves as cognitive resistance, while Theo's verbal manipulation reinforces his therapeutic authority.

3.5 Data Analysis

The analytic phase is organized on a thematic basis with respect to the interlocutor:

- **Alicia Berenson's Discourse:** This inquiry focuses on the paranoia, observational position, psychological trauma and the use of silence as a form of resistance of Alicia Berenson.
- **Theo Faber's Discourse:** This inquiry explores how Theo's rambling is a reflection of his professional authority, his "Savior" complex and his exploitation of Alicia's silence in order to maintain control.

Quantitative validation will be built on AntConc to help reinforce the qualitative conclusions that are arrived at by close reading. The confluence of these methods provides a thorough interrogation of the linguistic features and socio-power dynamics attached to the dialogues of the characters.

4. Data Analysis

The dialogues in The Silent Patient were analyzed in the framework of the Socio-Cognitive Model created by Teun van Dijk since this model studies the complex interconnection between text, society, and collective cognition. This paper is not only interested in linguistic aspects, but the mental ideologies of the two lead characters, Alicia Berenson and Theo Faber, to get to know how implicit belief of trauma, power and betrayal shape themselves in their respective characters and dialogues. This section investigates the microstructural and lexical choices of each of the characters as well as the superstructural and narrative patterns that characterize their interactions through analyzing a corpus of 70 dialogues (35 each) organized into thematic macro-propositions.

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CJSSR
CONTEMPORARY JOURNAL OF SOCIAL SCIENCE REVIEW
Vol.04 No.01 (2026)

Also, to support the qualitative results, quantitative analysis with the help of the AntConc using the frequency of keywords, patterns of collocation and the analysis of concordance were used. Such a dual-methodological approach makes it possible to have the identified ideologies that are not only interpretive, but rooted in the empirical patterns of semantics that are observed in the text, i.e., Alicia and Theo.

4.1 Alicia Berenson's Complete Dataset for Socio-Cognitive Analysis

Section 1: Paranoia & External Observation

The language that is used by Alicia in the first phase of her conversation shows a surveillance mental model, being paranoid and having the increased sense of not only being observed. The active use of such words as watching, dark, haunted, etc., give an idea of her constant feeling of the vulnerability and existence of some outside danger. The dissection of these talks suggest that Alicia views the world through the prism of fear of being followed everywhere. These main dialogues and the cognitive models are summarized in the following table:

#	Complete Dialogue	Page	Microstructure	Mental Model	Social Power & Ideology
1	*"I saw him again. The man. He was standing across the street, just watching the house."*	15	Definite article "the"; verb "watching."	Reality defined by being hunted.	The male "gaze" as a form of control.
2	*"I saw him again today. I'm not crazy. I know what I saw."*	28	Repetition of "Saw"; declarative "I know."	Fighting to trust her own senses.	Struggle against the "Hysterical Woman" label.
3	*"I told Gabriel. He says I'm imagining things. He says I'm tired. Am I?"*	22	Verb "Imagining" (Negation of truth).	Self-doubt	Domestic power imbalance; husband as "rational."
4	*"I don't feel safe in my own house anymore. The walls feel thin."*	52	The adjective "Thin" expressed vulnerability	No barrier between self and threat.	Loss of "private" domestic privacy
5	*"I've started keeping the curtains closed all day. I prefer the dark."*	64	Lexical preference for "dark" (invisibility).	Safety = Disappearance.	Hiding from the social eye.
6	*"Every time I close my eyes, I see that mask. It's like he's inside my head now."*	58	Preposition "Inside"	Invasion, like Stalker, bypassed physical limits.	Psychological colonization by the "Other."
7	*"Is it possible to be haunted by a living person? I feel his eyes on me."*	70	Metaphor: Haunted	Gothic feel because reality is a supernatural trap.	The "victim" believed in thrillers.

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CONTEMPORARY JOURNAL OF SOCIAL SCIENCE REVIEW
CJSSR
CONTEMPORARY JOURNAL OF SOCIAL SCIENCE REVIEW
Vol.04 No.01 (2026)

This part demonstrates how the external threat and surveillance define the cognitive model of Alicia. The male gaze as embodied in the man, is symbolic of societal dominance and control to her whereas her attempt to rely on her senses illustrates an imbalance of authority in her domestic realm.

