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DISCURSIVE DYSTOPIAS: LANGUAGE, POWER, AND IDEOLOGY IN ORWELL, ATWOOD, AND EVANS

Diana Alexandra Avram (Șandru)
1 Decembrie 1918 University of Alba Iulia

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Abstract

This article examines language as a mechanism of ideological control in George Orwell's *1984*, Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*, and Vyvyan Evans' *The Babel Apocalypse*. Using a semantic-pragmatic framework, it explores how linguistic features, such as lexical innovation, naming conventions, ritualised speech acts, and silences, function as instruments of power, identity formation, and resistance within these dystopian societies. Through comparative analysis, the study identifies common strategies including vocabulary reduction, semantic narrowing, symbolic re-signification, and algorithmically mediated communication. These techniques not only uphold authoritarian regimes but also shape subjectivity by limiting what can be thought, said, or expressed.

Drawing on critical discourse analysis, speech act theory, and Foucauldian concepts of power/knowledge, the article reveals how language operates as an active site of control, coercion, and subversion. Despite reflecting distinct ideological and technological contexts, the novels converge in portraying language as paramount to sustaining and occasionally unravelling authoritarian power. Finally, the article advocates for integrative approaches that combine close textual analysis with corpus-based methods, offering new insights into the evolving relationship between fiction, discourse, and political reality.

Keywords: Dystopian discourse; Semantic-pragmatic analysis; Language and ideology; Linguistic control; Orwell, Atwood, Evans.

1 Introduction

Language and power have long been intertwined topics in both linguistic and political inquiry, a relationship that becomes particularly perceptible and characteristic of dystopian fiction. In these narratives, language is never neutral. It is shaped, constrained, and mobilised to serve systems of control, acting as both medium and mechanism through which ideologies are enforced and contested. This article investigates language as the main instrument of ideological domination in

three influential dystopian novels from different literary periods: George Orwell's *1984* (1949), Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985) and a more recent dystopian novel, Vyvyan Evans' *The Babel Apocalypse* (2023). Despite differences in political and technological contexts, each novel constructs a dystopian world where language serves as a battleground for power and control. If subjects do not use or embrace the language, it means they do not embrace the ideology and are considered dissenters or enemies. Therefore, the selected texts portray language as the primary terrain upon which power is exercised and resisted. They depict various authoritarian forms, namely totalitarian surveillance in *1984*, theocratic patriarchy in *The Handmaid's Tale*, and techno-linguistic capitalism in *The Babel Apocalypse.*

Nonetheless, they share the conviction that language control means controlling thought, identity, and reality itself. This conviction aligns with Michel Foucault's (1980) idea of discourse as constitutive of knowledge and power, as well as Judith Butler's (1990, 1997) theory of performativity, which posits that identity emerges through repeated linguistic acts. (Butler 1990: 24-25) Within these novels, language regulates what can be spoken, who may speak, and the conditions governing speech, thereby shaping subjectivity, agency, and resistance.

While Orwell's *Newspeak* has become the classic example of linguistic control by illustrating how reducing vocabulary can shrink permissible thought, Atwood's ritualised greetings, patriarchal naming, and coded silences offer a sharp critique of gendered language ideologies. More recently, Evans' *The Babel Apocalypse* brings attention to mediated discourse shaped by algorithms, surveillance, and digital interruption, problematising traditional views on speech and meaning. Although a vast body of scholarship addresses these novels separately, there remains a need for comparative analysis that foregrounds the semantic and pragmatic mechanisms through which these regimes enforce discursive control.

This article fills that gap by applying a semantic-pragmatic framework to explore how meaning is constructed, constrained, and fragmented through lexical choice, morphological innovation, and naming strategies. It also examines how speech acts, silence, and conventional utterances function within pragmatic contexts laden with power. The study shows that language in dystopian fiction is never merely decorative but structurally embedded in ideological operations that shape what is allowed to be said or happen. Semantic strategies, such as affixation, compounding, and re-signification, reduce cognitive variability, while pragmatic tactics, including controlled speech, enforced silence, and performative utterances, impose compliance or carve out limited resistance.

The objectives of this paper are as follows: to identify how language encodes, reproduces, and challenges ideological structures in fictional dystopias, and to explore how these literary representations reflect, prefigure, or critique real-world sociopolitical and technological dynamics. Whereas *1984* and *The Handmaid's Tale* respond to twentieth-century totalitarianism and institutionalised misogyny, *The Babel Apocalypse* highlights the linguistic vulnerabilities of the digital age, especially regarding language commodification and surveillance. Together, these

novels form a historically grounded continuum of dystopian discourse suitable for linguistic and ideological analysis.

