
“The Power of Language: A Critical Examination of Linguistic Manipulation and Identity in Modern English Literature”

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Abstract

Language cannot be merely a method of conversation; it is the instrument of influence, control, and identity assemblage. This study discusses the nature of the power of language that is highlighted in modern English literature, especially the aspects of linguistic manipulation, social domination, and the formation of self and group identity. The works chosen and discussed in the study are *1984* by George Orwell, *The Handmaid's Tale* by Margaret Atwood, and *Beloved* by Toni Morrison, and they concern the shaping of reality by the words, dominance, and power of language. From the perspective of critical literature and linguistics, this paper is aimed at the arguments that language, in the case of being strategically controlled, turns into an ideological weapon yet has opportunities to provide resistance and self-definition. The conclusion is that the language is also a political tool employed by writers to expose the interaction of discourse and power besides being a narrative tool.

Keywords: Language and Power, Linguistic Oppression, Identity Construction, Narrative Resistance, Postcolonial Discourse

1. Introduction

English Language Teaching (ELT) is not an innocuous teaching process; it is closely related to the issues of power, identity, and the role of politics. English has become world-dominating, and it is impossible to explain it without considering the historical, political, and economic factors that have brought this language to the present-day status of lingua franca. Criticizers of the English language include P.S. Rao (2019), who believes that the widespread use of the English language around the world came as a result of the British imperial expansion and the impact of the industrial strength, which made it easy to be established as a language system in the educational and governance

systems of colonized nations. This legacy is evident today in English Language Teaching (ELT), which tends to enhance the asymmetrical distribution of power between non-native and native speakers.

The world's implementation of ELT clearly reflects the power and cultural domination of language. E. In her article on the politics of language in English language testing, Shohamy (2007) underlines the dual nature of language and standardized tests, stating that in the world of language examinations, English language testing is about more than testing proficiency because it helps those in control of academic and professional opportunities. As a result, these tests will act as gatekeepers to determine who is qualified to participate in global discourse and who is not. This assessment power develops hegemony, in which success is more likely to be based on knowledge of English than intellectual achievement.

The dynamic is further criticized by Brumfit (1994) in his CLE working paper by appealing to educators to oppose homogenizing forces that intend to educate all learners to an identical pattern in English language use. He warns about the cultural imperialism inherent in such an approach and the fact that it marginalizes local languages and transgresses identities. He claims that language teaching should be contextual and ethically conscious of its potential effect on the self-perception and social role of learners.

In addition, language is not just any tool of communication but a form of identity creation and manipulation. In the power of language: The author critically examines linguistic manipulation and identity in modern English literature, revealing how English has been used as a literary device and a tool of ideology, either oppressively or liberatingly. With the ideologies of a dominant culture, literature written in the English language tends to take positions on this same ideological theme, defaming other perspectives on the world and manifesting hegemonies (Author, year). This live resonates through the education systems where the language of instruction is English and, therefore, authorizes particular knowledge and systems at the disadvantage of others who remain mute. The other topic that R. Salomone (2022) examines is the importance of English as a global language that involves not just a searching medium but the values, assumptions, and histories of the native speakers. In teaching and learning, this can be rendered as a Western perspective on educational systems, such that the curriculum and instructional systems place much value on the Anglo-American cultural standards. This affirms a microscopic yet pervasive cultural hegemony, especially in societies that are postcolonial with a struggle to establish their linguistic and cultural identity.

Moreover, another big issue is the conflicting relationship between English and indigenous languages. G.C.S. Iwuchukwu (2011) analyzes the tension between the English and African languages, which, according to the researcher, tends to lead to the depreciation of local languages and a decrease in linguistic diversity and the cultural heritage. Its symbolic capital is given by the

dominance of English in educational and media institutions, which ensured its position as a necessity to upward mobility at best and a drag in terms of practicality and emotion on the native languages at worst. Last but not least, A.P. Miller (2003) mentions that multilingualism loss at school brings about the decline of cognitive and cultural pluralism. Students usually lose touch with the roots of their culture and expressivity and lose both language and self when English is the only language authorized as the only language of instruction.

