

RESEARCH ARTICLE

The Language of Resistance: Evaluative and Ideological Strategies in Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*

Mohammad Hussein Mehdi Mohsen *, Rana Abdul Settar Abid

University of Basrah , College of Education for Human Sciences , Department of English , Iraq

ABSTRACT

In dystopian fiction, language is power where different forces seek to wield to control others, resist, and assert identity. While many studies view Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* as a critique of the patriarchal oppression, fewer have systematically examined the micro-linguistic realizations through which the oppressor's ideology is resisted. The current research addresses this gap via the investigation of how evaluative language functions as a tool of ideological positioning and resistance within the novel. The research integrates Martin and White's (2005) Appraisal Framework with Norman Fairclough's Dialectical-Relational Model of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) to analyze selected extracts of the novel based on their richness of the appraisal resources. The approach here is a mixed one focusing on frequency identification—quantitative analysis, using **LancsboxX** corpus analysis software alongside qualitative analysis of the extracts. The findings demonstrate that resistance in totalitarian environments may not be physical but a linguistic act used to maintain psychological sovereignty.

Keywords: The Handmaid's Tale, Appraisal Theory, Critical Discourse Analysis, Dialectical-Relational approach, Lancsbox.

مقالة بحثية

لغة المقاومة: الاستراتيجيات التقييمية والأيدولوجية في حكاية الأمة لمارغريت أتوود

محمد حسين مهدي محسن * ، رنا عبد الستار عبد

جامعة البصرة ، كلية التربية للعلوم الإنسانية ، قسم اللغة الإنجليزية ، العراق

الملخص:

في الأدب الديستوبي، تُعدّ اللغة شكلاً من أشكال السلطة، إذ تسعى قوى مختلفة إلى توظيفها من أجل السيطرة على الآخرين، ومقاومتهم، وتأكيد الهوية. على الرغم من أن العديد من الدراسات تنظر إلى رواية (حكاية الأمة) لمارغريت أتوود بوصفها إدانة للنسق الذكوري القامع، غير أن البحث في الكيفيات اللغوية الدقيقة التي تتجلى من خلالها مقاومة هذا النسق ظل محدوداً. تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى سدّ هذه الفجوة من خلال بحث الكيفية التي تعمل بها اللغة التقييمية بوصفها أداة للموضع الأيدولوجي والمقاومة داخل الرواية. تدمج الدراسة نظرية التقييم (Appraisal Theory) لمارتن ووايت (2005) مع النموذج العلائقي-الجدلي لنورمان فيركلاف في تحليل الخطاب النقدي، وذلك لتحليل مقتطفات مختارة من الرواية استناداً إلى غناها بموارد التقييم. وتعتمد الدراسة منهجاً يجمع بين التحليل الكمي، من خلال تحديد التكرارات باستخدام برنامج تحليل المتون اللغوية لانكس بوكس LancsboxX والتحليل النوعي/التأولي للنصوص المختارة. تُظهر النتائج أن المقاومة في المجتمعات الشمولية قد لا تكون بالضرورة فعلاً مادياً، بل قد تتجلى بوصفها فعلاً لغوياً يحفظ للذات سيادتها النفسية.

الكلمات المفتاحية: حكاية الأمة، نظرية التقييم، تحليل الخطاب النقدي، النموذج العلائقي-الجدلي، لانكس بوكس.

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* Corresponding author.

E-mail addresses: Mohammed.hussien@uobasrah.edu.iq (M.H. Mohsen), Rana.settar@uobasrah.edu.iq (R.A. Abid).

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1. Introduction

Language is a social semiotic phenomenon where society, history, culture, and identity are mirrored. As posited by Michael Halliday, language is not a mere system of signifier and signified but a socio-contextual, practical resource for creating meaning [10, p.141]. Halliday's approach to language, *systemic functional linguistics*, presents language as a system of choices guided by its functions in social life, i.e., lexical and grammatical choices—lexicogrammar—are inherently meaningful and socially functional [9, p.188]. Proceeding from this premise, Norman Fairclough advanced his *dialectical-relational* approach of CDA in which language/discourse reflects social realities and contributes to their reproduction and transformation through power dynamics and ideological processes [6, p.8]. This process of production and reproduction of social structures can be seen, e.g., in the concepts of intertextuality (how texts draw on prior texts) and interdiscursivity (how texts create hybrid mixes of genres, discourses and styles), where producers' choices in the production stage draw on and recombine existing texts and genres [7, p.134]. No matter how well one harbors or entertains an ideology—oppressive or resistant—language always gives away its users, unearthing their stances. The ideological presuppositions hide in various lexicogrammatical forms, such as vocabulary, grammatical strategies, modality, metaphor, and many other forms. For instance, lexical choices can privilege and marginalize people, ideas, and things, thereby unveiling the speaker's evaluative stance.

Dystopian fiction serves as a vehicle for ideological critique, functioning as what scholars have termed “a canary in a coal mine” that warns readers of potential future dangers while, simultaneously, critiquing contemporary social and

political systems of the real world [20, p.xxix]. The ideological struggle between oppression and resistance is evident in this genre, especially, in the theme of discursive control—manipulation of discourse. Discursive control works in many ways, such as the enforcement of illiteracy, the reduction of discourse to ritualized formulas, and the imposition of monolithic meaning through controlled vocabulary.

Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985) serves as the prototypical example of a totalitarian dystopian fiction where discourse is controlled and manipulated by the regime (Gilead) for the sake of limiting vocabulary, enforcing scriptural interpretations, and silencing female voices. Against this discursive control, Offred—the protagonist—employs a discourse of resistance to counter the ideology of the oppressor. Thus, language in the totalitarian context of this novel becomes the primary site where ideologies are produced, reproduced, and—crucially—resisted.

Despite extensive studies conducted to tackle literary and discursive issues related to *The Handmaid's Tale*, fewer studies have systematically examined the linguistic mechanisms through which ideology is communicated and reflected in the text. Accordingly, the current study aims to fill this gap through a systematic analysis of evaluative language and an exploration of how it contributes to the shaping of ideological positioning in discourse.

The current study seeks to answer the following questions:

1. What types of evaluative language are used in *The Handmaid's Tale* to construct and express ideological positioning?
2. How does evaluative language contribute to the construction of resistant ideological discourses in the novel?

The objectives this study aims to fulfill are:

1. To identify and categorize the evaluative language of resistance using the Appraisal Framework.
2. To foreground the interpretation of the identified appraisal resources and then explain their ideological implications using Fairclough's Three-Dimensional

Model.

The significance of this study resides in its contribution to Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis, as it demonstrates that resistance in totalitarian contexts is at times realized as a linguistic act. This research also offers a methodological blueprint for analyzing how the powerless use evaluative language to maintain psychological sovereignty in the face of oppression.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Language, Power, and Gendered Ideology

The relationship between language and power is foundational to Critical Discourse Analysis (hereafter CDA). CDA is the systematic approach of unveiling the “relationships of causality and determination” between discourse and social and cultural issues such as race, politics, gender and identity to explore how ideologies and power relations are mediated through discursive practices [7, p.93]. Language in CDA is treated as a form of social practice: discourse both reflects and helps to (re)produce social relations, and it, therefore, must be studied with an eye to power, ideology, and the possibilities for social change [19, pp.186-190]. The relation between gender, language, and power is well defined in the Feminist branch of CDA, which is concerned in exposing and critiquing discourses that ideologically sustain patriarchal order—empowering men while disempowering women—giving the feminist analysts the chance of “demystifying the interrelationships of gender, power and ideology in discourse” while enacting 'analytical resistance', for the end sought of bringing social change [14, pp.5-6]. Capitalizing on this, feminist critical discourse analysts took the task of:

examin[ing] how power and dominance are discursively produced and/or resisted in a variety of ways through textual representations of gendered social practices, and through interactional strategies of talk [14,

p.10].

2.2 Evaluation as a Means of Positioning and Alignment

According to Hunston and Thompson, evaluation is “a broad cover term for the expression of the speaker or writer’s **attitude or stance** towards, **viewpoint** on, or **feelings** about the entities or propositions that he or she is talking about” [12 ,p.5]. When the speaker expresses attitude, stance, viewpoint, or feelings, he, knowingly or unknowingly, (1) reveals his opinion which reflects his value system and community (positioning), (2) creates and preserves relations between him and the hearer or reader (alignment) [12 ,p.6]. The above functions introduce evaluation as being both subjective and intersubjective. Evaluative utterances are subjective in that they “express a personal opinion”—stance—situated within a social and ideological framework and they are intersubjective as they have “the function of interacting with a social other” [13, p12]. These two functions are dealt with delicacy in the engagement dimension of the Appraisal Framework [4, p.206]. Through evaluative language, a speaker/writer does not just describe the world but positions the audience to view it in a specific way—either aligning them with the speaker’s values or distancing them from opposing views. In the context of a first-person narrative like *The Handmaid’s Tale*, the narrator does not simply report the oppression of Gilead; she evaluates it, inviting the reader to share her disgust, skepticism, or irony. This process of alignment is what transforms the act of reading into an act of ideological participation.

2.3 Appraisal Theory in Critical and Literary Studies

Distinct scholarly papers have been written about the application of the appraisal framework to literary texts; some proceed from the fact that the appraisal framework can serve as a means that bridges the gap between linguistics and literature, providing a new approach through which literature can be learned. The work of Matiyenga and Ajani (2025) introduces

an integrated theoretical framework, comprising the Appraisal with the *Extended Pragma-dialectic Theory of Argumentation* to analyze literary discourse. They argue that such integration is valid and provides a valuable tool for literary criticism. Ataei's (2019) analysis of *Twilight* is another study that applies the *Appraisal Theory* to literary texts. However, this study focuses exclusively on the affect subsystem leaving out the rest of the subsystems (Judgment and Appreciation) and systems (Graduation and Engagement).

Furthermore, the *Appraisal Framework* has proven its efficiency in analyzing the discourse of the marginalized alongside CDA. Ortega-Robles and Hidalgo-Tenorio [18] applied the AT with CDA to the transcripts of those who have been wrongfully convicted, analyzing how their trauma manifests in the lexicogrammar of the evaluative patterns (AT) and how power relations are construed in their discourse (CDA).