The theoretical framework combines semantics, pragmatics, speech act theory, critical discourse analysis, and Foucauldian perspectives on language and power. Semantic analysis examines how lexical and morphological choices influence meaning, while pragmatics investigates how utterances function contextually to perform acts, resist, or enforce obedience. This integrated approach reveals the linguistic materiality of power: regimes of control manifest not only in what is said, but in what may be said and under what conditions speech occurs.

Furthermore, the article engages with contemporary scholarly debates on the evolution of dystopian fiction, particularly in the context of digital technologies and algorithmic governance. As platform capitalism increasingly rules communication, understanding linguistic control in dystopian literature grows ever more urgent. By putting Orwell, Atwood, and Evans in dialogue, this study highlights persistent patterns of discursive control alongside new forms of linguistic vulnerability and resistance driven by technological change.

Following this introduction, the article reviews relevant literature on dystopian discourse and linguistic control, outlines the comparative and interdisciplinary methodology, and presents findings structured across semantic and pragmatic dimensions along with suggestions for future research directions.

2 Literature Review

Dystopian literature often employs language manipulation as a main mechanism for examining power, control, identity, and resistance. By shaping, distorting, or restricting linguistic expression, these narratives emphasise how language serves not only as a means of communication but also as a powerful tool for social and cognitive restriction. Within the confines of authoritarian or totalitarian regimes, language becomes a strategic site for enforcing ideological conformity, influencing thought, social relationships, and individual subjectivity.

George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* stands as the most enduring literary portrayal of linguistic control, depicting a regime that reshapes reality through the engineered language of *Newspeak*. Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* and Vyvyan Evans' *The Babel Apocalypse* extend Orwell's concerns into distinct ideological and technological contexts. The selected texts collectively depict dystopian futures in which language serves as both a vehicle of subjugation and a contested site of agency. This literature review synthesises relevant linguistic and discourse analysis theories to foreground the major role of language in both constructing and disrupting dystopian realities.

Norman Fairclough's work on language and power (1989, 2010, 2013) provides a foundational framework for comprehending how discourse operates as a social practice inseparable from ideology. Political discourse, Fairclough (2010: 12) argues, legitimates decisions and maintains power through practical argumentation.

In dystopian settings, language mediates both consent and coercion, controlling not only communication but social roles and subject positions (Fairclough 1989: 46). His framework model outlines three constraints that language imposes: on content (what may be said), on social relations (who may speak and how), and on subjectivity (who one can be) (Fairclough 1989: 46). All these three constraints resonate powerfully with the engineered syntax of *Newspeak*, the ritualised speech of Gilead, and the digitally mediated communication in *The Babel Apocalypse*.

Mikhail Bakhtin's dialogic theory (1981) further complements Fairclough's view by emphasising language's ideological contestation. Bakhtin (1981: 270-272) conceptualises discourse as shaped by the tension between *centripetal forces*, which push for linguistic unification, and *centrifugal forces,* which represent heteroglossia and discursive plurality. In dystopian fiction, totalitarian regimes attempt to impose a "unitary language" (Bakhtin 1981: 270) to eliminate dissent and diversity. Orwell dramatises this erasure through *Newspeak*, which aims to restrict the ability of critical thought. Atwood's Gilead suppresses polyphony through scriptural repetition and the gendered linguistic roles it employs. Evans, by contrast, explores linguistic homogenisation through the collapse of semantic coherence, portraying a near-future world in which the loss of linguistic diversity coincides with sociopolitical unravelling.

The Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis (Whorf 1956), also known as linguistic relativity, confirms many dystopian portrayals of language control. It posits that the structure of a language shapes the cognitive patterns of its speakers. Orwell's *Newspeak* operationalises this theory by drastically narrowing vocabulary and erasing semantic distinctions; the regime seeks to eliminate the conceptual scaffolding necessary for subversion or independent thought (Fowler, Hodge, Kress, & Trew 1979).

