

# Margaret Atwood's Language Aspects in *The Handmaid's Tale*

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**Abstract**—Language is used in our daily routine as a communicative tool. Language users engage in a wide range of activities within the context of their daily social life and interact in several ways to make their goals understandable to their peers. Style is defined as an individual method of expressing ideas while speaking the common language exceptionally well. An individual's style dictates how one shapes one's language use to fit his or her objective. In a language, there are a variety of designs that may be characterised as scientific, literary, historical, legal, religious, rite, and rhetorical. These designs supported the modalities of communication and, as a result, the realms of language use. These communicative idioms take on completely diverse meanings in various fields of study. Atwood is widely regarded as a writer who is easy to read. She is the most well-known writer in Canadian literature. Her unique way of thinking is shown in her book, *The Handmaid's Tale*, through the writing process.

**Index Terms**—language aspects, *The Handmaid's Tale*, genre, gender, Canadian literature

## I. INTRODUCTION

### A. Margaret Atwood

Atwood's father was an entomologist, and her mother had previously worked as a dietician. When she was 16, she decided to pursue a writing career. She got her bachelor's degree in English from Victoria College, University of Toronto. In 1961, she published *Double Persephone*, her first collection of poetry, and in 1962, she graduated with her master's degree from Radcliffe College. She was beginning her career as a writer and teacher. Many awards have been bestowed upon her.

Margaret Atwood is well-known for being a writer who is easy to read. The official Margaret Atwood web pages are managed by Atwood herself, and they are often visited by readers. The internet source is a fantastic resource for an extensive and comprehensive overview of the author's literary career. Also revealed is Atwood's interaction with the associates of her favourite charities, such as the "Artists Against Racism" website, as well as the hilarious blurbs she writes when the advocate makes a public appearance. It also has information about upcoming lectures and appearances, updates on her current writing projects, and reviews of her work, so you can find out more about her.

From writer to writer, there is a difference in writing style and tone. No two writers can write in the same way that no two speakers can talk in the same way that no two speakers can speak. Many differences may be observed in their modes of communication as well as in the presentation of facts, content, and so on. The most evident cause of this discrepancy may be traced to the impact of society and the corresponding environmental factors on the writer's or speaker's work. To describe the style, the author's linguistic and social effects have been taken into account.

In addition Margaret Atwood's usage of the English language touches on these issues. Several socio-linguistic characteristics become apparent when language is used in the context of the current Indian society. Her use of stylistic techniques, inventions, and deviations in her work shows that she knows how to write in the new ways that are now common in English. As a result, her style of talking fits in well with the content system, which makes her very successful and efficient.

### B. Margaret Atwood's Process of Writing

According to Atwood, she prefers to handwrite her first draughts because it allows her to achieve the most fluid flow from her mind to her hand to the paper. She describes herself as a "downhill skier," which means that she keeps going as fast as she can and then fills in the gaps later in the process. Even though Atwood is well-known for her ideas and scope, she says that this is not where her work starts, and it should not start.

"I never start with an idea," says Atwood. "It just happens." When people are teaching books, especially books that have already been done, they may talk about ideas, because by that time, someone might know what the notion is or what the thoughts are. (Rasmussen, 2020).

### C. Margaret Atwood's Genre of Writing

Science fiction publications are frequently distinguished from literary fiction; nonetheless, Atwood's work obscures the distinction between the two categories. She doesn't think about genre while she's writing, instead giving that responsibility to the book's marketers.

Atwood's writings tend to fit into the category of speculative fiction, which is a sort of science fiction in which the setting is comparable to reality on Earth but with several essential imagined components. She argues that magazines such as *New Scientist* or *Scientific American*, among others, might serve as sources of inspiration for this type of work. After reading about genetic experiments and contemplating the potential of extinction, she began writing the dystopian novel *Oryx and Crake*. According to her, "aspects of reality that we can already achieve or are on the verge of being able to achieve must serve as the inspiration for science fiction and fantasy. As a result, the growth of human organs in pigs had already begun when I wrote *Oryx and Crake*. They had come close to success before, but now they have." (Atwood).

#### D. Margaret Atwood's Process of Crafting Gender in Her Works

The female view of the world has been a recurring theme in Atwood's work since her first fiction, *The Edible Woman* (1989). When writing about female characters, she expresses a particular understanding of what gender plays in forming their identity, even when the primary character is not female. Her choice to do so is deliberate. Performative aspects of gender, such as what a person is told to do and how they can choose to break those rules, are talked about.

Atwood's female characters are faulty and even villainous, which she values when creating them. It was her indignation at being told that there were no female comen that inspired her to write *The Robber Bride*, which draws its title from a gender reversal in a Grimm's tale named *The Robber Bridegroom*. As the author points out, women are available in a variety of forms and sizes, at different phases of life, in all heights and colors, and from every part of the world.