2.4 Fairclough's Dialectical View of Discourse

While the *Appraisal Theory* provides the tools for micro-analysis, a complete understanding of resistance requires a macro-sociological perspective. This is provided by Norman Fairclough's (1992) dialectical view of discourse. Fairclough argues that discourse is a 'social practice' resulted from the dialectical relationship between discourse and social structure; that is, "on the one hand, discourse is constrained by social structures [society in general... and] on the other hand [it] is socially constitutive" [6, p.64]. This model is essential for the current study because it bridges the gap between the text and the outside social reality. It allows the analysis to move beyond describing what Offred, the protagonist, says (Text Dimension) to explain why it matters (Social Practice Dimension). By viewing discourse as a social practice, the study demonstrates how Offred's linguistic resistance serves as a counter-practice that challenges the institutionalized power of Gilead.

2.5 Previous Studies on the Text

The *Handmaid's Tale* has been the subject of

extensive academic inquiry, particularly regarding the discursive construction of totalitarianism. Recent studies have largely employed Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) to examine how the regime of Gilead maintains authority. For instance, Al-Furaiji et al. [1] utilized van Dijk's socio-cognitive model to analyze the "discursive tactics of atrocity" used in *The Handmaid's Tale* to (re)produce social reality. Their study focuses on "the ideological polarization of a favorable presentation of the handmaid's self vs. a negative portrayal of the other". Similarly, Hussein and Kadhim [11] conducted a macro and micro-analysis of power structures in the text, focusing on how language is manipulated to enforce and resist the patriarchal order. Unlike the previous studies, the current research addresses the linguistic incarnations found in the resistance theme of the chosen novel in a systematic delicate way that comprised two frameworks (Appraisal Framework and Three-Dimensional Framework) instead of only one, rendering the identification process of such realizations more accurate.

3. Theoretical Framework

3.1 Fairclough's Three-dimensional Model

Building on the premise that "discourse is a form of social practice" [21,p.26], we can understand social change, as far as CDA is concerned, as referring to how shifts in discourse both mirror and constitute/shape social relations, institutions, identities, and power; in other words, discourse and social matters are bound in a dialectical relation, where they reflect and change each other [6, p.64]. This dialectical relationship is the core of Fairclough's three-dimensional model (1992), which is adopted in this research. Fairclough's model covers three dimensions: (1) Text (description), (2) Discursive Practice (interpretation), and (3) Social Practice (explanation).

3.1.1 Text Dimension (Description)

The first dimension, text, is the semiotic product, written or spoken, that holds 'traces' of production and provide 'cues' for interpretation [6, p.80]. This dimension of discourse corresponds with the

description stage of the analysis process of discourse, where analysis is concerned with “identifying and ‘labelling’ formal features of a text in terms of the categories of a descriptive framework” [8, p.59].

3.1.2 Discursive Practice (Interpretation)

The second dimension mediates between the text and the social practice. It is concerned with the processes of text production, distribution, and consumption. This stage involves the ‘interpretation’ of how participants interpret and produce texts based on internalized discursive rules. Central to this dimension are the concepts of intertextuality (how texts draw on prior texts) and interdiscursivity (heterogeneous hybrid mixes of genres, discourses and styles).

3.1.3 Social Practice (Explanation)

The third dimension situates the discourse within the wider social context. It is the stage of ‘explanation,’ determining whether the discursive practice reproduces or restructures the existing social order. This level analyses the ideological effects of discourse and its role in sustaining or challenging hegemony. It answers the question of how discourse relates to power struggles and social change. In this study, the explanation stage connects the linguistic evidence (resistance) to the totalitarian structures of Gilead and the real-world patriarchal ideologies they mirror.

3.2 Appraisal Framework

To operationalize the descriptive analysis of the ‘Text’ dimension, this study utilizes the Appraisal Framework developed by Martin and White [16]. Located within Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), Appraisal is an interpersonal system that focuses on the speaker/writer’s attitudes, the intensity of such attitudes, and how stances are sourced and readers aligned [15, pp.25-26]. Evaluation in this framework falls into three interacting domains: Attitude, Graduation, and Engagement.

3.2.1 Attitude

Attitude is concerned with "our feelings, including emotional reactions, judgements of behaviour and

evaluation of things" [16, p.35]. It comprises three sub-systems:

First, Affect (Emotions): This refers to the resources for construing emotional reactions, which are typologized according to six criteria: (1) positive or negative, (2) external or internal, (3) emotional trigger or ongoing mood, (4) how intense they are, (5) realis or irrealis, (6) whether they have to do with the ‘affairs of the heart’, ‘ecosocial well-being’, or ‘telos (the pursuit of goals)’ [16, pp.46-51]. Second, Judgement (Ethics): Through this semantic region we direct our attitudes towards people and their behaviours, forming evaluation of their ‘normality’ (whether they usual or unusual), ‘capacity’ (their ability) and ‘tenacity’ (how resolute they are); as well as their ‘veracity’ (the truthfulness of a person) and ‘propriety’ (the ethicality of a person). Normality, capacity, and tenacity are grouped under the label “social esteem”, while veracity and propriety fall under the category of “social sanction” [16, p.52]. Third, Appreciation (Aesthetics): While judgement is exclusively meant for evaluating conscious beings, appreciation is used for evaluating—abstract and concrete—things only [15, p.37]. Such evaluation straddles three strands: (1) reactions to things (impact and quality), (2) the composition of things (balance and complexity), and (3) the value of things (was it worthwhile?) [16, p.56].

3.2.2 Graduation

Graduation is the system responsible for scaling the intensity or the sharpness of the attitude. It operates across two axes: First, Force: involves adjusting the volume of the evaluation. It includes Intensification (scaling qualities, e.g., very sad, slightly sad) and Quantification (scaling amount and extent, e.g., many, all, always). Second, Focus: involves sharpening or softening the boundaries of categories. It distinguishes between a prototypical instance (Sharpen, e.g., a real father) and a peripheral instance (Soften, e.g., kind of blue).