Kress and Hodge (1979: 21) interpret *Newspeak* as an instance of Whorfian determinism, arguing that Orwell envisioned language as a site where ideology is enacted and perpetuated. Fowler (1995), in his work *The Language of George Orwell*, however, warns against the reductive popularisation of Orwellian terms like "doublethink" or "thoughtcrime," emphasising that their nuanced linguistic mechanisms deserve more rigorous scholarly engagement. Furthermore, he posits that Newspeak is closely tied to the more realistic assertion that language promotes a particular worldview, close enough to give readers who can see through Newspeak a "chill", so that it is necessary to reconsider and suppress an instinct that suggests there is something realistic in Newspeak, considering that the "*double-take reaction is the effect of the deadpan style of the Newspeak Appendix"* (Fowler 1995: 219), and is just a satirical strategy. Nonetheless, considering how some discursive practices have been incorporated into 'real' political language, perhaps this opinion should be reconsidered nowadays.

Atwood extends Whorfian concerns to the category of gender. In *The Handmaid's Tale*, theocratic control is inscribed through ritualised greetings, biblical citation, and linguistic prohibition. Language female identity, not just through what women are allowed to say, but through how they are named, described,

and heard. Offred's interior monologue becomes a "counter-language", a very fragile space of subjectivity that resists ideological programming.

Evans' *The Babel Apocalypse* brings these linguistic anxieties into a hyperconnected, digital future. In this dystopian context, the language failure results not from restriction but from saturation and semantic overload. Through algorithmic mediation and accelerated meaning shifts, Evans envisions a world where the erosion of shared language threatens not only communication but coherent social organisation itself. His work reframes Orwellian and Atwoodian themes within a contemporary context of linguistic volatility.

Whilst a broad analysis of dystopian language focuses on semantics and structure, pragmatic frameworks uncover the performative and interpersonal dimensions of language control. Speech Act Theory (Austin 1962; Searle 1969, 1979) reveals how utterances operate as actions, such as commanding, promising, threatening, or legitimating authority.

Orwell's slogans and *Newspeak* constructions operate as assertives and declaratives, not just describing but 'legislating' ideological 'truths'. In Atwood's Gilead, official speech performs assertives, commissives, and declaratives, but Offred's private narrations introduce expressives and commissives that resist these regimes. Searle's taxonomy clarifies how even constrained discourse can convey multiple illocutionary forces, depending on the context and the speaker's intent.

Grice's (1975) theory of conversational implicature adds another layer, explaining how speakers navigate repression through strategic ambiguity and imprecision. In surveillance environments, characters rely on what is *implied* rather than *explicitly* stated. Offred's coded resistance and Winston's elliptical diary entries exemplify how dissent survives in the gaps between literal meaning and inferred intent.

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), particularly Fairclough's approach, traces a normative framework for assessing how dystopian texts reproduce, reinforce, or challenge ideological structures. CDA examines how language mirrors and shapes power asymmetries, making it especially useful for understanding dystopian discourse, where institutional control is embedded in linguistic norms.

Millward's (2006) doctoral research applies CDA and stylistics to dystopian fiction, introducing a helpful distinction between *speculative* and *reflective* language. Speculative language, through neologisms, affixation, and semantic drift, disorients readers and designs future social orders. Reflective language, by contrast, recalls familiar ideological frameworks, drawing attention to what has been erased or distorted. Orwell's *Newspeak* and Evans' fragmented lexicon exemplify the former, while Atwood's evocations of "freedom" and "love" undermine their official redefinitions with historical resonance.

Millward's work suggests that dystopian fiction constructs reality twice: once through critique and once through reconstruction. Although her classification could benefit from greater formalisation, her interdisciplinary method demonstrates how stylistics and discourse analysis can productively intersect.

Bakhtin's (1981) emphasis on dialogism and heteroglossia counters the monologic aspirations of dystopian regimes. Even in worlds designed to suppress plurality, language's inherent instability provides space for resistance. Atwood's Offred builds a subversive interior world through private language; Orwell's Winston writes, speaks, and imagines the surrounding world in ways that threaten official discourse. Evans' vision, though focused on ruining the language rather than censorship, echoes Bakhtin's insight that communication always exceeds institutional control.

Across dystopian literature, language emerges as a contested domain where ideology is both enforced and rebelled against. Therefore, while Orwell's *1984* offers a foundational critique of totalitarian linguistic engineering, Atwood expands the inquiry to gender discrimination, ritual, and voice. Later, Evans updates the framework for a digitally saturated, semantically unstable world. Theoretical perspectives from Fairclough, Bakhtin, Whorf, Austin, and Grice reveal how dystopian texts utilise language as both an instrument and a battleground.