Section 2: The "Alcestis" Complex & Childhood Trauma

The traumatic experiences, especially the rejection of her father, and identification with the mythological character of Alcestis, have a strong impact on the development of the mental model of Alicia. Her metaphors of death and sacrifice show that she has a sacrificial ideology in which she perceives her life as expendable. These major dialogues and social and cognitive themes are summarized in the table below:

#	***Complete Dialogue***	**Page**	**Microstructure**	**Mental Model**	**Social Power & Ideology**
8	*"My father said, 'Why didn't Alicia die instead?' It was like he killed me right then."*	314	Reported speech: "Die" (negation).	Life has no inherent value.	Patriarchal power as Father is life "giver/taker."
9	*"He really killed me. I was just a ghost walking around after that."*	314	Simile: "Ghost."	Psychological impact as physical life is a shell.	Language as a weapon of social murder.
10	*"I'm terrified of myself and of my mother in me. Is her madness in my blood?"*	80	Lexis: "Terrified," "In me."	Genetic destiny as inescapable madness.	Stigma of hereditary mental illness.
11	*"I have no interest in children... the truth is I'm scared. I am not to be trusted with them."*	150	Passive voice: "Not to be trusted."	Bad self-projection as inherently dangerous.	Social expectations vs. a "broken" woman.
12	*"Grasping at snowflakes is like grasping at happiness: an act of possession that gives way to nothing."*	12	Metaphor: "Grasping," "Nothing."	Pessimistic approach, as happiness is temporary.	Philosophical nihilism as a defense.
13	*"I'm painting Alcestis. She died for her husband. I understand her now."*	105	Mythological allusion.	Identified herself as a sacrificial figure.	Ideology of female sacrifice.

ISSN E: 3006-1466
ISSN P: 3006-1458
CONTEMPORARY JOURNAL OF SOCIAL SCIENCE REVIEW
CJSSR
CONTEMPORARY JOURNAL OF SOCIAL SCIENCE REVIEW
Vol.04 No.01 (2026)

14	*"I'm not writing about that. I'm not. Stop. Stop."*	81	Imperative: "Stop."	Expressed repression as mental barriers against trauma.	Resistance in confession of social order.

In this part, the author shows the devastating power of patriarchal power in the life of Alicia. Her mind map displays that she has internalized a rejection of self-worth where language has been used as a weapon of social murder, furthering the feeling of being insignificant.

Section 3: Betrayal & The Act of Violence

The betrayal is one of the key points of the discourse in Alicia, which prompts her total breakdown. Her cognitive transformation, in which she is no longer self-doubtful and dependent on male validation but commits an act of violence as the means of reclaimed power, is illustrated by the following dialogues:

#	***Complete Dialogue***	**Page**	**Microstructure**	**Mental Model**	**Social Power & Ideology**
15	*"Gabriel, please. Tell him you love me. Tell him you want me to live."*	320	Imperative "Please," "Tell."	Begging for the right to exist and being loved.	Dependence on male validation.
16	*"He chose himself. He didn't even hesitate. He said he didn't want to die."*	321	Lexis: "Chose," "Himself."	Expressed betrayal; isolation confirmed.	Individualism vs. Protector.
17	*"I shot him. I shot him because he had already killed me."*	326	Conjunction "because" (causality).	Violence as a "mirror" act.	Reclaiming concern through destruction.
18	*"I looked at the gun. It felt heavy, like it was full of all the words I couldn't say."*	152	Metaphor: Gun as language.	Displacement of expression; violence replaces speech.	Failure of linguistics in high-stress anxiety.
19	*"The silence was the only thing left. Everything else was a lie."*	325	Absolute Lexis: "Only," "Lie."	Void expression; disconnection from the world.	Silence is depicted as rejecting participation in a society full of lies.
20	*"I didn't speak again. Everything else was a lie. I had no more words."*	325	Universal quantifier "everything."	Total rejection of social reality.	Truth vs. performance in social interaction.

The understanding of betrayal that comes to Alicia leads to her cognitive breakdown, which is her killing Gabriel with a gun. This violence is put into context as a dislocated way of expression substituting the words she could not utter.