3.2.3 Engagement

Engagement is concerned with the ‘sourcing’ of the attitude—how the speaker positions their voice in

relation to other voices. It deals with bare assertion statements that allows no space for alternative viewpoints (Monogloss) as well as heteroglossic stances that recognize alternative voices. The recognition of voices in this dimension is divided into two categories: dialogic contraction and dialogic expansion. In the former strategy the speaker engages with other voices only to close them down through rejection (Disclaim: deny and counter) or via warranting the utterance (Proclaim: concur, pronounce, and endorse). The latter strategy manifests in how the speaker opens the space for alternative positions through attribution (Attribute: acknowledge and distance) or via presenting the view as one of several possibilities (Entertain: evidentiality and modality).

3.3 Integration of Appraisal Framework within Fairclough's Model

The integration of the selected frameworks in this study rests on two premises. The first is that, because Fairclough's model operates on three dimensions, the first one being the textual dimension, it needs a toolkit for carrying out the analysis of the micro-linguistic features. The second is that, given appraisal framework is an SFL-based, it serves most effectively as an analytical toolkit within both the textual dimension and the discursive practice dimension.

4. Methodology

This research utilizes a mixed-methods approach, incorporating both quantitative and qualitative analyses, with greater methodological weight assigned to the qualitative component. The quantitative aspect involves the identification and frequency count of the evaluative language in the corpus. The identification process is carried out according to the linguistic realizations of the three dimensions of appraisal mentioned in Martin and White (2005). Rather than identifying and counting the frequency manually, the researcher makes use of a corpus inspection software called "LancsboxX" [5]. However, the results of this software were not followed blindly; the researcher double-checked

them. The qualitative aspect can be seen clearly in how the three-dimensional model of Fairclough is employed in relating the identified linguistic triggers—appraisal resources—to the wider social reality where ideological processes thrive.

4.1 Selection of Data

The selection procedure of the data rests on two criteria. The first criterion is that the selected passages should fall under the rubric of the resistance theme in *The Handmaid's Tale*. Beside this criterion, the selected passages should also be rich in ideological positioning. Each extract is expected to embody ideological significance so that, when analyzed, its microlinguistic features can be systematically related to broader social structures; therefore, Fairclough's Three-Dimensional Model will be employed to its fullest analytical potential.

4.2 Analytical Procedure

The analytical procedure followed here is primarily qualitative with some quantitative aspects. The quantitative aspect involves:

1. Automatic Identification: the identification and the calculations of the distribution of evaluative resources is done via the corpus analysis software **LancsboxX** provided by the Lancaster University [5], but cautiously reviewed and fine-tuned by the researcher. The whole novel is uploaded into this program, so as to be tagged automatically into grammatical and semantic categories. This automatic tagging helps in identifying appraisal resources, e.g., within the dimension of judgement, adjectives—grammatical category—constitute one of the many manifestations that express judgements.
2. Fine-tuning: after identifying the evaluative expressions throughout the corpus successfully, the program starts counting the frequency of each expression; but before letting the program doing this, the researcher makes sure to fine-tune the results, ruling out any irrelevant instances.

3. Beyond fine-tuning: after fine-tuning the raw results, the next step is to read these results in their context to make sure that they fall under the theme of resistance.

While the quantitative aspect rests at the appraisal framework, the qualitative aspect of analysis is a CDA-oriented analysis, but not entirely. The analysis is carried out like this:

1. Text dimension/ description stage: within this stage, the micro-linguistic features are identified. This stage of analysis is entirely quantitative and appraisal-based; it is so, because what matters here is the identification and the counting of frequencies (quantitative) of the evaluative expressions (appraisal).

2. Discursive practice dimension/ interpretation stage: this stage of analysis is concerned with how texts are produced, distributed, and consumed in relation to the concepts of intertextuality and interdiscursivity; these concepts align with the engagement system in the appraisal framework,

where Bakhtin’s dialogism is adopted. The linguistic realizations of the engagement system are identified in the description stage and interpreted in the interpretation stage.

3. The social practice/ the explanation stage: in this stage, the micro-linguistic choices are explained in relation to the wider social reality where power dynamics and ideologies are produced, reproduced, and maintained.

5. Analysis and Discussion

The above procedure will be applied to a detailed analysis of three out of the nine excerpts related to the theme of resistance. Only three excerpts are selected to maintain conciseness and avoid redundancy, while ensuring representational adequacy. These excerpts were chosen because they contain the most extensive instances of appraisal resources relevant to resistance. The remaining excerpts are summarized in Table (1), where their appraisal resources are briefly presented in Table (2)

Table 1: Supplementary Extracts of Resistance

No.	Extract	Page	Included in Analysis
1	“May the Lord open,” I answer, the <u>accepted</u> response. We turn and walk together past the large houses, towards the central part of town. We <u>aren’t</u> allowed to go there except in twos. This is <u>supposed</u> to be for our protection, <u>though</u> the notion is <u>absurd</u> : we are <u>well protected</u> already. The truth is that she is my spy, as I am hers. If either of us slips through the net because of something that happens on one of our daily walks, the other will be accountable.	p. 27	No
2	This is the <u>one</u> good thing about these evenings, the evenings of the Ceremony: I’m allowed to watch the news. It seems to be an unspoken rule in this household: we <u>always</u> get here <u>on time</u> , he’s <u>always</u> late, Serena <u>always</u> lets us watch the news. Such as it is: <u>who knows</u> if any of it is true? It <u>could</u> be <u>old clips</u> , it <u>could</u> be <u>faked</u> . <u>But</u> I watch it anyway, hoping to be able to read beneath it. Any news, now, is <u>better</u> than none.	p. 96	Yes

