

EUPHEMISTIC LANGUAGE, HARSH TRUTHS: A CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS OF LANGUAGE, EXISTENCE, AND INSTITUTIONAL POWER IN NEVER LET ME GO

Nazia Hassan Khan

Head of Department English at Punjab Daanish School Girls Campus Mianwali (PDS)

Email: naziahassankhan5@gmail.com

Beanazir Mughal

M.Phil. English Scholar, Qurtuba University DI Khan

Email: beanazirmirza705@gmail.com

Aena Farooq

M.Phil. English Scholar Qurtuba University DI Khan

Email: aena.farooq97@gmail.com

Abstract

This research article aims to analyze the use of euphemistic language in the novel Never Let Me Go (2005) by Ishiguro in order to soften the harsh reality, soften the situations and to normalize the horrendous acts in Hailsham institution. This is qualitative research. The researcher has specifically focused on the use of words like donation, carer and the students (clones) whose organs are donated. The entire study has been analyzed through the perspective of Critical Discourse Analysis (CD). In this novel, the polite language has been used in order to make the harsh and terrible acts seem normal, acceptable and common. Moreover, this article has also focused on the mentality of the students that has been shaped and designed by the Hailsham institution. The language has the power to control the lives and psyche of the students to an unhealthy degree. This article is the paragon to show brutal reality under the disguise of euphemistic language.

Keywords: brutal reality, critical discourse analysis, donation, carer, euphemism

1. Introduction

1.1 Background of the study

Never Let Me Go (2005) by Kazuo Ishiguro presents a world where all the children were cloned so that their organs can be donated and use for a particular purpose. This is basically a dystopian novel where horror, pain and sadness certainly reside. The dystopian literature is usually written in open and plain style, everything is expressed and told in a harsh reality but this novel presents a calm, relaxed and ordered society where resistance is unchallenged, bad things are internalized and being treated as something normal. Only the narrative is not haunting but the language used to express certain things is polite, normal and idealistic. Three terms have been used in this novel and these are completion, donation and carer. These are used to mitigate the harsh realities of death, pain, sacrifices, troubles, end and exploitation.

There is a main character named Kathy H., she depicts the entire story and she never questions the conditions and morality of world around her. She uses the tone of passivity, acceptance and compliance like how all the characters have agreed and accepted the ideology that the society has literally imposed on them without questioning. Such ideology has used language system to hide the true intentions behind this dehumanization. Language does not depict reality, actually it just establishes it. This novel examines how discourse functions as a tool of power. The language used in it reinforces the institutional control, emotional suppression that completely shapes the identities and perceptions of the characters.

It can be understood through the lens of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), that shows how language control everything that includes social structure, ideologies and dominance. It further demonstrates how language shows power imbalances that psychologically suppressed the characters' choice, thinking, imaginations and perceptions within this cruel and oppressive system. Everything is hidden in social order and control that ultimately challenges the moral

values. Choice of words and style of narration completely changes the course of the story that haunts the characters as well as the readers too.

1.2 Significance of the study

Sometimes, things are not as they appear to be because appearances can be deceptive. Same is the case with this novel. By delving into this work, the readers will get to know how institutional power can play with language. It can use language according to its own desires, motives and purposes. Some words like donations, completion and carers have been used euphemistically but they hold supreme meaning and harsh realities. This is just a fictional novel but it holds the meaning of justifying the oppressed societal system as can be seen and observed by artificial intelligence. Apart from literary analysis, the study engages and questions over ethical and philosophical issues about individuality, freedom, and submissiveness. The clones in *Never Let Me Go* (2005) are ordered and conditioned to accept their fate, much like people in real societies who constantly endure oppressive rules and regulations through institutional power. Through the lens of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), the research shows how power structures maintain dominance not just through direct force but through the nuance shaping and blending of thought and language. This approach and angle allow the study to draw equal connection between Ishiguro's fictional cosmos and contemporary issues such as ethics related to life, planned dehumanization, and the moral detachment plus aloofness enabled by authorized language. The readers will further get to realize that how institutional power simply and suitably justify the concept of biotechnology, war, violence, massacre, murder and capitalism through language. It will also question the authority of people to use language according to their own methods.

