

UDC 821.111.09'06 (71)

DOI <https://doi.org/10.32782/tps2663-4880/2023.28.1.38>

**SYNTACTIC PECULIARITIES IN CONSTRUCTING THE REALITY  
OF MARGARET ATWOOD'S *THE HANDMAID'S TALE*  
AND *THE TESTAMENTS***

**СИНТАКСИЧНІ ОСОБЛИВОСТІ КОНСТРУЮВАННЯ РЕАЛІЙ  
У РОМАНАХ М. ЕТВУД «ОПОВІДЬ СЛУЖНИЦІ» ТА «ЗАПОВІТІ»**

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Margaret Atwood, a prominent Canadian figure in culture and literature, is known for her exploration of language in her works. This article examines how Atwood employs syntactic stylistic means in her dystopian speculative and science fiction novels, such as *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985) and its sequel, *The Testaments* (2019). The author delves into the dystopian aspects of totalitarian and consumer societies, employing a wide range of storytelling techniques. The article highlights the insufficient exploration of syntactic structures as crucial components in portraying dystopian worlds in Atwood's works. While foreign and Ukrainian scholars have extensively studied genre peculiarities, stylistic elements, and formal features in her novels, the examination of syntactic techniques remains understudied. By analysing the use of newly coined words and language in dystopian narratives, the article argues that language in these societies has become simplified and standardised, reflecting the stringent control of the ruling authority. It also explores how syntactic techniques enable Atwood to depict the marginalised voices and experiences of subjugated individuals. The article emphasises Atwood's effective use of language in capturing the characters' fear, desperation, and powerlessness. It analyses her employment of parcellation, aposiopesis, ellipsis, nominative sentences, parallel constructions, repetitions, and rhetorical questions to convey the characters' emotions and resistance against the oppressive regimes. Furthermore, the article compares the language patterns of different female protagonists in *The Handmaid's Tale* and *The Testaments* to reveal common elements such as defensive strategies, guilt, and mental struggles. It also explores the role of repetitive elements, such as epizeuxis, in highlighting the manipulation and indoctrination of characters within dystopian societies. Overall, this article provides an insightful examination of Margaret Atwood's use of syntactic stylistic means to shape the creation of her imagined dystopian worlds. It contributes to the understanding of her narrative techniques and the portrayal of power dynamics, oppression, resistance, and the struggle for freedom within these societies.

**Key words:** dystopia, syntactic stylistic means, speculative fiction, language manipulation, parcellation, nominative sentences.

Маргарет Етвуд, видатна канадська діячка культури та літератури, відома своїми дослідженнями мови у творах. У цій статті розглядається, як М. Етвуд використовує синтаксичні стилістичні засоби у своїх дистопійних спекулятивних і науково-фантастичних романах, таких як «Оповідь служниці» (1985) та її продовження «Заповіді» (2019). Автор заглиблюється в дистопійні аспекти тоталітарних і споживачьких суспільств, використовуючи широкий спектр оповідних технік. У статті підкреслюється недостатня вивченість синтаксичних структур як ключових компонентів у зображенні дистопійних світів у творах М. Етвуд. Зарубіжні та українські дослідники активно вивчали жанрові особливості, стилістичні елементи та формальні ознаки її романів, проте розгляд синтаксичних прийомів залишається недостатньо вивченим. Аналізуючи використання новотворів у текстах дистопій, авторка доводить, що мова в цих суспільствах стала спрощеною та стандартизованою, що відображає суворий контроль з боку правлячої влади. Вона також досліджує, як синтаксичні прийоми дозволяють М. Етвуд зображати маргінальні голоси та досвід підкорених людей. У статті підкреслюється ефективне використання М. Етвуд мови для передачі страху, відчаю та безсилля персонажів. У статті проаналізовано використання парцеляції, апозіопезису, еліпсису, номінативних речень, паралельних конструкцій, повторів і риторичних запитань для передачі емоцій персонажів і їхнього опору деспотичним режимам. Крім того, у статті порівнюють мовні шаблони різних героїнь «Оповіді служниці» та «Заповідів», щоб виявити спільні елементи, такі як захисні стратегії, почуття провини та душевна боротьба. Вона також досліджує роль повторюваних елементів, таких як епізод, у висвітленні способів маніпуляції та впливу на персонажів у дистопійних суспільствах. Загалом, ця стаття є глибоким дослідженням використання М. Етвуд синтаксичних стилістичних засобів для створення її уявних дистопійних світів. Це сприяє розумінню її нарративної техніки та зображенню динаміки влади, пригнічення, опору та боротьби за свободу в цих суспільствах.