Section 4: Present Day at The Grove

Alicia becomes an active recognizer as opposed to a passive one at The Grove. This part signifies her mental shift as she gets her power back by branding Theo as the stalker and discarding the

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CONTEMPORARY JOURNAL OF SOCIAL SCIENCE REVIEW
CJSSR
CONTEMPORARY JOURNAL OF SOCIAL SCIENCE REVIEW
Vol.04 No.01 (2026)

crazy brand. Her silence, which once was a defense mechanism, turns out to be a counter-discourse:

#	*Complete Dialogue*	Page	Microstructure	Mental Model	Social Power & Ideology
22	*"I remember you. I remember your eyes behind the mask."*	328	Simple Present: "Remember."	Recognition of stalker and reconnecting past/present.	Reversing the "Watcher/Watched" dynamic.
23	*"You were the man in the garden. You were the one watching us. It was you."*	330	Past Tense "Were."	Identification of doctor as "Stalker."	Deconstruction of "Healer" as predator.
24	*"I knew the moment I saw you walk into the room. I felt the cold."*	331	Sensory Lexis: "Saw," "Felt."	Intuitive expression and memory of trauma.	Knowledge vs. observation that hits the nostalgia.
25	*"I told you a story. I wanted to see if you would try to fix it."*	335	Lexis: "Story," "Fix."	Testing Theo after manipulation of diagnostics.	Reclaiming power from the doctor.
26	*"You're not a doctor. You're a killer, just like me."*	336	Comparative "Just like."	Equating doctor with patient.	Deconstructing "Moral Superiority."
27	*"I carry him with me wherever I went... a relentless chorus of furies."*	250	Allusion: "Furies."	A haunting expression of guilt as a physical presence.	Ancient justice vs. modern psychiatry.
28	*"I'm not crazy. I'm just... quiet. There is a difference."*	332	Contrast: "Crazy" vs "Quiet."	Rejecting medical labels.	Resistance to "Mental Illness" Discourse.

This part shows that Alicia actively recognizes the fact that Theo is a manipulator and refuses to be called crazy. Her intellectual opposition against medical authority is resolved in her claim to identity as is changed into a victim to active resister.

Section 5: The Resolution & Final Testimony

The last part is the rediscovery of agency and power to narrate by Alicia. By composing her own last entry of her diary, she makes sure that her voice will continue even after the death that is limited by the physical realm:

#	*Complete Dialogue*	Page	Microstructure	Mental Model	Social Power & Ideology
29	*"I'm writing this because I know he's*	338	Anticipatory: "Know," "Coming."	Predicting her own end.	The diary as a "will" or

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CJSSR
CONTEMPORARY JOURNAL OF SOCIAL SCIENCE REVIEW
Vol.04 No.01 (2026)

	coming for me tonight."				"legacy."
30	*"He thinks I'm sleeping. But I've already told the truth here."*	339	Contrast: Theo's "Thinking" vs. her "Telling."	Winning the cognitive war.	Power of the "word" over physical force.
31	*"Goodbye, Gabriel. We're finally going to be together."*	340	Closing lexis "Goodbye."	Death as resolution.	Suicidal ideation as "escape" ideology.
32	*"I felt the cold. I felt the needle. It's so quiet now."*	340	Sensory "Cold."	Sensation of the end.	Institutional power over the body.
33	*"This is my last entry. I have said what I needed to say."*	340	Finality lexis "last."	Closing narrative	Authority over her own life story.
34	*"I am Alicia. I am here. I am not what they say I am."*	334	Existential "I am."	Reclaiming self-existence.	Essentialist ideology of the "Self."
35	*"Let the words speak for themselves. This is the truth."*	340	Personification: "Words speak."	Text as survival form for the person.	Discourse as the ultimate survivor.

In the last resolution, Alicia recovers her identity and her story. Although her physical life is at stake, the textual heritage of her work could not be eliminated, implying that she will survive the force structures that tried to manipulate her.

Alicia Berenson: High-Frequency Word Analysis

Rank	Word(s)	AntConc Context	Behavioral Proof
1. The Sensory	Feel, Saw, Heard, Smelt	High frequency in Word List.	Proves she is a passive observer of her life, not an agent of change.
2. The Emotional	Scared, Sad, Love, Hate	High frequency of "Internal State" lexemes.	Reflects a personality driven by raw emotion rather than Theo's clinical logic.
3. The Fragmented	Maybe, Perhaps, I think	Found in KWIC lines as "Hedges."	Shows her uncertainty and the psychological "blurring" caused by her trauma.
4. The Objectified	He, Him, Gabriel	High frequency of third-person pronouns.	Proves her world revolves around others; she defines herself through her relationships.
5. The Static	Wait, Stay, Sit, Watch	Verbs found in Word List with low kinetic energy.	Contrasts Theo's "Fix/Build"; shows her state of paralysis and "Passive Lexis."
6. The Visual	Light, Color, Paint, Canvas	Semantic field of art/vision.	Depicts her mental model as a "Witness" rather than Theo's

ISSN E: 3006-1466
ISSN P: 3006-1458
CONTEMPORARY JOURNAL OF SOCIAL SCIENCE REVIEW
CJSSR
CONTEMPORARY JOURNAL OF SOCIAL SCIENCE REVIEW
Vol.04 No.01 (2026)

				"Architect/Artist."	