1.3 Research Objectives

Following are the research objectives of this study:

1. to investigate how soft words such as donation, completion and carer are used to dull and justify the exploitation of clones in *Never let me go* (2005)
2. to show an indirect language such as students and carers that depicts the brutality of their predetermined fate
3. To highlight and demonstrate how Ishiguro's style of narration expresses and reinforces systematic and planned oppression

1.4 Research Questions

Following are the research questions of this study:

1. How does the use of euphemistic language justify the exploitation of clones in *Never let me go* (2005)?
 1. How an indirect language such as students for clones conveys the idea of brutality of their predetermined fate?
 2. How Ishiguro's way of narration strongly expresses and support systematic and organized oppression?

1.5 Problem Statement

Kazuo Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go* (2005) shows an unpleasant world where cloned people are used as organ donators. But this cruelty and violence is hidden behind soft words like donations and completion. The use of such polite language raises pivotal questions about how words can hide and reshape violence, make oppression and cruelty seem normal, and keep people submissive. While many studies have looked at the novel's moral, ethical and philosophical issues and problems, few people have focused on how language itself supports this system. How people have normally manipulated language for their own purpose and motive that strongly favors this system.

1.6 Research Gap

Although euphemism is shown in the literature on *Never Let Me Go* (2005), but it does not properly connect it to institutional power systems at all levels. The elegant and modest opposition of the clones (such as Tommy's artistic work or Kathy's style of narration) is frequently disregarded as submissive speech. Moreover, no study looks at how euphemism go from training in childhood to acceptance and yielding in adulthood. By revealing language as a center of brittle resistance as well as an instrument of cruelty and oppression, this research helps close these gaps.

1.7 Organization of the study

The entire study has been organized into five chapters. Chapter 1st is the introduction of the study, covering the background, significance, research objectives, research questions, problem statement and research gap. Chapter 2nd is the literature review. It covers the review of relevant literature. Chapter 3rd is the research methodology that this study carries. Chapter 4th is the analysis of the study. Chapter 5th is the conclusion of the study covering findings of the study and future recommendation. Last are the references.

2. Literature Review

Here are the opinions, reviews and standpoints of the famous scholars, researchers, critics as well as the authors about relevant literature.

2.1 Theoretical Background

The term euphemism has come from the Greek terms *eu*, meaning “well,” and *phēmē*, meaning “speaking.” It refers to the use of polite, favorable and positive words to substitute harsh or unpleasant ones. Euphemism is useful when people are unable to express their true intentions because those intentions are somewhat harsh, offensive, or sound bad. The concept of euphemism, which replaces the word or phrase with a more favorable, sweet and less disagreeable meaning, rather than adopting a harsher or more unpleasant tone that precisely conveys the desired or intended meaning. An example of this phenomenon is when a milder word or expression is used as a substitute for one that is more displeasing or off-putting. Euphemism is a literary device that requires the replacement of a word or phrase with a soft or less direct expression.

The famous critic as well the researcher, Allan and Burridge (1991, p.11) state euphemism as “an alternative to a dispreferred expression, in order to avoid possible loss of face: either one’s own face or, through giving offense, that of the audience, or of some third party.” Euphemism, as defined by both of them refers to the use of a substitute term that is considered more favorable and authentic in order to prevent any harm or damage to one’s reputation or to avoid offense or being offended by the audience or any other individuals involved.

Cameron (1995, p.73) re-defines euphemism as “a term used deliberately to avoid or soften the negative associations of words that deal directly with taboo subjects.”