Margaret Atwood, a Canadian author and political activist, feels that language is intrinsically political. In her work, language acts of influence and dominance are brought to light via the interactions of the characters, exposing the political nature of interpersonal communication. A critical examination of the significance of language to Atwood's artistic practise and her theories of writing is provided in the introduction. In this book, Atwood talks about how Offred uses her voice to change Gilead, a theocratic society, in a future dystopian world.

## II. RESEARCH METHOD

The qualitative research technique was utilised by the researchers in their work, which examines the language aspects of Margaret Atwood's work, *The Handmaid's Tale*. The explorative research technique is used to explore a topic that was not clearly described in the previous study. Researchers have gathered secondary research materials from a variety of sources to conduct the investigation. In this study, the exploratory research technique was employed to help the researchers strengthen their initial ideas. It contributes to the production of fresh knowledge that leads to the discovery of a solution to the situation at hand. With fresh notions, the explorative technique assists in the finding of all viable solutions to a problem, which is beneficial in many situations. This method is employed by researchers in order to pinpoint their primary components. Primary research (which is the initial type of exploratory research) and secondary research are the two categories of exploratory research that may be conducted. When conducting primary research, it is important to acquire the information directly from the topic. Examples of such approaches include direct interviews, observation, focus groups, and questionnaires. Secondary research, on the other hand, usually focuses on studying problems that we already know about, like through literature reviews of research findings that have already been published. This type of research is called "secondary research."

## III. DISCUSSION

### Language Aspects in Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tales*

In *The Handmaid's Tales*, freedom of speech and religion confer power on the wives and commanders, but the handmaids are constrained in the way they communicate with one another and with other people, resulting in increased power for the government. *The Handmaid's Tale* is written in the form of diaries by a woman who lives under the strictures of a totalitarian dictatorship in the United States. The protagonist of the novel is Offred; her real name is June. The diary is written in the language of the past, where Offred is accustomed to doing so; nonetheless, the past language of authority is diametrically opposed to the new authority language. In a totalitarian state, attempts are made to suppress and repress earlier linguistic discourse in favour of the scriptural manner of using the language, which is also regarded as the official language. Gilead is attempting to establish societal norms by forcing individuals to adopt biblical and theological views as their primary worldview (Somacarrera, 2005). The language in Offred's diary serves as an unambiguous deconstructive critique of current society's social and customary conventions. The official language in use in Gilead, as evidenced by Offred's remark and characterization of the new state, may be seen in the following text. Although the dominating authority can disregard the past, human memories that serve as a source of conflict between it and the people are impossible to erase. Even if actions and actions can be controlled, managing a system of minds and thoughts is challenging since people's hopes do not always match those of the new worlds of existence. Handmaids are

taught the official language by Aunt Lydia, who also makes them do their chores. She instils the dictatorship's goals and beliefs into them so that they become common and acceptable in the community where they live.

Ordinary, Aunt Lydia explained, is what you are accustomed to. This may not seem commonplace to you right now, but it will become commonplace over time. It will become commonplace (Atwood, 1985, p.43).

Handmaids, Marthas, Econowives, or Jezebels, must comply with the norms and regulations, and the official language must be considered a regular and usual topic of discussion. The administration recognises that if women adopt established conventions and try to forget their history, they will achieve their ideal future. Handmaids' conditions make the handmaids' situation seem like a temporary generation that needs to learn a new set of beliefs:

You must accept the new belief system. It is the most difficult for you. We are aware of the sacrifices you are being asked to make. When men despise you, it's difficult to cope. It will be less difficult for those who come after you. They will go into their responsibilities with open hearts. (Atwood, 1985, p.127)

Because knowledge is power, according to Foucault's definition, that knowledge is controlled by power. The Theocratic pushes the transitional generation to progressively adapt to the Republic's government, as described above. The dictatorship hopes that in the future, they will be able to exert complete control over the thoughts and beliefs of the previous generation, thereby weakening their opposition to the official language. To obtain control over the language, the authorities change it to serve their own ends. For example, Gilead believes that the freedom that existed in the past was one of the main factors that led to the emergence of anarchy. Aunt Lydia explains to the handmaids that there are different types of freedom, such as freedom from and freedom to.