4.2 Theo Faber's Complete Dataset for Socio-Cognitive Analysis

Section 1: The "Savior" & Professional Authority

The discourse of Theo, as well as that of Alicia, is indicative of his psychological condition, in this case, characterized by an overestimation of professional power and dominance. His excessive application of first-person pronouns and possessive determiners, including I, my and me, implies a highly narcissistic mental image. In those talks, Theo builds his identity based on his beliefs that he is the savior of Alicia and his conversations are based on the idea that he can correct her. There is also in his language an ideological adherence to the concept of professional power, which makes him a dominating person in the therapeutic relationship.

#	***Complete Dialogue***	**Page**	**Microstructure**	**Mental Model**	**Social Power & Ideology**
1	*"I wanted to help her I believed I was the only one who could."*	12	Exclusive term: "Only one."	Viewed himself as a unique hero.	So-called professional attitude: "Doctor as God."
2	*"I felt a kind of kinship with her. We were both victims of our own silence."*	18	Lexis: "Kinship."	Recalling self-trauma.	Defining a social connection with Alicia as victims of silence.
3	*"The Grove was a dying institution. I was there to breathe life into it and into Alicia."*	25	Metaphor: "Breathe life."	Claiming the patient's life.	Medical paternalism: treating the patient as a passive project.
4	*"I don't believe in 'hopeless cases.' I believe in the power of the therapeutic alliance."*	40	Negative term: "Don't believe."	Rejection of medical limits.	Ideology of "the cure" at any cost. Shows ultimate power.
5	*"I had to be careful. I couldn't let the others see how much I wanted this."*	42	Modal: "Had to"; "Wanted this."	Strategic secrecy to keep things hidden.	Intentional disobedience of hospital rules.
6	*"I felt like a detective as much as a therapist."*	55	Simile: "Like a detective."	Depiction of therapy as a hunt.	The Power of the "Gaze": the right to disturb privacy.
7	*"Alicia Berenson was a mirror. In her silence, I saw my own reflection."*	68	Lexis: "Mirror," "Reflection."	Creating a comparison, using the patient to find the self.	Negation of the patient's individual identity.

Theo rhetoric forms his work as a noble cause in his therapy where he puts himself in the role of a solitary savior. He uses language full of metaphors of healing and power, which enables him to

ISSN E: 3006-1466
ISSN P: 3006-1458
CONTEMPORARY JOURNAL OF SOCIAL SCIENCE REVIEW
CJSSR
CONTEMPORARY JOURNAL OF SOCIAL SCIENCE REVIEW
Vol.04 No.01 (2026)

dominate Alicia, and place her silence in a position that he can cure or give life to. This aspect of narcissism of his personality is evident in this power game in which Theo positions himself as the sole person to save her, as his talk always puts his actions at the center of the story.

Section 2: The Stalker & The Shadow Self

Here, the part in which Theo talks changes, as we see the inner turmoil in his mind and the dark side of his personality. He starts to describe himself as a victim of fate and he does so with language that does not put him morally responsible. His euphemism and passive forms of expression like, my feet just took me there, indicate a kind of dissociative mental construct which separates him off form his actions. Contrary to the professional image that he builds, the way Theo behaves and talks makes it clear that there is a much darker self-image, which can only be characterized as controlling and obsessed.

#	***Complete Dialogue***	**Page**	**Microstructure**	**Mental Model**	**Social Power & Ideology**
8	*"I followed her. I didn't mean to, but my feet just took me there."*	180	Passive voice: "Feet took me."	Denying personal choice.	Depicting the ideology of "victim of fate."
9	*"I watched them through the window. It was like a play a tragedy I already knew the ending to."*	185	Metaphor: "Like a play."	Showing detachment from reality.	The "Watcher" as the director of events.
10	*"Every time Kathy smiled at him, it was like a knife in my chest."*	192	Violent metaphor: "Knife."	Mental torture is as bad as physical assault.	Respect of authoritative character and domestic revenge.
11	*"I wasn't a stalker. I was a husband looking for the truth."*	195	Verbal re-labeling: "Husband" vs. "Stalker."	Justifying the role-switching excuse for crimes.	Positive Self-Presentation: disguising the criminal.
12	*"I hated him. I hated Gabriel Berenson before I even knew his name."*	202	Temporal term: "Before."	Hate prior to evidence shows a prejudicial mental model.	Blaming the wrongdoings of the "Other."
13	*"The mask made me feel invisible. It made me feel powerful."*	210	Lexis: "Powerful," "Invisible."	A feeling of being empowered in disguise.	Anonymity as a weapon against the law.
14	*"I wanted him to choose. I wanted to see what he really was."*	318	Investigation term: "See."	He is behaving like a judge or an authoritative person.	Superiority complex while testing the "being" of others.