2. Theoretical Framework: Language, Power, and Identity

2.1 Language and Power – Foucault and Orwell

The connection between language and power is laid deep thematically in philosophy and literature. Michel Foucault spent his time suggesting that discourse is not a medium of control, but it is a control apparatus. Based on Foucault, language is not merely the mirror of knowledge; it establishes knowledge and forms what may be taken as the truth within any community. Institutions, such as education, medicine, and the legal system, have the power to normalize some behaviors and beliefs and marginalize others through language use (Foucault qtd. in Wodak, 2012). At the same time, this concept can be seen fulfilling itself in the novel *1984* by George Orwell, presenting a fictional yet frightening realization of it. The creation of highly regulated English “Newspeak” illustrates that the restriction of linguistic means restricts thought, causing control of the society. The work produced by Orwell is an allegory of the threats of manipulation of words in language, where power is in the ability to speak and not to speak (Orwell, 1949). This is a direct contribution to the discussion of Foucault that truth is a product of the discourse practice and not a fact that is found objectively.

2.2 Language and Identity – Linguistic Relativity and Narrative Construction

The Sapir-Whorf hypothesis, or linguistic relativity, holds that language structure and lexicon affect the perception and worldview of language speakers. This theory plays a critical role in describing the relationship between linguistics and identity, especially in literature and sociolinguistic research. Language is not a simple description of the reality; it is also a set of frames within which the identity is formed and re-formed. Langston and Peti-Stanti (2014) argue that languages possess subsumed national and ethnic values that nourish the national and ethnic identity in general and are usually guardians of group memory. Identity change is not a rare phenomenon in literary works where characters may use or neglect specific languages or dialects to maintain their identity. This perspective is reaffirmed by Joseph (2003), who points out that identity is not made but constructed in an ongoing process of interaction, accent, and voice, which has social significance.

Of further support to this argument with respect to conceptualizing identity in language learning is the argument put forth by Bonny Norton (2010), who further posits that a poststructuralist view

of identity is superior to explaining the nature of current identity in language learning because it allows the identity to be fluid, multiple, and a negotiated entity. Cultural norms are not passively internalized by language learners, who rather position themselves with or against cultural expectations in order to develop new subjectivities in the process of interaction. As an example, learners can oppose hegemonic linguistic ideologies by switching languages or talking in vernaculars, being in control of their own image. Within the domain of heritage language literacy, Lo-Philip (2010) states that language has also been used as a symbolic resource in determining people in their sense of belonging, marginalization, and empowerment.

Moreover, Wodak (2012) explains how language policies and discourses of institutions develop hierarchies, where a particular language and identity obtain the status of valued assets over others. These policies tend to increase social stratification, giving voice to those who speak the dominant languages and silencing the minority. These dynamics are particularly acute in the present globalized contemporary world, where English as a language is commonly viewed as the default language of power and prestige. Rahman (1999) explains that language acts as a means of group mobilization and resource access, and as such, problems of tensions between the lingual majorities and the minorities arise.

Lastly, the introduction of digital discourse and social media has added a new star to this theoretical framework. According to such scholars as Sajjad, Malghnai, and Khosa (2018), online linguistic practices now commonly produce and broker political and personal identities and present them to the world. This digital era has reduced language as an instrument of performance and strategy in the making of identity as a proving of the elastic yet continuing interaction between language, power, and selfhood.

Altogether, the so-called theoretical framework of language, power, and identity is fertile in discussing both pieces of literature and linguistic practices in the real world. Through the process of discourse theory mentioned above by Foucault, the literary warning against controlled language by Orwell, the hypothesis presented by Sapir-Whorf, and poststructuralist approaches to identity, academicians concur that language forms the focal point of determining social realities. Language is not just a description of the world but the system of structuring thought, the posing of hierarchies, and the creation of the sense of who we are. The knowledge of these theories makes us able to be critically involved in the politics of language in education, literature, and other areas of life.