By synthesising insights from semantic, pragmatic, and discourse analysis, scholars can better understand how language in dystopian fiction reflects broader sociopolitical anxieties, ranging from control, surveillance, and fragmentation to resistance. In an era when digital media, AI, and political polarisation threaten linguistic coherence and preservation, a critique of dystopian fiction is more than helpful and may raise awareness of how literature serves as a warning, in this case: that the erosion of linguistic agency is the erosion of freedom itself.

3 Research Methodology

The research methodology of this article consists of a combination of a qualitative and interpretive methodology, focused on close textual analysis and comparative linguistic examination of three landmark dystopian novels: Orwell's *1984*, Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*, and Evans' *The Babel Apocalypse*. It concentrates on how language is manipulated within fictional dystopias to establish and maintain ideological control, privileging detailed semantic and pragmatic interpretation over quantitative or corpus-based methods. The research aims to elucidate linguistic tools through which power performs within totalitarian, theocratic, and techno-surveillance societies.

The analysis pursues two main objectives. Firstly, to identify the discursive strategies regimes use to enforce dominance. Secondly, to explore how characters negotiate, internalise, or resist these structures via semantic and pragmatic choices. Consequently, the study examines lexical innovation, morphological shifts, and naming practices alongside pragmatic features, including speech acts, ritualised utterances, and silence. The analysis is firmly grounded in linguistic and philosophical theory, drawing on the works of Austin (1962), Searle (1969), Butler (1997), Foucault (1980), and Fairclough (2013).

The selected novels depict distinct but complementary models of dystopian control. Orwell's *1984* illustrates totalitarian surveillance through lexical reduction in Newspeak. Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* showcases theocratic manipulation of language to enforce gendered social hierarchies. Evans' *The Babel Apocalypse* depicts digitally mediated discourse, highlighting the fragility of language under algorithmic governance and the consequences of outages.

The methodology is developed in three phases. First, semantic analysis identifies lexical strategies that (re)shape meaning, restrict cognition, and symbolise control, such as Orwell's morphological simplification ("doubleplusgood"), Atwood's re-signification and possessive naming ("Offred"), and Evans' techno-neologisms ("vertipad", "cybercrime"). Second, pragmatic analysis examines language in use: how speech acts perform ideology, how slogans and silence restrain social behaviour, and how subtextual dissent emerges through implicature and coded speech. Third, a comparative framework integrates semantic and pragmatic findings, revealing recurrent patterns like meaning narrowing, identity ritualisation, and communicative fragmentation that transcend individual texts.

Close readings focus on passages that illustrate these phenomena, such as Orwell's party slogans, Atwood's gendered naming conventions, and Evans' digitally disrupted speech. No computational tools are employed, reflecting the study's emphasis on interpretive nuance over quantification. Instead, the analysis draws on critical discourse theory and socio-pragmatic frameworks to situate language within sociopolitical and narratological contexts, striking a balance between textual specificity and broader ideological structures.

The theoretical basis rests on Foucault's (1980) discourse theory, Butler's (1997) performativity, and Austin's (1962) and Searle's (1969) speech act theory, enabling an exploration of how language both constrains and enables agency within dystopian worlds.

While interpretive, the methodology is systematic and comparative, treating each novel as a self-contained narrative and as part of a broader tradition where language serves as a formal mechanism of ideological critique. The study does not claim universality but offers transferable insights into how semantic and pragmatic strategies construct and contest power.

The choice of texts reflects a diachronic and technological spectrum: *1984* addresses mid-twentieth-century fears of totalitarianism, *The Handmaid's Tale* responds to late-twentieth-century concerns about gender and fundamentalism, and *The Babel Apocalypse* engages twenty-first-century challenges posed by digital mediation and algorithmic control. Together, they trace the evolving relationship between language, power, and resistance in dystopian discourse.

4 Results and Interpretation

This section presents the detailed results and interpretation of the semantic and pragmatic analysis conducted on George Orwell's *1984*, Margaret Atwood's *The*

Handmaid's Tale, and Vyvyan Evans' *The Babel Apocalypse*. The aim is to uncover the linguistic mechanisms through which these dystopian texts construct, enforce, and at times subvert ideological control. The analysis integrates semantic strategies, such as lexical innovation, morphological manipulation, and naming practices, along with pragmatic analysis, including speech act structures, silence, ritualised utterance, and performative agency. By synthesising these findings within a comparative framework, the study analyses how dystopian discourse functions simultaneously at the levels of meaning and use.