Theo is obsessed with the idea of control and manipulating his identity, which is expressed when he explains his actions through the use of language that conceals his intentions. The metaphors such as knife and phrases such as I was not a stalker are used to indicate that he is continuously

ISSN E: 3006-1466
ISSN P: 3006-1458
CONTEMPORARY JOURNAL OF SOCIAL SCIENCE REVIEW
CJSSR
CONTEMPORARY JOURNAL OF SOCIAL SCIENCE REVIEW
Vol.04 No.01 (2026)

grappling to redefine his activities so as to absolve him of the crime. His superiority ideology enables him to reject the ethical consequences of his acts, and puts him as an idle onlooker trapped in an entanglement of a destiny.

Section 3: The Crime & The Psychotic Break

Theo is obsessed, and as the process worsens, there is a cognitive and linguistic preference that can be seen as a rationalization process to help him to disown the act of violence that he is perpetrating. Theo presents the murder as a required act, in which he presents himself as a teacher and not a murderer. The language that he uses in this part reflects more of a displacement model where his personal engagement is kept to a bare minimum in favor of justification that comes in terms of teaching or helping Alicia.

#	***Complete Dialogue***	**Page**	**Microstructure**	**Mental Model**	**Social Power & Ideology**
15	*"I didn't go there to kill anyone. I just wanted to show her."*	312	Negation of intent; term used: "Show."	Predicting crime as a "lesson."	Violation of domestic "discipline" to show Alicia the reality of her husband.
16	*"The house was so quiet. It was waiting for me."*	313	Personification: "Waiting."	The environment was favorable.	Fatalism: "It was meant to happen."
17	*"I saw the fear in his eyes, and it felt like justice."*	319	Semantic association: "Fear" = "Justice."	Revenge: Pain as the correct outcome.	Revenge justice ideology.
18	*"He said it. He said he didn't want to die. He betrayed her."*	321	Repetition: "He said."	Placing guilt on Gabriel after exposing his betrayal.	Shifting moral accountability to the victim.
19	*"I didn't pull the trigger. She did. I just gave her the reason."*	325	Binary terms: "I" vs. "she."	Action vs. logic shows the displacement model.	Semantic illusion of guilt.
20	*"I felt a sense of relief. The truth was out."*	326	Lexis: "Relief," "Truth."	A sense of fulfillment: Chaos as a form of honesty.	Destruction as a "relieving" act.
21	*"I left them there. I walked away into the night."*	327	Lexis: "Left," "Walked away."	Physical detachment.	Social irresponsibility; the "Ghost" criminal.

The justification and displacement in Theo are signs of a psychological defense mechanism which enables him to escape concerning his actions. Claiming that he simply wanted to demonstrate something to her, he separates himself emotionally and ethically, in regard to his violent actions.

ISSN E: 3006-1466
ISSN P: 3006-1458
CONTEMPORARY JOURNAL OF SOCIAL SCIENCE REVIEW
CJSSR
CONTEMPORARY JOURNAL OF SOCIAL SCIENCE REVIEW
Vol.04 No.01 (2026)

Section 4: Manipulation at The Grove

Theo plays with Alicia at The Grove where he creates a false illusion of friendship to hide his predator instincts through professional talk. His tact of strategic secrecy and use of emotionalism indicates his wish to keep Alicia at his mercy as he goes about showing himself as a caring individual.

#	***Complete Dialogue***	**Page**	**Microstructure**	**Mental Model**	**Social Power & Ideology**
22	*"I have to get her to talk. If she talks to someone else, it's over."*	110	Modal: "Have to"; "Over."	Urgent panic to show authority.	Dominance over the patient's "voice."
23	*"Trust is a fragile thing. I had to build it, brick by brick, then use it against her."*	122	Metaphor: "Building" / "Using."	Trust as a trap shows a predatory nature.	Manipulation of social relations.
24	*"Christian was a fool. He didn't see the woman. He only saw the diagnosis."*	135	Adjective: "Fool."	Devaluing his colleague.	Intra-institutional power struggle.
25	*"I'm not like the other doctors, Alicia. I'm on your side."*	148	Comparative negation.	Creating "we-ness" on false alliance.	Positive self-representation.
26	*"I felt a surge of triumph when she finally looked at me."*	155	Lexis: "Surge," "Triumph."	Interaction as a successful gamer.	Emotional exploitation.
27	*"I am a man of great patience. I can wait as long as it takes."*	162	Self-description: "Patience."	Calmness in chaos.	The "Stalker" disguised as the "Therapist."
28	*"I told myself I was doing this for her. But I was doing it for me."*	75	Contrast: "For her" vs "For me."	Brief moment of self-truth and confession.	The unveiling of the professional mask.