3	My God. Who Art in the Kingdom of Heaven, which is <u>within</u> . I wish you would tell me Your Name, the <u>real</u> one I mean. <u>But</u> <i>You</i> will do as well as anything. I wish I knew what You were up to. But whatever it is, help me to get through it, please. <u>Though maybe</u> it's <u>not</u> Your doing; I <u>don't believe</u> for an instant that what's going on out there is what You meant.	p. 223	No
4	"I <u>want</u> ..." he says. I try not to lean forward. Yes? Yes yes? What, then? What does he want? But I <u>won't</u> give it away, this eagerness of mine. It's a <u>bargaining</u> session, things are about to be exchanged. She who does <u>not</u> hesitate is <u>lost</u> . I'm <u>not</u> giving anything away: selling <u>only</u> .	p. 159	No
5	I <u>intend</u> to get out of here. It <u>can't</u> last forever. <u>Others have thought</u> such things, in <u>bad</u> times before this, and they were <u>always right</u> , they did get out one way or another, and it <u>didn't</u> last forever.	p. 154	No
6	"It means you <u>can't</u> cheat Nature," he says. "Nature demands variety, for men. <u>It stands to reason</u> , it's part of the <u>pro-creational</u> strategy. It's Nature's plan." I don't say anything, so he goes on. "Women know that instinctively. Why did they buy so many different clothes, in the old days? To trick the men into thinking they were several different women. A new one each day." He says this as if he believes it, but he says many things that way. <u>Maybe</u> he believes it, <u>maybe</u> he doesn't, or <u>maybe</u> he does both at the same time. <u>Impossible</u> to tell what he believes. "So now that we don't have different clothes," I say, "you merely have different women." This is <u>irony</u> , <u>but</u> he <u>doesn't</u> acknowledge it.	p.270	Yes
7	The pen between my fingers Is <u>sensuous</u> , <u>alive almost</u> , I can feel its power, the power of the words it contains. Pen Is <u>Envy</u> , Aunt Lydia would <u>say</u> , quoting another Centre motto, warning us away from such objects. And they were <u>right</u> , it is <u>envy</u> . Just holding it is <u>envy</u> . I <u>envy</u> the Commander his pen. It's one more thing I would <u>like</u> to steal.	p. 213	No
8	Moira was like an <u>elevator with open sides</u> . She made us <u>dizzy</u> . Already we were losing the taste for freedom, already we were finding these walls <u>secure</u> [...] In the light of Moira, the Aunts were <u>less fearsome</u> and <u>more absurd</u> . Their power had a flaw to it.	p. 153	No
9	Falling in love, I said. Falling into it, we all did then, one way or another. How could he have <u>made such light of it</u> ? <u>Sneered</u> even. As if it was <u>trivial</u> for us, a <u>frill</u> , a <u>whim</u> . It was, on the contrary, <u>heavy</u> going. It was the <u>central</u> thing; it was <u>the way you understood yourself</u> ; if it never happened to you, not ever, you would be like a <u>mutant</u> , a <u>creature from outer space</u> . <u>Everyone knew</u> that. Falling in love, we said; I fell for him. We were <u>falling</u> women. We <u>believed</u> in it, this downward motion: <u>so lovely</u> , like flying, and <u>yet</u> at the same time <u>so dire</u> , <u>so extreme</u> , <u>so unlikely</u> . God is love, they said once, but we reversed that, and love, like Heaven, was always just around the corner.	p.256	Yes

Anti-propaganda evaluation in Extract 2

1. This is the one good thing about these evenings, the evenings of the Ceremony: I'm allowed to

watch the news. It seems to be an unspoken rule in this household: we always get here on time, he's always late, Serena always lets us watch the

news. Such as it is: who knows if any of it is true? It could be old clips, it could be faked. But I watch it anyway, hoping to be able to read beneath it. Any news, now, is better than none.

[3, p.96]

A. Text dimension/ description stage:

The current extract is rich in linguistic resources from all three systems of *Appraisal*. The *Attitude* system is realized via the adjectives “good,” “late,” “old,” “better,” the verb “faked,” and the predicate “get here on time”—which can be paraphrased as the adjective “punctual”. The adjectives “good” and “better” are *Appreciation* resources, showing the *good quality* of the thing being appraised. The adjective “old” and the verb “faked” are also *Appreciation* resources, bearing *negative value*. As for the word “late” and the phrase “get here on time”, they are *Judgemental* resources, expressing the *customary* habits of the people being evaluated—*normality*.

The *Graduation* system in the current extract manifests in the repeated adverb “always” and the adjective “one”. Both of these resources are *force-based* ones, more specifically, they are quantification resources, expressing the *time(extent)* and *amount(number)* of the thing being appraised.