**Ключові слова:** дистопія, синтаксичні стилістичні засоби, спекулятивна фантастика, мовна маніпуляція, парцеляція, номінативні речення.

**Problem-setting and groundings for the urgency.** M. Atwood, a prominent figure in Canadian culture and literature, explores language extensively in her various works. Through stylistic experimentation, manipulation of meanings, intertextual references, and the creation of new words, Atwood depicts dystopian realities in her speculative and science fiction novels like *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985) and its sequel, *The Testaments* (2019). These works delve into the dystopian aspects of totalitarian and consumer societies, employing a wide range of storytelling techniques.

**Recent research analysis.** Foreign (J. Freeman, C. A. Howells, F. Jameson, A. Malak, A. S. Mouda, M. Petto, K. Stein, A. Weiss, etc.) and Ukrainian (M. Vorontsova, N. Ovcharenko, I. Tymeichuk, etc.) scholars have extensively studied the narratives of M. Atwood, with a focus on genre peculiarities, stylistic elements, and formal features in her novels. However, the examination of syntactic structures as crucial components in portraying dystopian worlds in works like *The Handmaid's Tale* and *The Testaments* remains insufficiently explored by both foreign and especially Ukrainian scholars.

Examining the use of newly coined words in dystopian narratives – *Brave New World* (1932) by A. Huxley, *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949) by G. Orwell, *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985) by M. Atwood, and *The Circle* (2013) by D. Eggers – López-Rúa argues that the language in dystopian societies becomes simplified and standardised, losing its diversity and richness [1, p. 118]. It is compelled to conform to a uniformity that reflects the stringent control of the ruling authority.

N. Ovcharenko focuses on the literary and structural aspects of *The Handmaid's Tale* in Ukrainian literary studies [2, p. 47]. M. Vorontsova's analy-

sis, on the other hand, centres specifically on the issues addressed by the author in *The Handmaid's Tale* [3, p. 3]. N. Balan, in her examination of the composition of these books, characterises them as framed multilayered collages [4, p. 24].

Meanwhile, I. Tymeichuk explores the style and linguistic qualities of Margaret Atwood's dystopian novels, particularly through the lens of the discourse of the Other. I. Tymeichuk suggests that postmodern authors frequently employ various syntactic techniques, such as parcellation, aposiopesis, ellipsis, nominative sentences, parallel constructions, and repetitions [5, p. 113]. By analysing M. Atwood's novels, excluding *The Testaments*, the scholar contends that these techniques enable M. Atwood to depict the marginalised voices and experiences of subjugated individuals. In our study, our aim is to provide additional examples supporting I. Tymeichuk's viewpoint while also exploring a previously unexamined dystopian novel. We will delve into the use of these syntactic means to illuminate how Atwood's storytelling captures the discourse of those who are oppressed.

**The objective and tasks.** The objective of the article is to examine how M. Atwood employs syntactic stylistic means in her dystopian speculative and science fiction works to shape the creation of her imagined world. The tasks are to:

- Analyse the effective use of language and sentence structure in M. Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* and *The Testaments* to convey the characters' emotions, experiences, and resistance against the oppressive regime of Gilead.

- Explore the similarities and differences in language patterns and narrative techniques employed by the female protagonists in both novels, highlighting their strategies for survival, feelings of guilt, and mental struggles.

- Examine the role of repetitive elements, such as epizeuxis, and the rhetorical use of questions in shaping the narrative and reflecting the themes of religious extremism, manipulation, and power dynamics within Gilead's society.

**Presenting the main material.** I. Tymeichuk highlights that M. Atwood effectively conveys Offred's fear of facing execution on the Wall through her use of anaphoric, metaphorical, and concise language [6, p. 239]: "*I don't want to be a doll hung up on the Wall. I don't want to be a wingless angel. ... They can do what they like with me. I am abject. I feel, for the first time, their true power*" [7, p. 298]. We suppose that the author effectively uses language to convey Offred's fear of the oppressive society. The repetition of "I don't want to be" emphasises her resistance against the controlling regime. Metaphors like "*doll hung up on the Wall*" and "*wingless angel*" reinforce her objectification and the threat of physical harm. The Wall symbolises the regime's brutal enforcement and public execution of rebels. Offred's use of "*abject*" acknowledges her complete subjugation. However, her final sentence, "*I feel, for the first time, their true power,*" signifies a moment of awakening to the regime's control. M. Atwood's masterful use of language captures Offred's fear, desperation, and powerlessness, reflecting themes of oppression, resistance, and the struggle for freedom in a dystopian world within a few concise sentences.