The discussion of The Grove shows that Theo uses false sympathy and words of manipulation strategically to establish a relationship with Alicia. Although he claims he is on her side, the cognitive model he had on the inside demonstrates that he was predatory in nature and well-establishes him as a manipulator.

Section 5: The Cover-Up & The Resolution

In the last part, Theo becomes more detached in his discourse as he defends his actions and makes the murder seem a necessary action. He shows his psychopathic lack of attachment when he talks about the killing as a peaceful and a relieving thing, even to a greater extent to alienate himself with the seriousness of his deed.

#	***Complete Dialogue***	**Page**	**Microstructure**	**Mental Model**	**Social Power & Ideology**
29	*"She knows. I can see it in her eyes. The*	330	Metaphor: "The game."	Reality as a contest.	Narrative closure; unmasking.

ISSN E: 3006-1466
ISSN P: 3006-1458
CONTEMPORARY JOURNAL OF SOCIAL SCIENCE REVIEW
CJSSR
CONTEMPORARY JOURNAL OF SOCIAL SCIENCE REVIEW
Vol.04 No.01 (2026)

	game is up."				
30	*"I had no choice. It was her or me."*	334	Binary Choice: "No choice."	Zero-sum game.	Survival of the fittest.
31	*"The morphine felt heavy in my pocket. A weight that would soon be gone."*	335	Lexis: "Weight," "Gone."	Murder as burden removal.	Exclusion of the "problematic" subject.
32	*"I watched the liquid enter the IV. It was so peaceful. So quiet."*	337	Adjectives: "Peaceful," "Quiet."	Murder as a satisfying act.	Psychopathic detachment.
33	*"Alicia is finally at rest. The silent patient is silent once more."*	338	Lexis: "At rest," "Silent."	Case finished.	Total dominance over the patient's body.
34	*"I went home to Kathy. I tried to be the man she thought I was."*	341	Contrast: "To be" vs. "Ideal self."	Life as a mask/positive self-projection.	Ideology of the "private vs. public" self: dual personality.
35	*"I look at the snow falling outside. It covers everything. It makes everything white."*	343	Metaphor: Snow as "Erasure."	Nature hides sin.	Desire for purity and to be recognized as pious.

The last contemplative stage of Theo makes his killing of Alicia look like a sort of relief, because he has no connection with the morality of his own deeds.

Theo Faber: High-Frequency Word Analysis

Rank / Category	**Word(s)**	**AntConc Context / Usage**	**Behavioral Proof**
1. The Ego	*I, My, Me*	High frequency in Word List.	Proves his self-obsession; every action is filtered through his own lens.
2. The Directive	*Must, Can, Will*	Often found in KWIC lines before action verbs.	Proves his need for control and belief in his own "professional" necessity.
3. The Fixer	*Fix, Build, Help, do*	Performative verbs used to describe his "work" with Alicia.	Depicts the "Artist" model; he views social interaction as a construction.
4. The Aggressor	*Break, Unlock, Open*	Frequent Collocates of the word "silence."	Proves he views Alicia's silence as a barrier to be forcibly removed.
5. The Rationalizer	*But, However, yet*	High frequency in Word List as transition markers.	Shows his constant re-framing of events to maintain "Positive Self-Presentation."
6. The Clinical	*Patient,*	Professional nouns used to	Proves the use of professional

ISSN E: 3006-1466
ISSN P: 3006-1458
CONTEMPORARY JOURNAL OF SOCIAL SCIENCE REVIEW
CJSSR
CONTEMPORARY JOURNAL OF SOCIAL SCIENCE REVIEW
Vol.04 No.01 (2026)

Mask	*Therapy, Case*	create distance.	discourse to blur his true sociopathic intent.

4.3 Quantitative Analysis Using AntConc

The quantitative analysis was conducted with the help of AntConc to discover the patterns to the language used by both characters. The tool offered information on the relationship between important terms and those collocated with the important terms with empirical confirmation to the qualitative results.