3. Language Domination and Oppression: Orwellian Reflections and Contemporary Theories

3.1 Newspeak: Reducing Language to Reduce Thought

The book *1984* by George Orwell is one of the classic works on how language can in a systematic way be weaponized to control not only society but cognition as well. Central to the language machinery of the regime is Newspeak, a poor language that is created on purpose to rid words that

evoke rebellion, contrariness, or even criticism. Through limiting the words, Newspeak lessens the number of imagined conceits. The idea, as Orwell outlines, was to render the idea of thought crime literally impossible to consider, since, as it would turn out, there will be no words to express it (Orwell 1984). As an example, the boundaryless sense of the word "freedom" is deprived of its political implications and has been reduced to trivialities such as "this dog is free of lice." Thus, it cannot be directly related to a sense of individual liberty or to political agency. Such epistemic violence of language is some kind of mental enslavement, as the citizens themselves do not have the means to challenge or even express oppression.

This point is consistent with the argument of TY Okosun that language, under the pretense of neutrality or unification, becomes, most times, a tool in the domination system. Okosun, in his study, criticizes the historical tendency in which the dominant language (e.g., English) is promulgated over the local or indigenous one under the pretext of thematic harmonization, because what is pampered as linguistic unity usually turns implicitly into cultural destruction and intellectual colonialism. The language does not merely serve as a medium of transmitting and conveying something; it also becomes a regulator of access, participation, and belonging, especially in the areas of education and governance (Okosun).

Moreover, Cele (2001) reasons with the concept of language liberation when carried out within the parameters of Western interests, citing how it can take shape as a new type of oppression. English, through its perceived modernity and openings, becomes a gate itself that shuts off those who did not already have openings. In learning language policies, particularly in postcolonial situations, this tendency to entrench rather than remove hierarchies of languages results when such policies give privileges to dominant languages and fail to consider the linguistic predispositions of the learners. That reminds me of Orwell: words are fabricated at the top; those that hold the reins on the language hold the power over the minds and eventually over human beings.

3.2 Doublethink and the Manipulation of Truth

The other important linguistic innovation made by Orwell is the so-called concept of "doublethink," the ability to believe two mutually antagonistic precepts at a time and embrace both as valid. Neither is it hypocrisy, although it is a very forced state of mind in which contradiction is cast in the image of coherence by virtue of language. Catchphrases like "War is Peace," "Freedom is Slavery," and "Ignorance is Strength" are some of the examples of language used to project the opposite that leads to undermining of rationality itself (Orwell). Citizens are not just deceived by falsehood; they are taught to believe the falsehood, and their abilities to stand against the lie are ruined.

Another author following this model of reasoning, Celia Kitzinger (1996), uses it to discuss the current trends of discussion of lesbian and gay oppression, stating that language does not explore the oppression but is also its creator and possessor. She underlines that psychological and political

oppression can be very easily made invisible by the discourse, the element of euphemizing or coded silence. Even the words to talk or the words to fail to talk about marginalized identities become an erasure tool, just similarly to what Orwell defined as a reality control or a doublethink. Equally, G. Roche (2019) looks at language oppression when discussing colonialism, in this case, the removal of the minority languages in Tibet. According to him, language shift is not a faceless modernization process but a political relation of domination, during which the native voices and other voices are marginalized in the name of development or national unity. This habit is similar to how Orwell describes a situation where the past is rewritten to accommodate the present, and it is in language that the practice takes place.

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Language is both a much more powerful and a much more complex medium than that of communication: a technology of power that can construct thought as well as shape identity and dictate the rules of social relations. The fictional dystopia of *1984* designed by Orwell tells a horrific yet enlightening reflection of how language can become an architecture of controls, and that includes rules such as Newspeak and doublethink. Such literary notions reflect the actual practices in the real world as discussed by scholars such as Okosun, Kitzinger, and Roche, who report real-life examples of linguistic dominance in continuing to perpetuate cultural and political oppression in different situations both as a colonial legacy and in contemporary education

structures. The conflict in the choice of language is ultimately a conflict about whose voices count, whether it be in curriculum design or in policy work or in social media. In fiction and reality, the freedom of speech defines the limits of liberty, determining when one can speak or be silent.