4.1 Semantic analysis

The semantic strategies employed in the dystopian novels under analysis unveil a sophisticated manipulation of language as a fundamental tool for ideological control. Orwell's *1984* provides a paradigmatic example through its invention of Newspeak, which does not represent only a fictional language, but an engineered lexicon explicitly designed to narrow cognitive possibility. By drastically reducing vocabulary and eliminating synonyms, antonyms, and nuanced expressions, Newspeak narrows the semantic range available to speakers, thereby limiting their capacity to conceive of dissent or even to have a natural reaction. Morphological simplification, as observed in constructions such as "doubleplusgood", further erodes linguistic complexity, depriving words of subtlety and precision. Language in *1984*, therefore, becomes a vehicle for epistemic domination, enforcing a monolithic worldview by pre-emptively erasing the possibility of ideological deviation. In this regime, "thoughtcrime" becomes linguistically impossible for the majority, since the vocabulary needed to express unorthodox ideas is systematically eliminated or (re)invented according to the Party's principles.

In *The Handmaid's Tale*, Atwood employs a contrasting semantic approach, grounded in re-signification and symbolic naming, where language is inextricably linked to social status and religious ritual. The possessive naming convention serves to erase personal identity and reinforce masculine superiority and ownership, embedding patriarchal domination within linguistic form. The feminine names no longer mark the idea of personality or individuality, and names such as *Offred*, *Ofglen*, are compounds formed from the preposition "Of" plus the name of the Handmaid's assigned Commander (Fred, Glen), clearly indicating possession. Therefore, the names become tags that represent ideological inscriptions, which naturalise subjugation. Furthermore, ritualised phrases such as "*Blessed be the fruit*" and "*May the Lord open*" (Atwood 1996: 25) carry a dense semantic load, functioning simultaneously as greetings, blessings, and (re)affirmations of the theocratic order. They act as performative utterances that stabilise the regime's ideology through repetition. Atwood's text is semantically layered and full of religious symbols and references, embedding power relations into the very structure of meaning.

Evans' *The Babel Apocalypse* presents constant instability related to meaning decoding and a technologically mediated linguistic landscape, reflecting

contemporary anxieties about digital communication and the governance of algorithms. Unlike the centralised control of Orwell's regime, Evans imagines a world where meaning is disrupted through decentralised technological mediation. Language is fragmented by stream-speech, interrupted by system interference, and filtered through opaque algorithms. Neologisms such as "gynoid," "medivac," "holotab," and "soc-ed" (Evans 2023) reflect the semantic volatility, embodying the fragility of meaning in a digitally saturated world that is perpetually at risk of connection interruption or language outage. Semantic coherence is no longer guaranteed, as words become unstable referents in a world where linguistic content is shaped and distorted by both human and non-human agents according to state stakes. The fragility of language introduces a new form of epistemic vulnerability, where doctrine performs not by prescribing meaning but by subverting it.

Concurrently, these texts delineate a continuum of semantic control, starting from Orwell's model, which deliberately narrows language, through Atwood's symbolic re-inscription of social roles, to Evans' digitally induced fragmentation. Each novel demonstrates a distinct mode of semantic manipulation through which dystopian regimes (re)shape cognition and consciousness, thereby maintaining control. Language, in these narratives, no longer represents the distinctive form of human expression but instead proves to be a constitutive code that favours ideology, eradicating self-cognition and identity.

4.2 Pragmatic analysis

Beyond semantics, the pragmatic dimension of language presents essential insights into how dystopian regimes regulate speech, interaction, and subjectivity. In *1984*, pragmatic control is enacted through the suppression of communicative intent and the enforcement of silence. Winston Smith's clandestine diary entries and whispered dialogues exemplify speech acts imbued with political significance, rendered subversive simply by existing. These utterances, minimal as they may be, are pragmatically powerful, proving that resistance through language becomes an act of existential risk. The regime maintains its dominance not only by dictating what may be said but by policing when and how speech occurs. Silence, therefore, is not neutral but enforced, becoming a mechanism of social discipline and psychological control. In *The Handmaid's Tale*, pragmatic strategies are complex and multilayered, involving standardised speech, indirect communication, and subtextual defiance. Set phrases like "*Under His Eye*" (Atwood 1996: 55) or "*Praise be*" (Atwood 1996: 25) are performative utterances that reinforce theological and patriarchal hierarchies, based on the fear instilled by the concept of an omniscient God. However, Offred's deployment of irony, metaphor, and coded language introduces cracks within this ritualised order. Her inner monologue and strategic silences enable pragmatic agency even within constraints. These moments of indirect subversion highlight how language use can simultaneously sustain and resist power, illustrating a pragmatic double-bind where conformity and dissent coexist within the same communicative act.