As for the *Engagement* system, Offred uses *Heterogloss: Expansion (Entertainment)* to distance herself from the propaganda. Through the adverbial “who knows” and the repeated modals of probability “Could be... Could be” are used to refuse accepting the news as “fact.” She treats the news as just one possible version of reality, not the absolute truth. Beside these dialogically-expansive resources, Offred uses the dialogically-contractive “But” to *counter* the expectation that since all news is probably fake, then it is worthless.

B. Discursive dimension / interpretation stage:

The text functions as a site of interdiscursive struggle between two opposing discourses. The first discourse the text embeds is the *hegemonic discourse* of the state (propaganda). This discourse utilizes the genre of “the news” not to inform, but to construct a narrative of invincibility—showing ‘only victories’

[3, p.97]—to instill fear and quell rebellion. Against this discourse, Offred’s scepticism forms a *discourse of resistance*. By viewing the news through a critical lens, “reading beneath it”, Offred transforms the consumption of media from a passive act of indoctrination into an active act of decoding. She treats the state’s “truth” as fiction “faked” and “old clips”, thus stripping the propaganda of its power.

C. Socio-cultural dimension / explanation stage:

At the level of social practice, Offred’s appraisal choices reveal her ideological positioning in relation to Gilead’s monopolization of the media. Her scepticism towards Gilead’s news is clearly stated in how she expands the dialogical space rather than treating the news as fact; as if she is saying that the narrative of Gilead is just one of many other narratives and such narrative is probably a fake distorted one. While the state can control her body via the rigid routine of the household and the broadcast (the “faked” news), it cannot colonize her mind. The repetition of “always” emphasizes the ritualistic, unchanging nature of the “Ceremony.” It constructs the household as a prison of routine, where the only—one—good thing is watching news. The adjective “late” and the predicate “get here on time” expose patriarchal order which is an extension of the Gileadean ideology: these expressions show that the Commander is non-compliant, unlike the women. This subtly signals his power; he is above the “unspoken rule” that binds the women.

Ideological Evaluation in Extract 6

2. “It means you can’t cheat Nature,” he says. “Nature demands variety, for men. It stands to reason, it’s part of the pro-creational strategy. It’s Nature’s plan.” I don’t say anything, so he goes on. “Women know that instinctively. Why did they buy so many different clothes, in the old days? To trick the men into thinking they were several different women. A new one each day.” He says this as if he believes it, but he says many things that way. Maybe he believes it, maybe he doesn’t, or maybe he does both at the same time. Impossible to tell what he believes. “So now that we don’t have different clothes,” I say, “you

merely have different women.” This is irony, but he doesn't acknowledge it. [3, p.270]

A. Text dimension / description stage:

The engagement resources in the current excerpt highlight a contrast between the Commander's authoritative assertions and Offred's epistemic uncertainty. The use of the high-certainty phrase “It stands to reason”—proclaim-concur—reveals how the Commander appraises his opinion as a “common sense”, a natural law that everyone must agree with, thereby closing the dialogical space. The Commander backs his claim that it is common sense if a man is in a polygamous relationship by describing the situation via appreciation: composition resources “pro-creational” and “Nature's plan”. He further closes the dialogical space with Disclaim: Deny (“you can't cheat Nature”), rejecting any alternative view. In contrast, Offred uses heterogloss: expansion (entertain) through the high-frequency repetition of “Maybe”. These resources mark her epistemic uncertainty regarding his sincerity. She also uses disclaim: counter “but” and disclaim: deny “doesn't acknowledge” to highlight how hypocrite he is: instead of going such lengths, of having more than one woman, all he has to do to fulfil his needs is to allow women wear a variety of clothes instead of being confined with one dress.

The attitude resources employed in this text are categorized under the subsystem of appreciation. Specifically, the noun “irony” realizes appreciation: composition (complexity), while the adjective “impossible” realizes appreciation: valuation. Both lexical choices encode a negative evaluation, construing the situation as problematic and undermining the commander's intelligibility and credibility.

B. Discursive dimension / interpretation stage:

The current text is interdiscursively rich in that it displays a conflict between two discourses. The first discourse is biology-based discourse (“pro-creational strategy,” “instinctively,” “Nature's plan”), used by the commander to legitimize and naturalize the sexual exploitation of women under

the reign of Gilead not as a sin, but as a biological necessity. Against the commander's discourse, Offred employs a discourse of satire as a means of resistance. By reducing his biological “theory” to a simple equation (“different clothes” = “different women”), she exposes the shallowness of his logic, after all, humans are not merely biological creatures; they are social beings nonetheless. She reveals that his “Nature” is just a cover for treating women as interchangeable commodities.

C. Socio-cultural dimension / explanation stage:

At the level of social practice, this extract critiques the patriarchal order of Gilead. Gilead hides its patriarchal logic not only beneath the religious facade, but also beneath the facade of science. The state's justification for the commodification of women goes under the excuse that it is God's plan or that it is how nature works “Nature's plan”. Through these excuses, Gilead tries to naturalize its oppression; from the perspective of the state, women are products to be consumed; if the packaging (clothes) changes, the product feels new. Offred's resistance lies in her ability to intellectually deconstruct this dehumanization, even if she cannot physically stop it. She points out the irony of the situation and how hypocrite the state is.