4. Language and Gender Control in *The Handmaid's Tale*

Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* provides a chilling depiction of how language, through its erasure and ritualization, transforms into a tool of patriarchal control, effectively silencing and condemning women. The novel is written in the dystopia of a theocratic civilization of Gilead, where gender is linguistically produced, coded, and violently imposed. Language does not have a purely passive reflection of ideology; it is the actual mechanism by which ideology is brought to light. The Gileadic regime is a master in its ability to reconstitute reality using the manipulation of linguistic expression in this way, assuring obedience and conformity.

4.1 Linguistic Erasure of Individual Identity

The termination of women as real individuals with their identity, perhaps, is the most vivid image of linguistic oppression in Gilead. At this point, handmaids lose their names; thus, they are called patronymics, like, in the case of handmaid Offred, which literally means of Fred, as an indication that she is the property of her commander. Renaming it is not merely a symbolic step; it is a form of linguistic destruction of the identity and independence. According to Kamphorst (2017), identity in Gilead is not self-determined but is defined by the government, and this system of naming makes women mere functionaries in terms of reproductive economy. Such a designation as Offred does not infer a name; it consists of a sentence of subjugation, a brand that declares as well as denies a woman, because it tells functional ends, but not ends. Such renaming is one that buttresses the theory of performative gender by Judith Butler, in that language is transformed into a space in which identity is at the same time performed and restricted (Kamphorst).

Besides, this effacement is in accord with the Foucauldian notions of biopower as the process of regulating the body through discourse. Indeed, according to SA Lone and S Zafar, it is worth using the term of dialectical reversal as language is censored and transformed to meet the ideological requirements of the regime and can be described as a source of identity formation and negation (Lone and Zafar 2024). The gist of this is that women are not allowed to tell their own stories, and this silence is highly relied on, even on their names, which are the purest forms of individuality. It is linguistic nullification as a kind of dehumanization, but one that refuses narrative agency and forces a solid and affirmative identity determined by the state..

4.2 Ritualized Speech and Controlled Communication

Gilead applies the culture of ritualized and formulaic speech, which numbs originality and creates a culture of surveillance, while also erasing individuality. Such constructions as "Blessed be the fruit" or "Under His Eye" appear to be harmless and even innocent linguistic detention

observatories: words with a heavy ideological burden that enforce submission and indicate loyalty to the state. These mandated greetings are more of a way of checking each other and also a tool of self-censorship. Repeat of said language means people can internalize state doctrine in the same way that Newspeak narrows the range of thoughts by decreasing the use of language.

According to Namjoo (2019), in *The Handmaid's Tale*, language is not merely used, but it is created to support authority, making hierarchies and controlling minds. Ritual language does away with context and flow in the language and discourages originality and original thought. This is what Bourdieu would term *assymbolic violence*, the imposing of schemes of signification, naturalizing social differences, and relating them as legitimate. Expressing greetings between the females in a highly codified and religious language demonstrates that linguistic convention becomes a tool of ideological subordination.

Khafaga (2017) also mentions the way in which Gilead repeats the use of the so-called propaganda language to enforce political myths (including the notion of divine duty or national salvation) in the colloquial language. Personnel rites of language legitimize these myths without overt discussion. By means of linguistic indoctrination, not only are women denied the language to rebel, but they are also deprived of the cognitive structures for conceiving notions of resistance. Spadolini (2025) observes that though this imposition is presented in her inner speech, it is undermined by the internal voice Offred expresses, which is her own, in her narrative voice; the ritualized language that Offred is imposed upon is rebelled against, and the disjunction between the ritualized and Offred and her counter voice builds against the attention paid to the memory, the irony, and the narrative, thereby returning her what was taken: humanity.