Evans' *The Babel Apocalypse* presents a postdigital variation of pragmatic control. The freedom of speech is continuously altered because discourse is perpetually filtered, interrupted, or modified by technological systems or 'updates'. Speech acts are not only trained but also commodified, as platforms determine their reach, reception, and permanence. Communication is shaped by algorithmic logics that determine who hears what, when, and under what conditions. Pragmatic agency in this context depends on one's capacity to navigate or subvert digital infrastructures, considering that not all language software is state-approved, such as *Unilanguage*, and the power of 'administering' the language is reserved for a unique company. Resistance thus requires technological fluency, tactical code-switching, and an awareness of algorithmic behaviour, or exceptionally to be able to use natural languages, thing which is possible only for humans as Professor Ebba Black, "the last speaker of languages that would die with her" (Evans 2023: 5). This reflects a shift from authoritarian censorship to dispersed, infrastructural forms of control, where power is exerted less through prohibition than through modulation and signal interference.

These pragmatic dimensions demonstrate how power acts are distributed not only through language itself, but also through what language means, as well as how, when, and where it is used. The result is a communicative landscape marked by a combination of power-driven tools, namely strategic ambiguity, constrained self-expression, and fragile opposition.

4.3 Comparative framework: Semantic-pragmatic interface

Analysing the semantic and pragmatic dimensions across the selected novels unveils how the dystopian language system operates through the dynamic interplay of meaning and use. In *1984*, the semantic reduction of Newspeak is inseparable from the pragmatic policing of individuals' expression. The lexical impoverishment of the language restrains both thought and interaction, strengthening a regime of communication in which variation or creativity is both unspeakable and inconceivable. Therefore, semantic and pragmatic structures merge into a remote communication encouraging the use of 'approved' language.

Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* offers a model that is both ambiguous in meaning and performative in expression. Semantic manipulation, particularly in naming and liturgical phrases, is pragmatically enacted through what is supposed to be everyday life but turns into an everyday ritual. Nevertheless, these replicated rituals also become sites for disruption, as characters strategically deploy indirect speech, irony, and metaphor to resist their imposed identity and roles. The semantic–pragmatic interface in Atwood's narrative is characterised by a constant tension between subjugation and agency, revealing language as a field of negotiation.

Evans' *The Babel Apocalypse* reframes the interface by situating it within a fully technological environment. Semantic fragmentation is paired with pragmatic instability, as software systems disrupt, reroute, and reframe speech acts. Communication becomes a site of struggle between human expression and machines

intervention. Unlike Orwell's totalitarian manipulative communication or Atwood's symbolic ritualism, Evans' world is marked by opacity and unpredictability, where control is exerted through 'connection issues' rather than fully expressed prohibition. As a result, in this novel, the semantic–pragmatic interface reflects a postdigital reality in which language is streamed and no longer fully owned or naturally learned by its human users.

Table 1. Morphological strategies in the three novels

Novel	Morphological strategy	Examples	Ideological function
1984	Prefixation & Compounding	"doubleplusgood," "unperson"	Simplification and intensification to limit nuance
The Handmaid's Tale	Compounding & Re-signification	"Unwoman," "Handmaid," "Salvaging"	Gender and moral categorisation, ambiguity
The Babel Apocalypse	Prefixation, Suffixation, Slang	"holotab," "medivac" "VirDa"	Reflects mediated fragmentation and surveillance

Table 2. Textual examples of semantic strategies

Novel	Term	Textual context & quote	Semantic/Ideological note
1984	"unperson"	"Withers, however, was already an *unperson*. He did not exist: he had never existed." (Orwell, 2000: 43)	Intensity replacing variety; ideological intensifier
The Handmaid's Tale	"Offred"	"My name isn't *Offred*, I tell myself. But it's all I have." (Atwood, 1996: 90)	Name as possession and identity erasure
The Babel Apocalypse	"holotab"	"She frowned and then pressed on her wrist chip, reactivating her *holotab*. She issued a blink command to select her language app before speaking an in-app voice command." (Evans, 2023: 26)	New term expressing mediated erasure and pragmatic disruption

This comparative synthesis demonstrates that dystopian language systems cannot be fully understood through semantics or pragmatics alone. It is at their intersection that ideological control becomes most noticeable and most contested. Across all three

novels, language emerges as both a medium of power and a space of resistance, shaped by the changing structures of meaning, self-expression, and power turns.