Appraisal and Ideological Stance in Extract 9

3. Falling in love, I said. Falling into it, we all did then, one way or another. How could he have made such light of it? Sneered even. As if it was trivial for us, a frill, a whim. It was, on the contrary, heavy going. It was the central thing; it was the way you understood yourself; if it never happened to you, not ever, you would be like a mutant, a creature from outer space. Everyone knew that. Falling in love, we said; I fell for him. We were falling women. We believed in it, this downward motion: so lovely, like flying, and yet at the same time so dire, so extreme, so unlikely. God is love, they said once, but we reversed that, and love, like Heaven, was always just around the corner. [3, p.256]

A. Text dimension / description stage:

The appraisal choices in this extract are characterized by a sharp contrast between the resources of Appreciation used to value the past versus those used to characterize the Commander's dismissal. Offred employs Appreciation: Valuation (negative) to describe the Commander's view of love, utilizing words like "trivial," "frill," and "whim" to show how the patriarchal voice minimizes female emotion. In resistance to this, she deploys positive appreciation resources "heavy going,"—composition—"central," "lovely," "dire," and "extreme"—valuation—reinforced by negative judgment: normality—mutant, a creature from outer space—to show that falling in love is the contrary of what others might believe; it is not peripheral; it is the primary way of self-definition ("the way you understood yourself"). The extract is also saturated with graduation: force, through the repetition of the intensifier "so" ("so lovely," "so dire," "so extreme," "so unlikely"). This intensification scales up the emotional impact, suggesting that love a majestic life-altering phenomenon.

Regarding engagement, Offred contracts the dialogic space through the use of proclaim: concur ("Everyone knew that") to construct a shared, universal reality among women of the past. She also expands the dialogic space through the use of entertain: evidentiality ("We believed in it") to show the ideology that women entertained, in the pre-Gileadean era, not as an absolute fact, but as a subjective belief; without imposing this belief on others.

B. Discursive dimension / interpretation stage:

The interdiscursivity of the present text is evident in the tension between the cynical patriarchal discourse—represented by the Commander, who views love as a "whim"—and the romantic discourse of the pre-Gilead past. Offred defends the latter. The text exhibits intertextuality by citing the biblical verse "God is love" (John 4:8). However, Offred explicitly notes that they "reversed that," turning "Love" into a deity itself. This intertextual twist shifts the discourse from religious devotion to secular romantic obsession.

C. Socio-cultural dimension / explanation stage:

At the level of social practice, this extract demonstrates an ideological conflict between the state's and Offred's ideology concerning love. Gilead functions on a "loveless ideology" where human connection is reduced to biology and emotion is dismissed as a "frill" or a "whim." The regime seeks to transform women into passive vessels ("two-legged wombs") devoid of any emotions.

Offred resists this dehumanization by reclaiming the ideology of romantic love. By asserting that love was "the central thing" and "the way you understood yourself," she is fighting to preserve her human identity against a system that wants to erase it. To remember love in a loveless world is not just nostalgia; it is an act of psychological warfare against a regime that forbids passion.

Table (2): The linguistic realizations of the appraisal resources in the 9 extracts

No.	Appraisal Resource	Key Example(s)	Linguistic Realization	Freq.
Attitude				
1	Affect	Protected (extract 1), want (extract 4), intend (extract 5), envy (extract 7), would like (extract 7), dizzy (extract 8)	1. Adjective 2. Verb	6
2	Appreciation: Quality	sensuous (extract 7), alive (extract 7), good (extract 2), better (extract 2)	1. Adjective	4
3	Appreciation: Valuation	absurd (extract 1), old clips (extract 2), faked (extract 2), bargaining session (extract 4), within (extract 3), bad times (extract 5), impossible (extract 6), secure (extract 8), trivial (extract 9), frill (extract 9), whim (extract 9), heavy (extract 9), central (extract 9), lovely (extract 9), dire (extract 9), extreme (extract 9)	1. Adjective 2. Noun phrase 3. Adverb 4. Verb	16
4	Appreciation: Composition	irony (extract 6), Nature's plan (extract 6), pro-creational (extract 6), heavy going (extract 9)	1. Noun 2. Adjective	3
5	Appreciation: Impact	N/A	N/A	0
6	Judgement: Normality	late (extract 2), get here on time (extract 2), an elevator with open sides (extract 8), mutant (extract 9), a creature from outer space (extract 9)	1. Adjective 2. Noun phrase 3. Predicate	6
7	Judgement: Capacity	lost (extract 4), fearsome (extract 8), absurd (extract 8)	1. Adjective	3
8	Judgement: Veracity	right (extract 5), right (extract 7)	1. Adjective	2
Graduation				
9	Force	well (extract 1), always (extract 2), one (extract 2), less (extract 8), more (extract 8), so (extract 9)	1. Adverb 2. Adjective 3. Intensifier	6
10	Focus	only (extract 4), almost (extract 7)	1. Adverb	2
Engagement				
11	Expansion (Attribution)	Aunt Lydia would say (extract 7), Others have thought (extract 5)	1. Reporting verb	2
12	Expansion (Entertain/Evidentiality)	I don't believe (extract 3), We believed in it (extract 9)	1. Verb	2

13	Expansion (Entertain/ Modality)	who knows (extract 2), Could be... Could be (extract 2), maybe (extract 3)	1. Modal verb 2. Adverbial 3. Modal adjunct	4
14	Contraction (Disclaim/ Negation)	aren't (extract 1), won't (extract 4), not (extract 4), can't (extract 5), didn't (extract 5), don't (extract 3), doesn't acknowledge (extract 6)	1. Negation	7
15	Contraction (Disclaim/ Counter)	though (extract 1), But (extract 2), but (extract 3), though (extract 3), but (extract 6)	1. Conjunction	5
16	Contraction (Proclaim/ Concur)	It stands to reason (extract 6), Everyone knew that (extract 9)	1. Clause	2