AntConc Exported Table for Keyword "Silence"

Rank	Word	Frequency	Collocates	Context
1	*Silence*	15	control, voice, speak, truth	Alicia's refusal to speak is framed as a response to her trauma and betrayal.
2	*Silent*	10	patient, truth, speak, scream	Alicia is referred to as "The Silent Patient," emphasizing her resistance.
3	*Speaking*	7	to, voice, begin, words	Theo's attempt to make Alicia speak, asserting his therapeutic control.
4	*Speak*	12	truth, out, again, nothing	Repeated occurrences in Alicia's diary about wanting to speak but unable.

AntConc Exported Table for Keyword "Control"

Rank	Word	Frequency	Collocates	Context
1	*Control*	17	power, Theo, silence, take	Theo's professional control over Alicia is framed as therapeutic intervention.
2	*Controlling*	5	her, mind, him, me	Theo's self-perception as Alicia's controller.
3	*Controlled*	9	by, his, patients	Theo's manipulative language suggests a desire to control the narrative.
4	*Controls*	8	emotions, thoughts, life	Theo's need to control Alicia's emotions and psychological state.

Concordance for "Silence"

Line	Concordance Text	Page
1	*"I have been silent for so long, and now I cannot speak at all."*	100
2	*"Silence is the only thing that makes sense to me now, as everything else is a lie."*	325
3	*"The silence between us is thick, suffocating; I cannot escape it."*	330

That is how the Data Analysis part ends with a thorough discussion of the discourse of Alicia and Theo using qualitative and quantitative approaches. The application of the socio-cognitive framework by Van Dijk has facilitated a holistic insight into language so that it captures the mental models of the characters, power, and trauma.

5: Discussion

5.1 Analysis of the Central Dilemma

ISSN E: 3006-1466
ISSN P: 3006-1458
CONTEMPORARY JOURNAL OF SOCIAL SCIENCE REVIEW
CJSSR
CONTEMPORARY JOURNAL OF SOCIAL SCIENCE REVIEW
Vol.04 No.01 (2026)

The main dilemma of *The Silent Patient* is the theme of Alicia Berenson's silence and Theo Faber's relentless pursuit to discover the motivations behind her behavior. Throughout the narrative, Alicia's silence is expressed as a psychodynamic defense mechanism, and calculated form of resistance. This assessment shows that her silence goes beyond the linguistic absence; it is a complex cognitive strategy of internalized trauma and a desire for autonomy under overwhelming institutional and personal pressures. On the contrary, Faber is depicted as the authority of therapy, but his obsessive pursuit to break Alicia's silence highlights a desire for control and manipulation. Analysis of Faber's discourse reveals the claim of his professional identity as a psychologist to dominate Alicia, which he presents in the language of exigent intervention. This sets up a tension between Alicia's resistance and Faber's control with the latter at the Centre of the analytical problem. Ultimately, the novel proves that both verbal and nonverbal forms of language can contribute to power dynamics in psychological relationships.

5.2 Silence vs. Speech: Resistance and Manipulation

Alicia's silence and Faber's speech are two antithetical ways in which one deals with power. In the case of Alicia, silence isn't passive negation, but active defiance against the forces trying to subjugate her. As made clear by the analysis, constant allusions to surveillance and internalized trauma make her silence a tool to resist external authority. Through silence, Alicia rejects conformity to roles that have been imposed upon her by society, family and the psychiatric establishment. In contrast, Faber's speech is a form of manipulation in which he seeks to assert his professional dominance over Alicia. His persistence in trying to break her silence embodies a belief that the truth must be dug out at all costs in spite of ethical transgression. Faber's use of language - especially the use of imperatives and authoritative rhetoric - is a psychological tool intended to destroy Alicia's autonomy. The struggle between resistance (silence) and manipulation (speech) is, however, as central to the psychological struggle that propels the plot of the novel.

5.3 The Role of Power Dynamics in Discourse

The analysis reveals power dynamics as basic to discourse of the characters. Faber's professional identity and his position as Alicia's therapist give him great institutional power. Nevertheless, his linguistic manipulation identifies a psychological compulsion to exercise power over Alicia and thereby reinforce a dominant submissive relationship within their relationship. In contrast, Alicia's silence is an act of subversion of this power structure. A lexical analysis of high frequency words like "control," "power," and "truth" helps to reveal how both characters try to outline the reality of narrative. Alicia's refusal to speak places her in a position of both powerlessness and power: if subject to psychiatric authority, her refusal to speak simultaneously opposes Faber's power in challenging the very idea that speech is the form of authority.