5 Implications and Reassessment of Research Objectives

The comparative linguistic analysis of *1984*, *The Handmaid's Tale*, and *The Babel Apocalypse* confirms and extends the research objectives by foregrounding how semantic and pragmatic mechanisms operate within dystopian language regimes. Reassessment of the initial research objectives: (1) to identify how language encodes, reproduces, and challenges ideological structures in fictional dystopias, and (2) to explore how these literary representations reflect, prefigure, or critique real-world sociopolitical and technological dynamics, reveals both clear confirmations and nuanced complexities.

Regarding the first objective, the semantic findings indicate that each text employs distinct yet structurally analogous lexical strategies to delimit thought and impose ideology and a state of conformity. Orwell's Newspeak reduces lexical variety and meaning nuances through morphological simplification and the erasure of antonyms in favour of new, unnuanced words (e.g., "doubleplusungood"), thereby enforcing cognitive conformity. Atwood's regime reassigns meaning through possessive naming practices ("Ofglen," "Offred," "Ofwayne," "Ofwarren") and biblical recontextualisation ("salvaging", "Blessed are the meek"), embedding authority in ritualised expressions ("May the Lord open.*"*). Evans' narrative introduces a technologically mediated lexicon that fragments meaning across platforms and devices (e.g., "Unilanguage," "cybercrime," "CyberForce," "gynoid," "medivac," "lang-law," "soc-ed"), showcasing the volatility of digital discourse under surveillance.

Pragmatic analysis highlights how language-in-use functions as a performative tool of power. In *1984*, speech acts are reduced to formulaic slogans and monitored for orthodoxy, eroding the illocutionary force of dissent. In *The Handmaid's Tale*, ritual utterances ("Blessed be the fruit") and silence operate as both instruments of compliance and potential sites of subversion through implicature and tone. In *The Babel Apocalypse*, communication is technologically filtered, and resistance depends on subverting systemic expectations via strategic non-cooperation or coded utterances, pragmatic actions that recalibrate the communicative frame itself.

Concerning the second research objective, resistance emerges as a function of pragmatic affordances within constrained discursive environments, echoing the similarity with real-world struggles where surveillance and algorithmic governance limit expressive agency. Winston's illicit diary entries, like censored speech under authoritarian regimes, represent speech acts intended to reassert agency, but their locutionary and illocutionary effects are nullified by pervasive surveillance. Similarly, Offred's nuanced use of ritual language and ambiguity mirrors how marginalised voices exploit sanctioned forms to resist dominant narratives, thereby

exploiting pragmatic ambiguity. In Evans' digital dystopia, characters engage not just with human interlocutors but with algorithmic systems or software as part of the communicative act, paralleling contemporary dynamics of digital control through algorithmic power.

The analysis demonstrates that language in dystopian fiction operates not merely as a thematic concern but as a structural mechanism through which power is both enforced and challenged. The comparative semantic-pragmatic framework reveals that, while each regime deploys unique lexical and performative tools, common strategies, such as lexical narrowing, scripted speech, and mediated silencing, persist across contexts.

These findings confirm that language is a central locus of ideological control and contestation in dystopian fiction and show the utility of linguistic analysis for unravelling dystopian narratives and shaping relations. By integrating semantic and pragmatic perspectives, the analysis not only clarifies how dystopian regimes use language to dominate but also reveals the subtle, often covert ways in which resistance is imagined and enacted. Moreover, they point toward broader socio-political implications: in increasingly digital and surveilled societies, control over language, specifically over meanings, uses, and channels, remains a critical site of struggle. The study thus reinforces the relevance of critical linguistic inquiry for understanding contemporary mechanisms of ideological control.

6 Conclusions

This study adopted a close, theoretically informed qualitative methodology to examine how language functions as a mechanism of ideological power in dystopian fiction. Through detailed semantic analysis, pragmatic interpretation, and cross-textual comparison, it identified the linguistic strategies that constrain thought, enforce social hierarchies, and arbitrate forms of resistance. These findings provide both the empirical and theoretical foundation for the interpretations presented, providing a systematic account of how semantic-pragmatic mechanisms operate across a diverse corpus of dystopian narratives.