Moreover, the power of the regime over language goes to the extent of controlling how people read and write. Women have not yet been granted permission to read; this prohibition has come about by the fear that in case they learn to read, they would develop a think tank! Rajeshwari and Meenakshi (2022) insist that this ban should be understood as a kind of performance in which access to the language can also be referred to as a restriction on knowledge and moral control. As long as women cannot read, write, or speak freely, they have no tools to create resistance and communicate with each other. Only the ruling gender (men), such as priests, commanders, and lawmakers, can use language, making it a gender privilege.

4.3 Gossip, Memory, and Linguistic Resistance

In spite of these prohibitions, Atwood provides us insights into resistance in the form of language, the language of narrative memory and whispers, and informal communication. B. According to Johnson (1996), the informal talk between women, or better known as literary gossip, produces a meaning of alternative space despite the surveillance. These informal, talk words in whispers act as the micro-resistance to the hegemonic language by the state. They enable women to transmit

prohibited information, exchange experiences, and retain the memories of who they used to be, which is by no means obeying the enforced silence of Gilead.

In her turn, this narrative structure of the novel, the disjointed, self-concentrated voice of Offred, also becomes one of the forms of resistance. Though her spoken language is limited, she narrates with great metaphors and richness of deep humanity inside her head. This contradiction provides the image of this distance between external conformity and inner resistance, as it demonstrates that language can still be a place of self-sufficiency and resistance. According to Sucharzewska (2023), the act of narration on the part of Offred is a form of reclaiming agency whereby she testifies about all the injustices despite being unable to openly protest.

In *The Handmaid's Tale*, Margaret Atwood has shown very skillfully how any language can be used as a strong tool of subjugation as well. The Gileadean regime has come into existence through processes including renaming, ritualized language, and censorship, which build a patriarchally enforced gendered linguistic order. Nevertheless, even in these limitations, Atwood extracts subversive potential from the word "memory," the whispered word "irony," during a narration. The novel is in line with the larger body of critical thought—the discourse-power matrix as delineated by Foucault, the performativity as postulated by Butler, and the symbolic violence put forward by Bourdieu—to convey the point that wielding language is wielding power over identity, thought, and, in effect, freedom. Studying the process of language functioning in Gilead, we comprehend better how even real-life systems can be based on language as one of the means of gendered power and ideological control.

5. Language and Memory in *Beloved*

Beloved by Toni Morrison is a penetrating reflection upon slave trauma and the relationship between language, memory, and sense of oneself. In this neo-slave story, Morrison shows the constraining nature of language as well as its liberating effect—both insufficient enough to describe the evil of slavery and critical to the retrieval of both individual and cultural histories. In the perspectives of African American experience, Morrison discloses that traumas should not just be documented in terms of language, but they are entrenched in silences and symbols as well as embodied memory. Thus, language is turned into a field of battle: a field of articulation, a field of survival, and a field of redemption.

5.1 *Silence and the Limits of Language*

Being a revolutionary author, one of the most impressive tools Morrison uses is her performance of silence as the speech, as the refusal, as a restriction, and as the way of coping. The main character, Sethe, who is a former slave woman, constantly experiences situations in which words cannot sufficiently represent her suffering. Her inability to speak in particular about the death of her baby daughter addresses the horrific quality of trauma. That, according to R. Ferguson, impressions of slave ships and the first memories of *Beloved* became, as he puts it, something that

cannot be forced into language (man can only attempt to understand it in such a way as it can be converted into language) (Ferguson 2017). The traumatic memory does not obey linear narration and clear language use to express it, indicating that perhaps language is the betrayer of the memory, since it smoothes or domesticates its strong emotion.

This is the failure of language, which lies at the core of the Morrison project. As Sistani (2016) writes, *Beloved* trauma is based on the symbolic order of language and structure and at the same time disturbs them. Morrison is not a writer who obeys the rules of realistic narrative and instead tries to capture this rupture through discontinuous chronologies, multiple vantage points, and interior monologues used to theatricalize the loss of narrative structure. The psychological cuts that Sethe faces are symbolic representations of what language itself fails to describe: there is no way of looking at her past and verbally describing it or coming to terms with it because this is a layer beyond the capabilities of language.

