‘I had only their words for it’: Language as a Means of Control in Four Dystopian Novels

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## List of Abbreviations

- **BNW**: Aldous Huxley, *Brave New World.*  
- **HT**: Margaret Atwood, *The Handmaid’s Tale*  
- **NLMG**: Kazuo Ishiguro, *Never Let Me Go*  
- **NT**: Suzette Haden Elgin, *Native Tongue*
Introduction

‘Alone among the animals, we suffer from the future perfect tense. Rover the Dog cannot imagine a future world of dogs in which all fleas will have been eliminated and doghood will finally have achieved its full glorious potential. But thanks to their uniquely structured languages, human beings can imagine such enhanced states for themselves, though they can also question their own grandiose constructions.’

– Margaret Atwood, introduction to *Brave New World* (2007)

As Margaret Atwood rightly observed, language allows human beings to imagine an ideal future state. The creation of utopian worlds in literature in order to draw attention to negative aspects of society and offer a better alternative has a long tradition in Western literature (Snodgrass 523). Ironically, the word ‘utopia’ can be translated from its Greek etymology to mean ‘the good place’ as well as ‘no place’ (Snodgrass 525). With the ideal world apparently beyond reach, the twentieth century saw the rise of dystopian fiction, describing frightening and undesirable societies rather than ideal ones. Although dystopian literature can be considered the opposite to utopian thought, warning its readers against ‘the potential negative consequences of arrant utopianism,’ it is similar to utopian literature in offering a critique of contemporary society and/or politics (Booker 3). Because this definition of dystopian fiction allows for many novels to be viewed as ‘dystopian,’ M. Keith Booker argues that authors of dystopian literature make use of a strategy of defamiliarisation while responding to utopian idealism (3). As can be seen in the novels discussed in this thesis, this defamiliarisation is often achieved by setting a story in the (near) future.
Throughout the thesis, fields of study within sociolinguistics will be introduced and sociolinguistic theories will be used in order to shed light on the important part language plays in dystopian novels. The importance of language in dystopian fiction has not been overlooked by scholars and is quite obvious in some examples of dystopian literature, such as George Orwell’s *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, in which a new language is created in order to prevent its speakers from having undesirable thoughts. The notion that language is of influence on the world-view and thoughts of its speakers, known by linguists as ‘linguistic relativity,’ will be the starting point for this thesis. By analysing four different novels written in the past century, I will argue that in all dystopian fiction, language is an important instrument for those in power to create and maintain stability, allowing them to rule society according to their own specific ideologies and preventing possible resistance. The degree to which language is actively used to influence individuals’ thoughts in these four novels varies greatly, but all novels show a certain degree of manipulation of thought through language. The four novels to be discussed are Aldous Huxley’s *Brave New World* (1932), Suzette Haden Elgin’s *Native Tongue* (1984), Margaret Atwood’s *The Handmaid’s Tale* (1985), and Kazuo Ishiguro’s *Never Let Me Go* (2005). *Brave New World* is one of the best-known examples of dystopian fiction, while *The Handmaid’s Tale* is an excellent example of feminist dystopian fiction. *Native Tongue* is explicitly concerned with the notion of linguistic relativity, whereas language does not seem to be a very important aspect of *Never Let Me Go*.

Written during the interwar period, *Brave New World* provided its contemporary readers with a disturbing look into the possible future. Throughout the twentieth century, the book remained controversial, being banned in Ireland in 1932 and in India in 1967. The novel came in third on the American Library Association’s list of 2010’s ‘most challenged’ books (Flood). Set 632 years ‘A.F.’ – 632 years after the advent of American industrialist Henry Ford (1863-1947) – *Brave New World* describes a world in which people no longer come to
be through natural birth. Instead, embryos are being cloned through a process referred to as ‘Bokanovsky’s Process’ and kept in test tubes until they are ready to ‘decant.’ The development of the embryos is influenced by chemicals, creating human beings of different classes of intelligence, each one perfect for the job they were designed to do. Throughout their childhood, the people are further conditioned to become happy, hard-working citizens with a desire for consumerism. Perhaps the most striking about this novel is its use of futuristic technologies that, almost a century later, have actually become realisable, although eugenics remain highly controversial. Through its influence and controversy, *Brave New World* has become one of the pinnacles of twentieth century dystopian fiction and therefore cannot be overlooked in an analysis of this type of fiction.