2.2 Defining Soft Words or Euphemistic Language in Different Contexts

In her minute examination of *Never Let Me Go*, Margaret Atwood (2011) draws attention to parallels between the novel’s dystopian style of narration and real-world historical crimes, especially the language schemes used by different regimes to dull the concept of violence. Atwood says that Ishiguro’s use of soft words—such as “donations” (for organ harvesting) and “completing” (for the end) function similarly to the era during which Nazi used terms like “Final Solution” or “special treatment,” which disguised mass termination and removal under the appearance of lawful efficiency. These language constructions, she says, serve both purposes: they provide comfort and peace to both the victims and the people who commit such heinous crimes to their last extent of their pathetic actions while reasserting planned dehumanization.

Same is the case with Imam and Abdul Kadhim (2023), who apply Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) to *The Handmaid's Tale* to reveal how language functions from both aspects as a tool of authority and as a potential site of boldness as well as resistance. Through carefully designed religious dogmas and allusions, modest greetings such as "Blessed be the fruit," and the restatements of key terms (e.g., "Handmaid," "Commander," "Ceremony"), the aura naturalizes structures of authority and include oppression as well as violation into the dealings of everyday conversation. The power of this conversation lies in it by shaping what can be uttered, conceive, and remembered, it erases alternative style of narration and confines women's passivity within ideologically prescribed limitations.

Koehler (2023) notices how the term "completing" functions as one of the most intense and elegant euphemisms in *Never Let Me Go*, standing in for the harsh reality of the end of life. Rather than presenting the clones' unavoidable fate in harsh terms, the institutional conversation covers mortality in euphemistic vocabulary that fades the crime of donating organs. Focusing on Althusser's concept of ideological state apparatuses, Koehler discusses that the clones' education at Hailsham forces them to accept such replaced linguistic variation as natural, even polite. By continually listening and speaking words like "donations" and "completion," the clones accept the ideology of their own existence. In this way, institutional power is not merely dominant through external factors and threats but is constantly indulged within each and every individual's own consciousness through language.

3. Research Methodology

3.1 Methodological Approach

This study uses Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) as its supreme methodological framework. CDA is not a single method but a multidisciplinary approach to evaluate written and spoken text as a form of social practice and assessment. Its central motive is that language is not neutral; it is a source and medium for exercising and imposing power, making social identities, and everlasting ideologies (Fairclough, 1995; van Dijk, 2001). This makes it the central tool for examining how language in Kazuo Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go* is used to idealize, justify, and conceal a brutal system of exploitation.

3.2 Data Selection

The primary data for this study is the literary text *Never Let Me Go* (2005) by Kazuo Ishiguro.

To further examine and delve into the analysis so that a more authentic context can be made, these points are the center of discussion for examining various linguistic mechanisms.

- Major dialogues between the Guardians (Miss Lucy, Miss Emily) and the students.
- Explaining passages that further provide the details of the environment and rules of Hailsham, the different Cottages, and the recovery centers.
- Kathy H.'s style of narration where she talks about different events and her own sense of understanding.
- Specific institutional vocabulary and terms: A list of major terms (e.g., "donation," "completion," "carer," "clones" "student," "possible," "deferral") will be studied and analyzed in a detailed manner.

3.3 Ethical Considerations

As this is a study of a literary text, standard ethical consideration regarding human beings is not applicable. However, methodological terms have been maintained through:

Systematic Analysis: To make sure that all claims are grounded and studied in particular textual context. No Irrelevant material has been included.

Evading Anachronism: Explaining the text in accordance with its own style of narration and fictional story, while still drawing some connections to real-world social problems and phenomena.

3.4 Limitations

The entire study revolves around the novel *Never Let me Go* by Ishiguro (2005) with the implication of Critical Discourse Analysis by Fairclough. These boundaries have been followed:

- Conduct a detailed analysis of the entire novel, not just examples alone.
- Consider different narratives and moments where the euphemistic language fails to work such as (e.g., Miss Lucy's outburst).
- Consider every interpretation and detail in a clear, linguistic basis.