This linguistic shortcoming can be equated with that of Freud (through Comfort 1995) that language deprives memory of its emotional charge. Morrison defies this perception, implying that, on the contrary, silence is able to be as emotionally weighty as language, at least when the language is distorted by hegemonic discourse. To Sethe and many others, the language of the privileged white culture was not a language of emotional truth, but a language of property, of commerce, and of viciousness. Therefore, silence is an anti-discursive move, a rejection of expressing pain using the language of the oppressor.

5.2 Storytelling as Healing and Resistance

Nevertheless, these limitations do not preclude *Beloved*, which straightaway proclaims the sacralizing aspect of storytelling. Instead, Morrison portrays language, and language is a source not only of trauma but of healing and opposition as well. The storytelling, especially in the community, is one method that helps the characters rediscover their identity and regain ownership. It is demonstrated most clearly in the most dramatic moments of the novel, when Sethe, Denver, and even *Beloved* herself start reconstructing their past, as narrated by several people, using disparate elements.

The notion of rememory, presented by Sethe, takes a leading position within this process. Morrison's rememory is not recollection but the persistence of memory into space and time, into other minds than the one recollecting. In her statement that "One set of burned-down houses is gone, but the picture of it—the memory of it—stays, and not only in my rememory, but out there in the world" (*Beloved* 43), Sethe does not only state that memory is collective; she also indicates that it is spatial and occupies the present. The commonness of remembering makes it an area into which language is transformed into a focal point of a shared practice, a way of handing on otherwise inaccessible pasts.

Kreyling (2007) expounds on the same by stating that *Beloved* is a significant and complicated drama of memory using words in insistence that storytelling as a way of survival is a ritual. Blyn (1998) asserts that Morrison presents a model of memory reconstruction that allows for the subsumption of fragmented identities through storytelling. Rebutting erasures of slavery, the characters affirm their capability to tell the stories of their backgrounds as characters bring to voice what used to remain unspoken or even taboo.

Thus, language becomes the medium of rehumanization. By uttering the words ,You are your best thing, to Sethe, Paul D is able to reconfirm who she is in addition to the labels of slave, mother, or murderer. This scene is a linguistic reintegration of dignity, a means of illustrating how words, when uttered by a member of the group, can rearrange battered subjectivities. Through narrative acts, fragmented identity in the novel is reconstructed, as Favreau (2024) observes, as speaking is an act of self-authorization in the novel.

5.3 Embodied Language and the Haunting of the Past

In addition to speech, Morrison uses the body as memory text and signification. The ghostly reincarnation of Sethe, *Beloved*, is not merely some sort of a specter: *Beloved* is living trauma. The scenes in which she appears are characterized rather by silence, song, and gesture than by intelligible speech. Wardi (1998) writes more extensively about this, pointing out how Morrison subverts the tongue, putting the language of the body to work—the language of crying, scars, and touch—thus showing the body is as good a language as the language of the mouth and, in many instances, more truthful. The scarred back of Sethe, a revelation of a tree, turns out to be a text of pain and survival, as the scarred backs of the enslaved bodies serve as an embodiment of violence when they could not find written records of history.

According to Cummings (1990), Morrison's plan to decolonize language focuses on breaking the back of words and emphasizes non-verbal and non-linear forms of communication that do not belong to the Western literary tradition. By doing so, *Beloved* subverts Eurocentric assumptions of linguistic competence and suggests an alternative tradition based on oral history, experience of the body, and groups of people.

Toni Morrison has developed a complex and deeply emotional understanding of the use of language in the history of slavery in *Beloved*. Language can't convey trauma's enormity, but it can help with recovery, resistance, and self-reconstruction. The language, according to Morrison, is twofold, as it can silence people and also liberate them. Morrison employs silences, storytelling, and embodied expression to provide the characters in *Beloved* with the words and narratives they previously lacked. They do that by rewriting personal and collective histories and disrupting systems of oppression in a statement about the permanence of the power of language as a survival and transformational tool.