Less well-known is *Native Tongue*, a novel set at the turn of the twenty-second century. The novel, written by the linguist Suzette Haden Elgin, was written as a linguistic experiment. The novel focuses on families of linguists, who serve the government of Earth as interpreters of alien languages. The most notable aspect of this futuristic society, however, is not the communication with extra-terrestrials, but the position of women, who have been stripped of their rights and can no longer hold a job or possess their own ‘credits’ (the twenty-second century equivalent of money) without their husbands’ permission. Within the linguist families, women are mainly valued as vessels for procreation, adding new languages to the family with every linguist child that is born. The novel focuses on these women’s construction of a women’s language as a form of resistance to male dominance. This women’s language is made to be capable to express concepts that cannot be expressed in Panglish, the common earthly language. The notion of there being concepts that cannot be expressed in specific languages is emphasised in a second storyline of government officials attempting to have babies learn an alien non-humanoid language. According to the linguists, it is impossible for humanoids to learn these languages as the concepts expressed in these languages cannot be
grasped by humanoids, resulting in the tragic death of the babies exposed to these languages. The novel is set up as an experiment of linguistic relativity, researching the effects of language on culture, and the results of introducing a new language carrying new concepts into an existing culture (Elgin 176-8). Because this novel already has a focus on linguistics, it fits perfectly within a thesis researching sociolinguistic phenomena in dystopian fiction.

As the position of women within dystopian societies is one of the topics to be studied in this thesis, Margaret Atwood’s *The Handmaid’s Tale* could not be excluded from the novels to be discussed. One of the best-known examples of feminist dystopian fiction, the novel focuses on a near future in which women have been deprived of all their rights and possessions. A totalitarian, theocratic government has taken control of a large part of the United States of America, forcing women into different classes. The main character, Offred, is a handmaid and is therefore forced to have sexual intercourse with the head of the household, the Commander, at scheduled intervals, because the Commander’s wife is sterile. Offred lives a life of seclusion in her bedroom and often reminisces about life with her family before the days of the theocracy. Although her narrative in itself can be seen as an act of resistance, Offred does not actively participate in any resistance against the new government, and therefore provides an interesting case study of a person who has been coerced, partly by means of language, to play an important part in realising the theocracy’s aim to fight underpopulation.

Finally, Kazuo Ishiguro’s *Never Let Me Go* is a more recently published example of dystopian fiction. Detailing the lives of the students of Hailsham, whom the reader soon finds to be clones created as organ donors for the ‘normals,’ the novel is not set in the future as are the other novels, but in the recent past. Knowing that biological engineering has already developed the techniques necessary to realise Ishiguro’s dystopia, the fact that the novel is set in the near past adds to the chill the story inspires in its readers. Furthermore, although it is
clear that the students are being oppressed and coerced into donating their vital organs, the students appear to be strangely apathetic about their faith, and therefore there are few overt signs of coercion. The novel therefore makes for an excellent example of how language use can covertly influence individuals’ perceptions and coerce them into specific behaviour by use of subtle mechanisms such as linguistic taboos and euphemisms.

The first chapter of this thesis will provide examples of subtle language changes that influence both characters and readers of dystopian fiction, followed in the second chapter by a brief history of linguistic relativity within the field of sociolinguistics. Having discussed control of and through language at the level of society, the third chapter will explore the control of family structures through language as a means to control individuals. Armed with knowledge about how language may influence culture and thoughts, the last chapter will focus on the position of women in dystopian societies and how this is reflected and/or reinforced by the use of language in these societies.
Chapter One: Linguistic Taboos, Euphemisms, and Neologisms

Although control of and through language often takes a prominent place in dystopian fiction, this is not always the case. This chapter will show that even when control of language is not an obvious theme, subtle changes in language can still be found. These changes either affect the characters’ behaviour, the readers’ response to the situation described, or both. An example of such a change in language, which can be encountered in dystopian fiction, is the linguistic taboo: although a language might have a word or phrase to express a particular thought or emotion, this word or phrase is not used because it is regarded as inappropriate. In order to avoid using taboo words or phrases when discussing certain topics, speakers use circumlocution; this circumlocution is usually referred to as a ‘euphemism’ (Wardhaugh 237). In the context of dystopian literature, the breaking of a taboo can be viewed as a pursuit of freedom and individuality or even an act of rebellion against the totalitarian powers in place.