4. Analysis

4.1 Euphemistic language justifying the Exploitation of Clones

Through the lens of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), euphemism is a tool of mystery and ideological power and control. The authorized social group (humans) creates a discourse and conversation that fades the violent reality of their actions and doings, making the advantageous power structure seem natural, kind, lenient and unchangeable. This discourse is then hidden by the oppressed people by accepting and ensuring their agreement.

Never Let Me Go (2005) is a dystopian novel by Kazuo Ishiguro, in which the systematic exploitation and ultimate organ harvesting of a cloned underclass is not achieved by an overt use of violence and overt tyranny, but by an omnipresent and hideous control of euphemistic language. This linguistic model carefully created and maintained by the institution, is used to anaesthetize moral outrage, obscure brutal realities, and produce a sense of purpose and assent amongst the victims themselves. The euphemisms are not just descriptions of the system but are the main engine that legitimizes and continues the system, forming a common language that makes the unimaginable normal.

4.1.1 Blotting out Biological Reality and Dehumanizing the Individual

The school named Hailsham where all the students were there, uses polite and soft words in order to comfort them by hiding the real intention. The ugly truth that all of them were just there in order to take their organs for donation. This thing forces all the students to accept their fate and stop assuming themselves as fully humans.

4.1.1.2 Using Soft Words for Minimizing Harsh Reality

The Hailsham institution uses special technical vocabulary in order to make terrible and excruciating things sound positive, privileged and peaceful.

“Donation” instead of “Taking”:

The students who were usually considered as clones were forced to donate their organs. And instead of using this word donation, they call it taking in order to minimize the concept of violence. On the other hand, all the students consider this thing as their duty. They are being called as carer, which further make it seem like a meaningful purpose behind donating their organs.

“Finishing Task” instead of “Death”:

When a student (clone) is taken to the place where his or her organs are going to be donated, it has been shown in a very normalized and acceptable way so that the readers can readily admit the harsh and haunting reality of the institution. A teacher named Miss Lucy finally uttered the words, "You'll be taken to a place where they'll... start taking your organs." (p. 81). Her bold words show how violence is treated by using comforting and soothing words.

4.1.2. Keeping Them in the Haunting Condition and Making Them Feel "Special"

The Hailsham institution controls the future of the cloned students, their bodies and emotions.
Secrets and Rumors:

All the students at Hailsham School keep the students away from the harsh truth. The teacher never gives them the straight away answers. The narrator named Kathy also says that

all the students already know the truth but they have deliberately been ignored. This knowing but not talking about has meticulously been explained and shown in the novel.

The Concept of Being Special:

Hailsham tells the students about their speciality. They are further told that they are different from the ordinary and regular people. Their uniqueness lies in the fact that their organs are taken. In this way, violence lies at its peak when they are used and taken advantage of their organs. Such purpose surely negates the idea of a meaningful life full of happiness and wonders.

4.1.3. Turning and Using People as different Spare Parts

The most distressing thing in the novel is that when all the students are treated just like spare parts, their feelings and emotions have entirely been ignored. Once their job has been completed, they are discarded at the end.

Bodies for Use:

The entire Hailsham institution treats the students just like the containers of organs. They do not see them as fully humans. They are just concerned for their organs and after taking them, they think that their project and purpose have been completed. They keep the students safe just for their organs. Such kind of using students for their body parts have nicely been treated and shown by using euphemistic language so that, the harsh reality can be minimized and shown in a peaceful not in a daring way.

4.1.4 The Common use of Evil Intentions and the Linguistic Design of Domination

Even in this world of carefully designed controlled language, Ishiguro adds small moments of silent rebellion. When Tommy speaks out, "Why don't they let us prove what we're capable of?" (p. 228), he breaks through the calm, polite and graceful tone of the novel with real emotions. His words shortly reveal the violence and pain hidden beneath the surface. In the same way, when Kathy says, "I lost Ruth, then I lost Tommy, but I won't lose my memories," (p. 282). This thing reminds her act of remembering and missing becomes a form of bold resistance and opposition. Memories and imaginations, for her, are the ways to fight back. It keeps her humanity and feelings alive even when the system tries to remove it.