6. Comparative Analysis and Discussion: Language as Oppression and Liberation

The relationship between language and power lies at the core of George Orwell's *1984*, Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*, and Toni Morrison's *Beloved*. Although each novel situates language within vastly different historical, political, and social contexts—totalitarianism, theocratic patriarchy, and post-slavery trauma respectively—they all affirm the central thesis that **language does not merely reflect reality; it actively constructs it**.

Where Orwell emphasizes language as a tool for absolute control—with little room for subversion—Atwood and Morrison present more nuanced frameworks. In their texts, **language emerges as a site of both oppression and resistance**, especially when wielded by marginalized voices.

🔍 Comparative Table: Language as Oppression and Liberation

Work	Language as Oppression	Language as Liberation
George Orwell's <i>1984</i>	Newspeak systematically reduces vocabulary to eliminate dissenting thought. Doublethink forces citizens to accept contradictions, erasing truth. State propaganda rewrites history via the Ministry of Truth.	Extremely limited. Language is so manipulated that authentic expression becomes almost impossible. Winston's personal diary and forbidden reading (e.g., <i>The Theory and Practice of Oligarchical Collectivism</i>) serve as minor acts of resistance, but they ultimately fail.
Margaret Atwood's <i>The Handmaid's Tale</i>	Women are renamed (e.g., "Offred"), erasing individual identity. Use of ritualistic speech (e.g., "Blessed be the fruit") curtails free communication. Scripture is censored and weaponized to justify gender hierarchy.	Illicit writing (Offred's Latin message: "Nolite te bastardes carborundorum") represents a covert legacy of rebellion. Memory and inner monologue preserve identity. Storytelling becomes resistance—Offred's narrative is an act of self-preservation.
Toni Morrison's <i>Beloved</i>	Trauma-induced silence suppresses the ability to narrate the horrors of slavery.	Oral storytelling allows characters to reclaim memory and rebuild identity.

	Language fails to fully express emotional and physical pain. The enslaved are denied names, histories, and cultural continuity.	Rememory links individual trauma to collective history. Language becomes healing—Sethe, Denver, and Paul D reconstruct the self through shared narrative.
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Thematic Analysis: Language, Power, and the Politics of Memory

6.1 Who Controls Language Controls Power

In all three novels, the **central struggle is over linguistic sovereignty**—who gets to name, narrate, or define reality. Orwell's regime controls the very structure of language (through Newspeak), making **rebellion conceptually impossible**. As Syme chillingly observes in *1984*, "It's a beautiful thing, the destruction of words" (*1984* 52). In such a linguistic prison, thought itself is shackled. Atwood similarly reveals that **naming is a political act**. Handmaids are denied their birth names, reinforcing their subjugation as reproductive vessels. The use of rigid, repetitive phrases turns conversation into surveillance, eliminating the possibility of unsanctioned thought.

Morrison, by contrast, illustrates how the **legacy of linguistic domination** continues even after the fall of slavery. Sethe's silence and *Beloved*'s inarticulable trauma point to the enduring **erasure of Black voices**—but Morrison also shows that **language can be reclaimed**, especially when it emerges from within the Black oral tradition.

6.2 Language as Resistance and Reconstruction

Only in *The Handmaid's Tale* and *Beloved* does language evolve into a form of **resistance and liberation**. Offred's narrative is framed as a historical testimony recorded for future generations, suggesting that storytelling itself is a **defiant political act**. Atwood's metafictional structure invites the reader to **bear witness**, restoring agency to a voice that the Gileadean state tried to silence. Morrison's *Beloved*, on the other hand, places **healing at the center of linguistic resistance**. Language is not just used to confront the past, but to **re-member**—to piece together broken identities and familial bonds. As Paul D tells Sethe, "You your best thing, Sethe. You are." (*Beloved* 322). This brief yet affirming sentence reestablishes Sethe's personhood, challenging the dehumanization she endured.