Besides linguistic taboos and euphemisms, neologisms are often found in dystopian fiction. These are new words that express existing or new ideas. This chapter will focus on these apparently minor changes in language and the effects they have on both the characters and the readers of dystopian fiction.

Huxley uses linguistic taboos to present his readers with a world of reversed morals. Behaviour that was deemed acceptable and even respectable by Huxley’s contemporaries is considered immoral and even disgusting and vice versa in A.F. 632. As Margaret Atwood explains in her introduction to Brave New World: ‘The word ‘mother’ – so thoroughly worshipped by the Victorians – has become a shocking obscenity; and indiscriminate sex, which was a shocking obscenity for the Victorians, is now de rigueur’ (xii). Huxley presents this reversed morality to his readers through the use of linguistic taboos and explicit use of what could well have been linguistic taboos in his time, a means to which I will refer as
‘reversed linguistic taboo.’ Apart from being tabooed, several words and phrases have gone extinct as there is apparently no longer any use for them in A.F. 632.

Most linguistic taboos in Brave New World are related to family and the notion of child-bearing. In the first chapter, readers are introduced to the standard means of reproduction in A.F. 632 and the neologisms that come with it. Embryos are ‘bottled’ and ‘decant’ after nine months. It is the Hatchery’s job to keep the population at the same level, guaranteeing a constant influx of babies of the right caste to be able to do particular jobs as adults. Henry Foster describes the Hatchery’s task as making up for unforeseen wastages: ‘If you knew the amount of overtime I had to put in after the last Japanese earthquake!’ (BNW 7). As this mass-manufacturing of human beings leaves traditional families quite obsolete, the notion of traditional families is not only unfamiliar, but rather obscene to the characters in Brave New World, as illustrated by the next passage of a boy trying to explain the notion of ‘parents’ when asked to by the Director:

‘And “parent”?’ questioned the DHC.

There was an uneasy silence. Several boys blushed. They had not yet learned to draw the significant but often very fine distinction between smut and pure science. One, at last, had the courage to raise a hand.
‘Human beings used to be…’ he hesitated; the blood rushed to his cheeks.
‘Well, they used to be viviparous.’
‘Quite right.’ The Director nodded approvingly.
‘And when the babies were decanted…’
‘“Born,”’ came the correction.
‘Well, then they were the parents – I mean, not the babies, of course, the other ones.’ The poor boy was overwhelmed with confusion. (19)
Throughout the novel, words related to child-bearing and parenthood appear as linguistic taboos. For example, ‘mother’ is often referred to as ‘that smutty word’ (30), ‘a dirty joke’ (50), or ‘the obscenity’ (131). The use of these words is avoided throughout the novel and when these words are used, it usually results in some distress among the characters. The savage makes Lenina look uncomfortable when he tells her Linda is his mother (BNW 101) and Lenina shudders at the thought of having a baby (BNW 103). Similarly, the nurse at the Park Lane Hospital for the Dying is shocked when the Savage reveals that Linda is his mother: ‘The nurse glanced at him with startled, horrified eyes; then quickly looked away. From throat to temple she was all one hot blush’ (BNW 175).