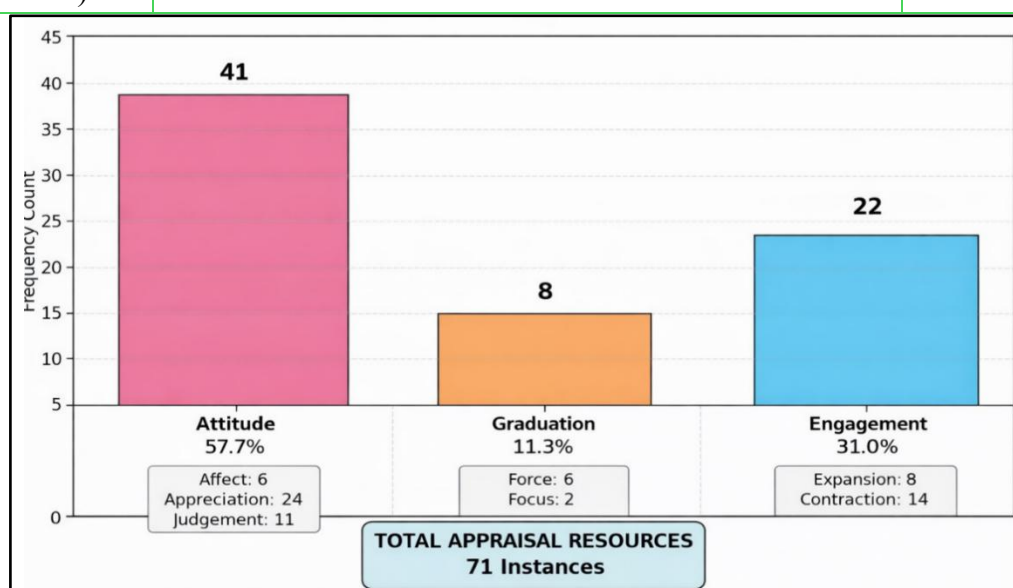


Figure (1) Appraisal resources analysis: Theme of resistance in *The Handmaid's Tale*

The above table and figure illustrate how the linguistic architecture of resistance is constructed mostly through the interplay of Engagement and Attitude resources. The Attitude dimension occupies 57.7% of the total 71 instances of appraisal resources in the 9 extracts. It is dominantly used by Offred to resist Gilead's view and provide an alternative one (e.g. love is central not trivial, frill, and whim). As for the Graduation dimension, constituting 11.3% only, it is the lowest on frequency; it is used merely to intensify (amplifiers and downtoners) the attitudes expressed by Offred (e.g., so dire, so lovely; less fearsome, one good thing). The rest of the 71 appraisal resources belong to the Engagement dimension. In this dimension, Offred relies mostly on contractive strategies (both Deny and

Counter), with markers such as “won’t,” “can’t,” “not,” and “but” appearing frequently, indicating that her resistance is dialogic; she does not merely narrates the regime’s atrocities but explicitly rejects and counter them. Even within the use of the expansive strategies, Offred sometimes uses modality and evidentiality to signal epistemic scepticism and resistance to state discourse.

Beyond the ideological positioning of the characters, the appraisal patterns in *The Handmaid's Tale* serve a meta-discursive function, that is, they ideologically position the reader as an accomplice to the resistance. Through the strategic use of appraisal resources (Attitude, Graduation, and Engagement), the author/narrator constructs a specific "reading

position" that prevents the reader from remaining a neutral observer.

Offred consistently invites the reader into a shared in-group through proclaim-concur resources (e.g., "Everyone knew that") and the assumption of shared values regarding love, freedom, and sanity. By validating the pre-Gilead worldview—which mirrors the reader's own reality—as normal and the Gileadean worldview as absurd, the text forces the reader to align with the resistance. We, readers, are not merely watching Offred; we are aligned with her evaluative choices. This is evident in moments of irony (extract 9), where the reader is trusted to decode the satire that the Commander misses. This creates a bond of intellectual solidarity between author/narrator and reader, positioning them together against the ignorance of the regime.

The reader is not guided to adopt this stance merely to confine it to the boundaries of the novel without any actualization in the outside reality. The text *implicates* the reader in the act of rebellion; it trains the reader to perform the same appraising strategies that Offred performs to deconstruct and resist the oppressive order. The implication of this positioning is that the reader is compelled to critique not only the fictional order of Gilead but also the real-world patriarchal and totalitarian structures it reflects. The reader is thus transformed from a passive consumer into an active critic, trained to "read beneath" the surface of political discourse.

6. Conclusion

This study has explored the intricate relationship between language and resistance in Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* via the synthesis of the micro-analysis (text) of the Appraisal Framework with the macro-sociological (social practice) perspective of Fairclough's Three-dimensional model. The analysis shows that the protagonist uses specific evaluative categories to deconstruct the regime's ideology. For instance,

the use of Appreciation to value the past, alongside Engagement resources like modality to express skepticism, allows Offred to distance herself from and expose the oppressor's ideology (Gilead). The study also highlights how these appraisal strategies meta-discursively train the reader to "read beneath" political discourse and challenge the oppressive ideologies mirrored in the text.

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