In both *The Handmaid's Tale* and *The Testaments*, we observe a significant presence of concise speech, primarily conveyed through parcelling – a linguistic syntax technique where sentences are divided into smaller units with distinct grammatical structures. This can be vividly seen in Offred's dialogue when she discusses the Eyes: "*Maybe he's in the Library. Somewhere in the vaults. The stacks*" [7, p. 175]. This excerpt, portraying the Eyes and their possible whereabouts, conveys the character's feelings of uncertainty, anxiety, and potential paranoia, which are effectively conveyed through the syntactic structure. M. Atwood employs parcelling to construct more intricate and nuanced sentence structures, highlighting specific words or ideas. Furthermore, the use of terms like "*maybe*" and "*somewhere*" suggests a lack of knowledge and control, while mentioning the "*vaults*" and "*stacks*" adds an element of secrecy and danger to the scene.

The identification of further examples of nominative sentences can be found in Offred's early diary entries. Instances such as "*A chair, a table, a lamp,*" "*A window, two white curtains,*" and "*A bed. Single, mattress medium-hard, covered with a flocked white spread*" [7, p. 17] exemplify the use of extended nom-

inative sentences to effectively convey the profound sense of oppression the protagonist endures upon entering the newly established dystopian society.

Whenever the protagonist experiences a sense of control or oppression, her language choices and sentence structure reflect this, particularly when she is near the Wall. An illustrative instance occurs when Offred encounters the bodies of two hanged Guardians as her narrative undergoes a shift: "*Their bodies still wear the Guardian uniforms. Caught together, they must have been, but where? A barracks, a shower? It's hard to say*" [7, p. 53]. Initially, her storytelling is straightforward, but it transforms in this instance. The second sentence employs a rhetorical question, a linguistic device used for emphasis rather than soliciting a response. This sentence structure and use of rhetorical questioning align with the prevailing biblical language and discourse within the dystopian society. In the Bible, rhetorical questions serve to underscore a point or challenge the audience's assumptions. For instance, in the book of Job, God poses rhetorical questions to Job, such as "*Where wast thou when I laid the foundations of the earth?*" (Job 38:4). Similarly, the author employs rhetorical questions to allow readers to contemplate various possibilities for the unfolding of the plot. In this passage, M. Atwood employs a rhetorical question to emphasise the complexity of the situation and to imply that Offred's perspective on the events is limited. Furthermore, the sentence structure employed here, reminiscent of biblical discourse, accentuates the oppressive nature of the regime in which Offred exists. The fact that even the structures of her inner thoughts reflect the authorities' strict control underscores how thoroughly the government has shaped the lives of its citizens. This passage serves as a compelling example of M. Atwood's adept use of language and structure to craft a vivid and unsettling portrayal of life under an oppressive regime.

The recurrent use of rhetorical questions by Offred may be attributed to the pervasive religious discourse within Gilead's society. The language employed in this society often relies on rhetorical questioning, akin to the biblical quote: "*Give me children, or else I die. Am I in God's stead, who hath withheld from thee the fruit of the womb?*" [7, p. 99]. By incorporating this form of language into her own internal musings, Offred both engages with and subverts the religious discourse that shapes her world. Through her use of rhetorical questions, she articulates her uncertainties, anxieties, and aspirations, all while subtly challenging the authority of the oppressive regime that dictates her existence.

M. Atwood frequently utilises rhetorical questions to depict Offred's inner thoughts. The length and structure of these questions vary depending on whether Offred adheres to Gilead's rules or defies them. When Offred is in control and manoeuvring her oppressive environment, her inner questions are concise and straightforward, mirroring her cautious approach to survival. However, as Offred reaches her breaking point and contemplates rebellion, her inner speech becomes more intricate and lengthy. The questions grow elaborate, capturing her escalating desperation and willingness to challenge the system. Through examples like, "*What if I were to come at night, when he's on duty alone... and permit him beyond my white wings? What if I were to peel off my red shroud and show myself to him, to them, by the uncertain light of the lanterns?*" [7, p. 21], Atwood illuminates Offred's internal struggle within Gilead's treacherous landscape. These questions offer a glimpse into Offred's psyche, laying bare her uncertainties, fears, and aspirations for the future. The gradual lengthening and complexity of Offred's questions, as she resists the system underscores the growing defiance she embodies.