This hot blush might have appeared on the cheeks of Huxley’s contemporary readers when reading about those matters that are not considered controversial in the book and which are therefore not tabooed. Already in the first chapter, the readers are introduced to what a nurse at the Conditioning Centre refers to as ‘ordinary erotic play’ among children (BNW 26). This erotic play is referred to several times throughout the book, underlining that it is no taboo. However, the Director explains that there was a time when this erotic play was regarded as highly immoral:

He let out the amazing truth. For a very long period before the time of Our Ford, and even for some generations afterwards, erotic play between children had been regarded as abnormal (there was a roar of laughter); and not only abnormal, actually immoral (no!): and had therefore been rigorously suppressed. (27)
This passage clearly echoes Freud’s ideas of repression. Indeed, it is no coincidence that in the novel ‘Our Ford’ is also referred to as ‘Our Freud’ (BNW 33). According to Freud, human beings possessed sexual and aggressive drives or instincts that had to be repressed in order to protect civilisation (Billig 73). Freud believed that children are born with these drives and learn to repress them from an early age (De Berg 7-8). This repression without which there would be no social order, would, according to Freud, inevitably lead to unhappiness: ‘[i]f civilisation imposes such great sacrifices not only on man’s sexuality but on his aggressivity, we can understand better why it is hard for him to be happy in that civilisation’ (Freud qtd. in Billig 73). The Controllers, firmly believing that providing their subjects with constant happiness is the key to social stability (BNW 193-4), encourage both children and adults to act upon their sexual drives. According to Michael Billig, moral expectations that can lead to repression can be recognised in the conventions of polite conversation (72). Promiscuity is therefore no taboo in Brave New World and is even described as ‘the strictest conventionality’ (BNW 35). As the sexual drive is not repressed in everyday language, the characters do not attempt to repress their desire for promiscuous behaviour.

Similarly, whereas death is usually regarded as a tragic event and therefore often euphemised, this is not the case in 632 A.F. As the Director states: ‘Murder kills only the individual – and, after all, what is an individual?’ (128). Because the individual is regarded as unimportant, the individual’s death has become unimportant, and this is reflected in the language used to describe death. For example, the nurse at Park Lane Hospital for the Dying tells the Savage that one of the patients ‘[m]ight go off any minute now’ (176). The Nurse does not understand the Savage, who behaves ‘as though death were something terrible, as though anyone mattered as much as all that’ (181). Thus, the process of linguistic taboos is reversed in this case: matters that were tabooed in Huxley’s time are explicitly mentioned in order to emphasise their conventionality in 632 A.F.
Just as in *Brave New World*, several examples of linguistic taboos can be found in *The Handmaid’s Tale*. These linguistic taboos do not just indicate matters that are improper and should not be discussed, they also imply that certain matters should not be thought. For example, Offred describes how all songs that use words like ‘free’ are no longer sung in public, because ‘[t]hey are considered too dangerous’ (*HT* 64). That words are not just simply no longer used, but actually forbidden, becomes clear when Offred visits the doctor, who suggests that the Commander might be sterile:

I almost gasp: he’s said a forbidden word. *Sterile*. There is no such thing as a sterile man any more, not officially. There are only women who are fruitful and women who are barren, that’s the law. (*HT* 70-71, emphasis in original)

The word ‘sterile,’ then, especially when referring to a man, is not just a linguistic taboo because of a general idea that this matter should not be discussed, but because the rulers imposed it as a linguistic taboo, making it illegal to refer to men as sterile, possibly hoping to thereby exclude the possibility from the minds of the women altogether. Allowing the women to even consider the possibility of the men being sterile would of course threaten the Gileadean theocracy as this would make it impossible to justify the presence of handmaids in the household. Thus, linguistic taboos serve to minimise resistance against the theocratic ideology in Gilead.

Whereas linguistic taboos are quite obviously used in both *Brave New World* and *The Handmaid’s Tale*, they are more difficult to find in *Never Let Me Go*. The only obvious example of a linguistic taboo is the Gallery, as Kathy explains, ‘there was an unspoken rule that we should never even raise the subject in [the guardians’] presence’ (*NLMG* 31).
However, many words in the novel are replaced by neologisms, which indicate that there is a taboo to a certain extent. Anjaly Pandey points out that Ishiguro does not invent new words for the purpose of his narrative, as is often done by authors of dystopian fiction. Instead, Ishiguro instils existing words with new meanings, which are often opposite to their original meanings (385). These neologisms play an important part in influencing both the characters’ and the readers’ behaviour as the characters’ identity becomes clear. At the same time, neologisms offer a means for the characters to cope with their ominous fate as live organ donors.