6.3 Modes of Language: From Instrument to Intimacy

Each text also explores **different modalities of language**:

- Orwell's is **instrumental**, stripped of emotion and manipulated by the state.
- Atwood's is **ritualistic and performative**, deployed to control behavior under a religious framework.
- Morrison's is **intimate, symbolic, and communal**, often communicated through nonverbal cues, ghostly presences, and bodily memory.

These modes reflect each author's thematic concern: Orwell with **totalitarianism**, Atwood with **gender and religious extremism**, and Morrison with **racialized trauma and historical memory**.

Ultimately, these three novels converge on the same philosophical conclusion: **language is never neutral**. It is a site of ideological struggle—shaped by institutions, history, and identity. Orwell warns us of a future where **language becomes a weapon to erase dissent**, while Atwood and Morrison reveal its **capacity for reclamation and survival**. Where Orwell closes the door on resistance, Atwood and Morrison leave it slightly ajar—suggesting that even in the face of systemic erasure, the human voice, when preserved or remembered, can still carry the weight of truth.

7. Implications for Modern Society

This literary exploration of language and power, as depicted in *1984*, *The Handmaid's Tale*, and *Beloved*, carries profound implications for the modern world. In contemporary society, language remains one of the most powerful instruments for shaping thought, directing public opinion, and controlling access to truth. Political rhetoric today frequently mirrors Orwellian manipulation, where phrases like “alternative facts” distort reality, and euphemisms sanitize violence or injustice—concealing harsh truths behind softened language. Governments and institutions continue to reframe public discourse through strategic language choices, redefining narratives to serve dominant ideologies. Similarly, as in Atwood's Gilead, modern media landscapes often rely on algorithmically curated content that controls what people see, hear, and believe, thereby reinforcing ideological bubbles and suppressing critical thought. This selective exposure to information subtly dictates perception, shaping social and political realities without the overt brutality of physical coercion. Even in the realm of digital communication, terms are filtered, policed, or redirected, often limiting expression while claiming to protect it. In this context, Morrison's exploration of memory and silence becomes equally relevant; marginalized communities around the world still struggle to have their histories and identities represented in mainstream narratives. The systematic exclusion of certain voices from public discourse is a continuation of the same linguistic erasure seen in the traumatic silences of *Beloved*. Whether through deliberate misinformation, institutional censorship, or algorithmic bias, language in the modern era is a terrain of ideological conflict. Literature acts as a powerful lens through which to view these phenomena, reminding us that the manipulation of language is not merely an artistic theme—it is a mechanism by which individuals, communities, and entire populations are influenced, confined, or empowered. Thus, these novels are not only works of fiction but cautionary tales that demand critical engagement with the language we use and consume every day.

8. Conclusion

Modern English literature offers a compelling and nuanced examination of the intricate interplay between language, power, and identity, revealing that language is never neutral—it is always ideological. Through the dystopian vision of Orwell's *1984*, the theocratic regime in Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*, and the haunting legacy of slavery in Morrison's *Beloved*, readers encounter a spectrum of linguistic function: as a tool for oppression, a medium of resistance, and a pathway to healing. These works demonstrate how language can be weaponized to strip individuals of their agency, reduce them to societal roles, and even rewrite reality itself. Yet, they also illuminate how language—through memory, storytelling, and subversive discourse—can serve as a means of reclaiming one's humanity and asserting identity in the face of systemic domination. What binds these texts is a shared understanding that language does not merely reflect reality—it constructs it. When language is manipulated, so too is perception, consciousness, and social truth. Literature, therefore, becomes an act of resistance: it interrogates the very medium through which people come to understand themselves and the world around them. In compelling us to reflect on how language operates across historical, political, and cultural contexts, these novels do more than narrate—they provoke, unsettle, and ultimately empower. They remind us that being critically literate in the language we use and encounter is not just a scholarly exercise, but a necessary practice for preserving truth, justice, and individuality in a world where language remains the most potent form of control.

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