During the time of anarchy, it meant having the freedom to do whatever you wanted. You are now being released from your imprisonment. Don't underestimate the importance of it (Atwood, 1985 p.34)

In order for the Republic to have power over language, it doesn't use historical discourses. In Gilead, "freedom" will only exist in the sense of "freedom from" for future generations because language is the foundation of thought, and those who control language also control the mind. Freedom, as we know it, is a concept that will no longer exist, and its use will be strictly restricted to future generations of people. Additionally, Gilead enforces illiteracy on the whole female population to keep tight control of the population. The administration outlaws all books and substitutes biblical stories, which are read aloud by the commander, as a substitute. "It is not feasible for power to be exerted in the absence of knowledge, and it is also not conceivable for knowledge to exist in the absence of power." (potential 52)

It appears that no woman, including a handmaid, is allowed to read or write because doing so would give them the information they need to overthrow the system. As a result, the Republic maintains a level of subservience appropriate for the situation. It is clear from these rules that individuals who are fluent in the language have considerable power. In the absence of the ability to read or write, people are unable to express themselves in ways that challenge the authority's views, and they are unable to think in ways that challenge their own.

Offred is intensely aware of the commander's command of language and words: "The Commander has something we don't have; he has the power of the word," she remarks. "How we spent once upon a time" (Atwood, 1985, p. 99). On the other hand, words elicit discourses informed by historical knowledge, which gives power, which is the only way to consolidate power across succeeding generations. Through her narrative discourses, Offred actively deconstructs the reality of the society in which she lives. She is aware of the power that surrounds them and seeks to generate information that contributes to the power's strength. Her story became a weapon in her fight to keep her sanity and fight the universe's inevitable rules.

Therefore, she tells the story as though someone is listening and responding one day: "But if it is a story, even in my head, I must be telling it to someone,". You don't narrate a story to yourself all the time. There's always someone else," (Atwood, 1985, p. 49). Offred shares her tale in the hope that it will be heard and that it will benefit others. She recognises that those who will hear her narrative will be immune to the Gileadean dictatorship's influence and will be able to offer an honest judgement on the regime. She recognises that future generations will find it difficult to believe this story as true at some point, and she has complete control over the outcome of a tale if it is one she is telling. Then there will be a conclusion to the fiction, and then there will be real life. I'm able to pick up just where I left off. "I'm not going to tell you a story" (Atwood, 1985, p.49).

In the following paragraph, Offred expresses her frustration with the regime's prohibition on writing, and her sole means of communicating with the next generation is to tell them her harrowing story: She says, "Tell instead of writing," because she has nothing with which to write, and writing is prohibited. As a result, she employs language power by narrating it. She is in complete command of her tongue, but she understands she is weak in the Gileadean order, which she recognizes. She feels that by selecting specific phrases, she has the ability to obtain the content necessary to re-connect with herself while also shedding light on the situation of contemporary society. For instance, when Offred is forced to live at the Commander's house, she refuses to refer to her room as "my" room, believing that doing so demonstrates her rejection of conventional norms and standards. The term "my" refers to personal property, whereas "my room" refers to personal space. As a result of her opinion that the commander's house lacks privacy and that she does not belong there, she clings to her previous beliefs in this manner. In this way, she is highlighting the contrast between her new and past societies. Offred, on the other hand, prefers official terms such as "home" over "family," believing that the term "family" implies a personal relationship between its members, which makes no sense

in the new society: "Household: that is what we are. The Commander serves as the home's head of household. He is the owner of the property. To have and to hold on to until death do us part is what we want" (Atwood, 1985).

It's because she has a lot of control over them that she uses the power of language to question social rules. To sustain herself both intellectually and emotionally, Offred defies the Gileadean official language and employs the power of language: "There are the kinds of litanies I use to compose myself" (Atwood, 1985, p. 120). Offred sees that the issue of discourse is the only thing standing between power and knowledge. Those who establish context wield power, and context is constructed based on language, which is related to the organisation and management of information. The relationship between speech, context, and knowledge is what gives people who wield power authority.

Since Offred has investigated two conflicting philosophies—her prior life experiences and the contemporary society that requires her to follow the authorities' regulations—she realises the relationship between power and knowledge. In *The Handmaid's Tale*, Margaret Atwood presents a civilization in which the dominance of language leads to the establishment of inflexible communal ideals. Unlike the other characters, however, Offred, the protagonist, is free to deconstruct language since she is not limited to the war for linguistic dominance and has influence over society's reality. In her diary entries, Offred uses historical vocabulary to narrate her stories, and in doing so, she analyses the alternative discourse she deploys in her fight against societal authority. No matter how much power society has at the end of the novel, the narrator's use of language and the discourses that are passed on through language weaken it.

#### IV. CONCLUSION

Through the narrator's learning experience, the reader gains an understanding of the reality of Gileadean civilization as well. When read as a dystopian novel, *The Handmaid's Tale* presents a society that aims for a perfect system of belief by enhancing its language and discourse while oppressing other languages. Use words and speech to find out how power works and what kind of government it is in this story. Offred, the narrator, does this as she moves through the society in the book.

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