The novel is written from the perspective of one of the donors, Kathy H., who is looking back at her youth at Hailsham school. Kathy’s word choice suggests that she expects her readers to be familiar with her situation, but it takes some time for the readers to catch up with the actual meanings of words such as ‘guardian,’ ‘carer,’ ‘donor,’ and ‘completing.’ These words, which usually have quite innocent meanings, are initially covering up a world in which human beings are cloned to function as a supply of vital organs, donating these organs while still alive, until final dying on the operating table. Pandey refers to Ishiguro’s use of these euphemistic words as creating ‘cloned copies of words from originals’ causing an effect of alienation (Pandey 384). This alienation does not only apply to the readers and their gradual discovery of the less innocent meanings of Ishiguro’s neologisms, but it also applies to the donors themselves. Throughout the novel, they speak in euphemisms of what will happen to them in the future and there appears to be an understanding among them not to speak of their fate explicitly: ‘What she was talking about was, you know, about us. What’s going to happen to us one day. Donations and all that’ (NLMG 19). These euphemisms clearly help the characters cope with their fate, and might be implemented by the governing powers so as to prevent the donors from rising up and trying to find a way out. Indeed, scholars have expressed their wonder at the lack of protest from the donors. The lack of explicit language
might be a contributing factor to the donors’ attitude.

Being used to this euphemistic language, it is no wonder Kathy, Tommy, Chrissie, and Rodney are shocked when Ruth loses her temper and moves away from euphemisms in favour of dysphemisms (Pandey 390):

We all know it. We’re modelled from *trash*. Junkies, prostitutes, winos, tramps. Convicts, maybe, just so long as they aren’t psychos. That’s what we come from. […] What do you think she’d have said if we’d asked her? ‘Excuse me, but do you think your friend was ever a clone model?’ […] We know it, so we might as well just say it. If you want to look for possibles, if you want do it properly, then you look in the gutter. You look in rubbish bins. Look down the toilet, that’s where you’ll find where we all came from.

(*NLMG* 164)

Ruth’s outburst is the first and only time that the reader’s suspicions about cloning are confirmed. This outburst is therefore just as shocking to the readers as to the characters, as the unwritten rule is suddenly broken and the characters are confronted with the horrible truth. Moreover, in her outburst, Ruth does not just use orthophemisms, describing things as they are, she descends into dysphemisms, using derogatory terms to replace the original (neutral) term.

Something else that might be contributing to the characters’ passiveness is the attitude of the other human beings in the novel, to which the donors refer as ‘normals.’ At a young age, the characters discover that their guardians and other normals appear to be afraid of them. Only near the end of the novel it becomes clear that most normals do not consider the donors to be human in the sense that they themselves are human. As Miss Emily explains, ‘We took
away your art because we thought it would reveal your souls. Or to put it more finely, we did it to prove you *had souls at all*’ *(NLMG 255, emphasis in original)*. For the normals then, euphemisms are not enough for them to be able to cope with their own cruelty towards the donors. The normals have to rely on a notion of being superior, more human than the donors, in order to justify their behaviour towards them. Earl G. Ingersoll views the donors’ passive acceptance of their fate as a chance for the donors to prove their humanity:

Ishiguro’s students seem intent on *serving with distinction*, much as millions have gone to their deaths with quiet resignation because they believed that if death is inevitable they could certify the value of their lives by dying with dignity and thereby demonstrating their superiority to other animals. When the possibility of survival is denied, the next best hope often lies in avoiding the futile attempt to survive at the cost of one’s humanity. *(53, emphasis in original)*

Ingersoll points out that this behaviour reflects humankind’s everyday behaviour towards the inevitability of death ‘which we know, yet ignore’ *(Ingersoll 55)*, referring to historical examples in which human beings calmly faced a certain death. In this light, the donors’ behaviour is just what we would expect from a fellow human being, and therefore it disproves the normals’ ideas that they are ‘just clones.’