The initial use of short nominative sentences in the novel can be contrasted with Offred's final statements after being charged with "violation of state secrets." In these concluding remarks, such as "*Whether this is my end or a new beginning, I have no way of knowing: I have given myself over into the hands of strangers because it can't be helped. And so I step up, into the darkness within; or else the light*" [7, p. 307]; Offred, despite her uncertainty and powerlessness, employs lengthy sentences with a sense of calmness. This suggests that she has transcended her fear of the oppressive regime and is no longer subjugated by it. Consequently, the comparison of sentence structures throughout the book indicates that the language patterns of the protagonist evolve, mirroring her changing perception of the dystopian reality. Characters who fear the regime tend to use short sentences and parcellation, while those free from totalitarian control opt for longer sentence structures that reflect the flow of their thoughts.

According to M. Keck [8, p. 19], an analysis of the varying positions of power and powerlessness among female characters in *The Handmaid's Tale* and *The Testaments* reveals that regardless of their differing levels of influence, the protagonists of both novels share common elements in their narratives. These elements include employing defensive strategies, experiencing feelings of guilt, and undergoing mental struggles. Through introspection and reflection on past and present events, these characters gain

a deeper understanding of themselves and their connection to the oppressive regime they inhabit.

A comparison can indeed be drawn between Offred's narrative in *The Handmaid's Tale* and the Testimonies 369A of the Witness in *The Testaments*. Offred's narrative is characterised by fear and a reluctance to openly rebel against the oppressive regime of Gilead. She is cautious and mindful of the consequences of her actions, often prioritising self-preservation over open resistance. In contrast, Testimonies 369A of the Witness exhibit a more assertive and outspoken stance against the regime, e. g., "*I agree with you that Gilead ought to fade away – there is too much of wrong in it, too much that is false, and too much that is surely contrary to what God intended – but you must permit me some space to mourn the good that will be lost*" [9, p. 9]. The lengthy and complex sentences used by this character reflect a willingness to express dissent and challenge the injustices of Gilead. The contrast between Offred's hesitancy and the Witness's boldness highlights the range of responses to oppression and underscores the individual complexities and choices within a dystopian society.

The language patterns in Gilead's regime often rely on repetitive elements, employing epizeuxis, a stylistic device emphasising the emphatic repetition of a word or phrase without any intervening words. For instance,

*"But whose fault was it?" Aunt Helena says, holding up one plump finger.*

*"Her fault, her fault, her fault". We chant in unison.*

*"Who led them on?"*

*"She did. She did. She did".*

*"Why did God allow such a terrible thing to happen?"*

*"Teach her a lesson. Teach her a lesson. Teach her a lesson"* [7, p. 82].

In Margaret Atwood's book, *The Handmaid's Tale*, a passage portrays Aunt Lydia leading a group of Handmaids in assigning blame to Handmaid Janine for her rape and abortion. The repetitive phrases and chanting highlight the manipulation and indoctrination of the Handmaids, as they are compelled to adopt Aunt Lydia's narrative and hold Janine solely responsible. The mention of God's role in allowing the traumatic event further underscores the theme of religious extremism and its role in justifying the oppressive behaviour of those in authority.

An example of repetition in the text is found in Offred's phrase, "*I feel so lonely, baby, I feel so lonely, baby, I feel so lonely I could die*" [7, p. 64].

Through this repetition, Offred's intense feelings of isolation and sadness are conveyed. The author utilises this syntactic device to accentuate the depth of the protagonist's emotions and evoke a sense of despair and hopelessness, as emphasised by the phrase "I could die". Additionally, the repetition creates a rhythmic pattern that mirrors the inner turmoil and distress of the character in the face of her daily dystopian reality.

**Findings and Conclusions.** Therefore, in literature, the construction of dystopian worlds often employs syntactic techniques to instil a feeling of unease and underscore the narrative's themes. In Margaret Atwood's novels, *The Handmaid's Tale*

and *The Testaments*, the language used within the dystopian societies is simplified and standardised, losing its diversity and expressive power, which mirrors the oppressive control exerted by the governing authorities. As a result, characters employ techniques such as parcellation, nominative sentences, parallel constructions, rhetorical questions, and repetitions when they perceive themselves as being under strict government control. Conversely, they adopt more complex sentence structures when they believe that their autonomy is less restricted. These syntactic choices reflect the characters' shifting perceptions of power and control within their respective dystopian realities.

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