Through memories and storytelling, Kathy, the narrative holds on to pieces and strings of her identity that the institution tried to erase and take away. In *Never Let Me Go* (2005), Ishiguro displays how language controls people's lives and psyche. The clones live their life, die and remember through language shaped by those in power and authority. The polite (euphemistic) and formal language in the novel reflects what Hannah Arendt called the "banality of evil," where horrible things are made to sound normal and accepted thing through rules, regulations and a proper system. When Miss Emily claims, "You were brought into this world for a purpose," (p. 262), she turns something inappropriate into something that sounds like an obligation. In this quiet unpleasant world, Ishiguro claims how language can become a tool of control and power, how words themselves can bind and ensnare people, making their servility a part of the very way they speak, behave and think.

4.2 How "Students" for "Clones" Conceals a Brutal and Terrible Fate

Fundamentally, using and choosing the word "students" rather than "clones" is a pungent example of euphemism language. A word that is considered too harsh or direct is replaced with a euphemism, which is a gentle and polite or indirect word. By referring to the clones as "students," the society in the novel as well as the establishments like Hailsham that is the center of creation creates a peaceful facade that conceals a horrifying reality.

A "student" is someone who is learning, grooming and getting ready for their future life and job. For Tommy, Ruth, and Kathy, this is the foremost and most significant lie.

The Illusion:

All the students (clones) at Hailsham who take classes, perform different activities, participate in sports, and fantasize about their future are informed that they are "special" and that their health and well-being are very important. They feel like ordinary kids with a bright future because of this scheme. By collecting their artwork for the "Gallery," Madame considers this notion that their inner life and being so innovative are significant.

The Harsh and Complicated Truth:

In reality, they are not really students at all. All of them are specifically cloned to donate their important organs until they "complete" (die). There is no real future for them. Their schooling is fabricated to keep them humble, healthy and "civilized" until they are taken advantage of and not to prepare them for any career. Their humanity and love are not celebrated by their art collection but rather, it serves as evidence that they are sensible, which is a point in a cold ethical argument.

This has been depicted very elegantly when Kathy rightfully narrates:

"We all knew, in a vague, distant way, that we were different from our guardians, and from the people outside... but we didn't really understand what it meant." (Ishiguro, 81)

4.2.1 How Language is Used to Control and Deceive

The Crushing and Painful Weight of the Truth

Miss Lucy is the one that attempts to clear the illusion, although the majority of caretakers maintain it. "Your lives are set out for you, she tells the kids bluntly in a well-known moment. After you reach adulthood, you will begin donating your important organs before you are old or even middle-aged. Each of you was made to accomplish that" (Ishiguro, 81). Because it shatters the euphemism code the students have been living by, the depiction of an utterly dystopian world in a carefully designed language.

The System's Supposed Justification and Acceptance:

Miss Emily and the other caretakers think that the polite language is a vital act of showing terrible act in a beautiful way. They attempted to "show the world that if students were reared in humane, cultivated environments, it was possible for them to grow to be as sensitive and intelligent as any ordinary human being" (Ishiguro, 261). She goes on to say that without institutions like Hailsham, the clones would have been shown as "mere shadows" (Ishiguro, 261). This evidence demonstrates how deeply the misleading and pathetic terminology is engraved in the institution's logical reasoning. Although the ongoing use of the word "students" is intended to show and confirm their humanity, it ultimately serves to uphold the notion of the very system that takes advantage of innocence.

4.3 Language that Supports Systematic and Organized Oppression

The style of narration used by Kazuo Ishiguro in *Never Let Me Go* (2005) is not just a stylistic pattern but it is the scheme that causes the reader to experience the hidden cruelty of systematic oppression. Ishiguro's narration shows how the system has successfully captured and controlled the clones' very thoughts and causing them to live in a horrific reality that is not characterized by intense rebellion or terrible violence.

4.3.1 The Polite Narrator: Kathy H. as a Design and Product of the System

Kathy H., Ishiguro's narrator, is his most dominant instrument. Instead of being an unbiased spectator, she is a victim who has fully accepted her fate behind her own subjugation and servility.