The neologisms have a different effect on the reader than on the donors. As the truth slowly begins to dawn, Ishiguro’s neologisms ironically hold both their original meaning and their new, opposite meaning at once, emphasising rather than euphemising the cruelty of cloning human beings for the sole purpose of organ harvesting and thereby shocking the readers. However, whereas this euphemising language is new to the readers, and therefore only serves to emphasise that which euphemisms usually cover up, it is the language the characters have been hearing and using all their life and as such it has a different effect on
their behaviour. It seems as though a strategic use of language has managed to convince the donors that it is their duty to donate their organs, no questions asked. However, the normals cannot be sufficiently convinced by clever use of language and therefore convince themselves the donors are not human and that the normals are therefore justified in taking the donors’ organs.

A similar situation is described in *Native Tongue*. According to Teresa Lynn Wells, the non-linguist characters in this novel view themselves as superior to the linguists, and they manage to justify this for themselves through a governing metaphor: ‘We are Human; others are animals’ (Wells 63). As the main character in *The Handmaid’s Tale* observes, it is easier to treat others badly, when they are not considered fellow human beings: ‘I’ll take care of it, Luke said. And because he said *it* instead of *her*, I knew he meant *kill*. That is what you have to do before you kill, I thought. You have to create an it, where none was before’ (*HT* 202, emphasis in original). In *Native Tongue* the linguists are regarded as animals, and this can be seen in the way other characters refer to the linguists. As Wells points out, the linguists are referred to as ‘Lingoes,’ their children as ‘cubs,’ their wives as ‘bitches,’ and their homes as ‘dens,’ invoking the image of wild dogs, even more so because Lingo rhymes with ‘dingo’ (Wells 64). The women are even said to ‘whelp’ rather than ‘give birth’ (*NT* 53). Furthermore, the other characters in the book de-emphasise the linguists’ humanity by claiming that they lack higher emotions and morality (Wells 73-74). For example, the non-linguists justify the kidnapping of a linguist baby by claiming that linguists do not care about their children, except for the languages they add to the family: ‘You Lingoes, you don’t have any feeling for your kids, you breed them like flyers come off assembly lines, they’re just products to you’ (*NT* 92).

Language, then, is deliberately changed in dystopian fiction in order to influence the perceptions of both the characters and the readers. Examples of linguistic taboos, neologisms
and/or euphemisms could be found in all four novels. As these examples of changes in language are still present in current day society, this is perhaps not a surprising discovery, but it does show the authors’ awareness of the influence of language in society. The next chapter will take the notion of the influence of language some further, discussing the idea that language is of great influence on the way its speakers perceive reality and perhaps even determines the way they think, known as linguistic relativity.
Chapter Two: Linguistic Relativity

‘We cease to think if we do not want to do it under linguistic constraints.’

– Friedrich Nietzsche (1881)$^1$

The first chapter has already shown that language is a popular means by which the totalitarian powers in dystopian fiction manage to reach their goal of suppressing individuality and maintaining the status quo. In the iconic dystopian novel Nineteen Eighty-Four, George Orwell provides probably the best-known example of control of language and by language in dystopian fiction to this day. In the novel, the Ministry of Truth, which is mostly concerned with ideological propaganda, strives to create a language that is meant to eliminate all subversive thought. Ministry employee Syme explains:

Don’t you see that the whole aim of Newspeak is to narrow the range of thought? In the end we shall make thoughtcrime literally impossible, because there will be no words in which to express it. Every concept that can ever be needed will be expressed by exactly one word, with its meaning rigidly defined and all its subsidiary meanings rubbed out and forgotten.

(Orwell 55)

The idea of language determining thought is a popular one in dystopian fiction, but more than just a novelist’s gloomy fantasy. The relations between language and thought, and language and culture, have been an important point of debate in linguistics ever since Benjamin Lee Whorf claimed that there was a deterministic relationship between language and culture

$^1$ Translation by Ronald Wardhaugh. As Wardhaugh points out, this phrase is often mistranslated into ‘we have to cease to think if we refuse to do so in the prison-house of language,’ echoing Benjamin Lee Whorf’s theory that there is a deterministic relationship between language and thought (Wardhaugh 147).
(Wardhaugh 220). Whorf’s theory, usually referred to as linguistic relativity, but also known as the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis, will form the basis for this chapter. I will first discuss the notion of linguistic relativity and its implications for linguistics. I will then show how linguistic relativity plays a role in dystopian fiction.