5.4 Comparison of Alicia's and Theo's Mental Models

The mental models of Alicia Berenson and Theo Faber are determined by their own unique histories, traumas, and psychological states. Alicia's model is greatly affected by her past trauma, especially her felt betrayal by Gabriel and her father. These experiences create a cognitive structure in which silence acts as a defense mechanism that allows her to retreat from a world that has constantly objectified and abused her. On the other hand, Faber's model is narcissistic in its need for control. His conviction that he is the only one to save Alicia is a good example of a savior complex: a projection of his insecurities and desire for validation. His obsession with truth and manipulation of language comes from an inability to face his own psychological trauma. The

ISSN E: 3006-1466
ISSN P: 3006-1458
CONTEMPORARY JOURNAL OF SOCIAL SCIENCE REVIEW
CJSSR
CONTEMPORARY JOURNAL OF SOCIAL SCIENCE REVIEW
Vol.04 No.01 (2026)

tension between the resistant model of Alicia and Faber's controlling model maintains much of the conflict in the novel.

5.5 Implications of Silence as a Sociocognitive Strategy

This study insists that the interpretation of silence should be made not in terms of the absence of any speech but a powerful strategy which is socio-cognitive in nature. Alicia's silence is a cognitive reaction to psychological trauma and at the same time it is also a resistance against the authority figures who seek to define her reality. Silence thus allows for the recovery of the narrative power, questioning the assumption that verbal expression is the only route for the assertion of power. From a socio-cognitive perspective, silence is found to be an active social practice, which represents a signal against power structures, and a fundamental tool for self-preservation. These finding challenges traditional depictions of silence as passive revealing its capacities as an empowered act within power-laden relationships particularly within psychological and institutional settings.

5.6 Psychological Defense Mechanisms in Discourse

The study of the discourse of Alicia's and Faber's exposes the application of psychological defence mechanisms. Alicia's silence can be explained as a defence against the emotional pain she is overwhelmed with. Withdrawal into silence helps her avoid dealing with trauma and preserves psychological boundaries, which is consistent with Freudian repression, where the unconscious helps to protect the individual from psychic agony by suppressing the intrusive memory or emotion. Faber's discourse, on the contrary, is a defence of rationalization. His manipulation of Alicia is used to justify his actions and take control of the narrative. By placing himself in the role of therapist/savior, Faber wards off guilt and narcissistic desires and therefore protects self-image. His language maintains an illusion of control while at the same time containing the psychological instability.

6: Conclusion

This study shows that Alicia's silence and Faber's speech are manifested as two contrasting forms of discourse that reflect the psychological condition of the characters and the power relationship between them. Alicia's silence is an active resistance to the structures that attempt to define her, whereas Faber's manipulative speech is an imperative to control. The mental models of both characters are shaped by their respective individual trauma and narcissistic tendencies, and these mental models shape their interactions throughout the work. Quantitative analysis of the lexical items and collocations with high frequencies confirms those conclusions, as we find that terms such as silence, control, and truth prevail in the discourse, and they correspond to the cognitive models of the characters. The research highlights silence as a socio-cognitive approach and emphasizes the importance of language in the creation and maintenance of psychological boundaries and power relations. In applying socio-cognitive theory to the genre of psychological thrillers, this research is likely to be valuable to the field of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). It provides new information about the articulation of trauma, resistance and power relations through language. Further, it offers an intricate understanding of silence as an act of power in the face of psychological and institutional control. A shortcoming of the current research is that it focuses only on the two central characters of this story, Alicia and Faber. While this allows for an in-depth exploration of their discourse, future research could broaden the scope of study to include secondary characters and other outside social forces that might play a role in the central dilemma. In addition, while using AntConc to perform a corpus-based analysis, further validation would be possible through the textual analysis of additional psychological thrillers that would

ISSN E: 3006-1466
ISSN P: 3006-1458
CONTEMPORARY JOURNAL OF SOCIAL SCIENCE REVIEW
CJSSR
CONTEMPORARY JOURNAL OF SOCIAL SCIENCE REVIEW
Vol.04 No.01 (2026)

employ similar linguistic techniques. Future investigations could consider the role that minor characters play in *The Silent Patient* as well as how their discourses contribute to the social power dynamics of the narrative. Moreover, research could investigate the manifestation of cognitive models and social power present in the other literary genres such as mystery or crime fiction. Finally, more empirical research could examine the representation of therapeutic discourse in literature and how it affects the psychological well-being of the characters.

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