Internalized and Polite Language:

Kathy takes on euphemisms "donation," "completion," and "carer" without thinking even thinking about. "We are being harvested for our organs until we die," (p. 289), she never explains. She continues, "I've been a carer for over twelve years now, and I know my donors will 'complete' after their fourth donation."(p. 289). The aberrant language is normalized and

accepted by her cool, business-like tone. Her style of narration turns into a continuation of the suppressed and controlled system itself by accepting this terminology and situation.

Lack of Courage:

Kathy speaks in a calm, peaceful and frequently polite manner. With a sense and feelings of acceptance, she remembers the harsh realities of her brief, planned life. Because it shows that the system has been successful and dominant in making itself appear normal, inevitable, and unchangeable. This lack of anger is more horrifying and painful as well than any outburst emotion could be. The oppression is so finalized and completed that it is enforced through language which makes it seem acceptable and common.

4.3.2 Unveiling the Past: The Slow Declining of Hope

Kathy's story is being told from a place close to her own "ending." This enables Ishiguro to organize the novel as a gradual and painful revelation of the reality by hiding the organized setting the system is so used to manipulate and control them.

The Crushing Twist of the Story:

The emotional twist of the story is actually a conversation rather than an action. The reality is revealed and opened to Tommy and Kathy when they meet Madame and Miss Emily: there are deferrals and procrastinations. Proving and demanding their souls to others was the main motive of the work and not to prove it to themselves. The oppression and violence is psychological and certain, as this moment and incident makes clear. Even their inspirations and desire for independence were pre-planned and supported by the system.

In short, the novel's concept and the main theme is best expressed through Ishiguro's style of narration. The most effective control designs and patterns are not those that use force, but rather those that convince their victims to accept, incorporate and even count their own oppression in the language of the oppressor who runs the system. Ishiguro demonstrates this point by telling the story through Kathy H., a trustworthy and reliable reporter but a completely untrustworthy and confused interpreter of her own oppression who has been treated in such a cruel system for a long period of time. The protagonists in *Never Let Me Go* (2005) are mentally and linguistically manipulated by their own fate, which is more horrendous than the reality in which they are physically imprisoned and captured. The victims of the cruel system quietly tell their stories, structuring and positioning their recollections around the very euphemistic language that is intended to mask their harsh and unimagined reality. This is the very system's greatest achievement.

Reference

- Allan, K., & Burrige, K. (1991). *Euphemism and dysphemism: Language used as shield and weapon*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Atwood, M. (2011). *In Other Worlds: SF and the Human Imagination*. Doubleday.
- Cameron, D. (1995). *Verbal hygiene*. London: Routledge.
- Fairclough, N. (1995). *Critical Discourse Analysis: The Critical Study of Language*. Longman.
- Imam, N. S. H., & Abdul Kadhim, G. (2023). Language and authority: A Critical Discourse Analysis of power structures in *The Handmaid's Tale*. *Journal of Language Studies*, 9(1), 1-?
- <https://doi.org/10.25130/Lang.9.1.13>
- Ishiguro, K. (2005). *Never let me go*. Faber & Faber.
- Koehler, E. (2023). The euphemism of escape in *Never Let Me Go*. *The Arsenal: The Undergraduate Research Journal of Augusta University*, 5(2), 60-68. <https://doi.org/10.21633/issn.2380.5064/s.2023.05.02.60>
- Brown, S. (2019). *The Ethics of Unfreedom: Coercion and Consent in Dystopian Fiction*. Oxford University Press.
- Fairclough, N. (1995). *Critical Discourse Analysis: The Critical Study of Language*. Longman.
- Foucault, M. (1977). *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (A. Sheridan, Trans.). Vintage Books. (Original work published 1975).
- Gramsci, A. (1971). *Selections from the Prison Notebooks* (Q. Hoare & G. N. Smith, Trans.). International Publishers.