Focusing on Orwell's *1984*, Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*, and Evans' *The Babel Apocalypse*, the analysis reveals that language within dystopian worlds is not a neutral communicative tool, but rather a site of ideological manipulation. Across these texts, previously mentioned semantic strategies, including lexical reduction, re-signification, and technological fragmentation, are deployed to outline the boundaries of thought and perception. From a pragmatic perspective, the texts exemplify how speech acts, ritualised utterances, enforced silences, and communication intermediated only by technology control subjectivity and retain the conditions under which agency may be exercised or withheld.

These findings reaffirm that language is not merely reflective of power, but constitutive of it. In each fictional world, linguistic structures trace the limits of the *sayable* and the *thinkable*, reinforcing specific epistemologies and social hierarchies.

By placing these texts in comparative dialogue, the study foregrounds how semantic narrowing in *1984*, symbolic naming and liturgical phrasing in *The Handmaid's Tale*, and digital mediation in *The Babel Apocalypse* articulate distinct yet interconnected modalities of linguistic control. Therefore, these literary texts resonate beyond the fictional realm, offering allegorical insights into real-world configurations of discourse, governance, and technological control.

The comparative semantic-pragmatic framework developed here contributes to our understanding of how language functions not only as a theme in dystopian fiction but as a structural mechanism of domination and resistance. Control, as these texts demonstrate, is not solely achieved through overt censorship or linguistic violence, but through more subtle manipulations of meaning, identity, and communicative possibilities. The integration of critical discourse theory and speech act analysis situates these findings within broader philosophical and sociolinguistic debates about the role of language in shaping knowledge, behaviour, and social order.

Ultimately, this research highlights the enduring significance of linguistic analysis in the examination of power. It highlights the potential for interdisciplinary inquiry, linking literary criticism, linguistics, philosophy, and digital theory to illustrate how control is linguistically enacted, contested, and transformed. The study lays the groundwork for future research into the evolving dynamics of language and power, particularly in relation to emerging forms of algorithmic discourse, surveillance capitalism, and digital subjectivity. By bridging the gap between fictional representation and lived experience, it affirms the critical role of language in constructing both dystopian imaginaries and the realities they mirror.

In an era increasingly defined by algorithmic surveillance, platform governance, and the erosion of discursive nuance, the linguistic strategies explored in these dystopian texts resonate with growing urgency. Orwell's model of enforced linguistic uniformity, Atwood's gendered semiotic economy, and Evans' abundance of technological neologisms discourse offer allegorical insight into real-world mechanisms of ideological governance, from censorship and disinformation to the algorithmic filtering of speech. These fictions help us comprehend both how language is manipulated and how it can be reclaimed as a site of antagonism, starting from a seed of dissent. Through reactions such as Winston's covert acts of writing and speech, we see the fragility of resistance under constant surveillance. Offred's strategic manipulation of ritual language reveals how subversion can exist within and through institutionalised forms. In Evans' text, resistance necessitates a reimagining of agency itself, one that acknowledges technological systems as active participants in communicative acts.

At the same time, this research acknowledges certain limitations. First, the qualitative and interpretive nature of the methodology privileges depth over breadth; it does not attempt to offer statistical generalisations or empirical correlations. Nor does it engage in a full-scale corpus-linguistic or computational analysis, which might yield additional patterns across a larger body of dystopian texts. Furthermore, while the selected novels offer a temporal, technological, and thematic range, they

inevitably reflect Anglophone, Western-centric perspectives on language and control. A broader comparative study might incorporate dystopian literature from non-Western traditions, multilingual environments, or oral cultures to examine how language manipulation manifests across diverse sociopolitical contexts.

Future research could expand this inquiry along several promising trajectories. One avenue involves integrating corpus stylistics or digital humanities tools to examine linguistic manipulation across larger datasets of dystopian fiction. This could reveal recurring lexical or syntactic patterns that may not be apparent through close reading alone. Another direction might explore the role of artificial intelligence, machine translation, and speech recognition technologies as contemporary agents of linguistic control and standardisation, echoing the concerns dramatised in *The Babel Apocalypse*. Finally, interdisciplinary collaborations with fields such as media studies, political science, or sociolinguistics could deepen our understanding of how language functions within evolving ecologies of power in both fictional and real-world dystopias.

In summary, this study confirms the pivotal role of language in shaping, challenging, and envisioning power. As our communicative environments become increasingly mediated by technology and ideology alike, this highlights the critical importance of protecting discursive diversity, semantic complexity, and communicative agency. It addresses the questions raised by dystopian literature and the analytical tools used to examine them, which remain not only relevant but also essential.

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