Although the idea of linguistic relativity is usually associated with Edward Sapir and Benjamin Lee Whorf, the notion can be traced to Wilhelm von Humboldt in the nineteenth century (Wardhaugh 220). The linguist Wilhelm von Humboldt (1767-1835) was mainly interested in classical languages until an encounter with the Basque people in 1799 led him to realise that not all language structures are similar to Latin, as he had previously believed. Von Humboldt moved to the Vatican and there studied descriptions of South-American languages that were brought back by Jesuit missionaries, discovering even more different types of language structures. His studies led him to assert that ‘the difference [between languages] is not only of sound and sign, but a difference of world-view itself’ (Von Humboldt 20, my own translation; original text provided in the appendix). Not only did Von Humboldt claim that differences in languages reflect differences in thought, he also argued that these different languages influence the thoughts of their speakers:

That languages with no, or imperfect grammatical structures obstruct the intellectual flow instead of easing it, originates, as I hope to have shown, in the nature of thought and speech. (Von Humboldt 62, my own translation; original text provided in the appendix)

However, Von Humboldt never claimed that language constrains thought entirely, acknowledging that in principle, it is possible to express any thought in any language (Deutscher 136).

During a joint meeting of the Linguistic Society of America and the American Anthropological Association in 1928, the linguist Edward Sapir stressed the importance of
linguistics for other sciences such as anthropology, cultural history, sociology, and psychology, defending the position of linguistics as a science (Sapir 209). In Sapir’s opinion, linguistics plays a key role in studying culture, because ‘the network of cultural patterns of civilisation is indexed in the language which expresses that civilisation’ (209). Language, according to Sapir, functions as a ‘guide to social reality’ because language strongly conditions the way human beings think about social problems and processes (209):

Human beings do not live in the objective world alone, nor alone in the world of social activity as ordinarily understood, but are very much at the mercy of the particular language which has become the medium of expression for their society. It is quite an illusion to imagine that one adjusts to reality essentially without the use of language […]. The fact of the matter is that the ‘real world’ is to a large extent unconsciously built up on the language habits of the group. […] We see and hear and otherwise experience very largely as we do because the language habits of our community predispose certain choices of interpretation. (Sapir 209-210)

Sapir’s ideas about language being responsible for differences in world-views between cultures, echo Von Humboldt’s views. Sapir believed the studies of language and culture were intricately related and that these two aspects could not be studied on their own. However, although Sapir stressed the important link between language and culture, like Von Humboldt he did not argue that language determines the way humankind thinks, allowing for the possibility to express any thought in any language (Deutscher 140).

It was Edward Sapir’s student, Benjamin Lee Whorf, who took these ideas of languages carrying a predisposition to certain views further, claiming that the relationship
between language and culture was a deterministic one (Wardhaugh 220). Benjamin Lee Whorf was a chemical engineer rather than a linguist by training (Wardhaugh 220), but he became increasingly interested in the Hopi language and he claimed to have discovered that ‘the Hopi language is seen to contain no words, grammatical forms, constructions, or expressions that refer directly to what we call “time,”’ (Whorf 58). This observation led Whorf to believe that a Hopi ‘has no general notion or intuition of time as a smooth flowing continuum in which everything in the universe proceeds at an equal rate’ (Whorf 57). Whorf asserted that human thought is unconsciously influenced by language and that language constrains human thinking. Some thoughts would thus be unthinkable in particular languages:

[T]hinking is most mysterious, and by far the greatest light upon it that we have is thrown by the study of language. This shows that the forms of a person’s thought are controlled by inexorable laws of pattern of which he is unconscious. These patterns are the unperceived intricate systematizations of his own language – shown readily enough by a candid comparison and contrast with other languages, especially those of a different linguistic family. His thinking itself is in a language – in English, in Sanskrit, in Chinese. And every language is a vast pattern-system, different from others, in which are culturally ordained the forms and categories by which the personality not only communicates, but also analyses nature, notices or neglects types of relationships and phenomena, channels his reasoning, and builds the house of his consciousness. (Whorf 252)

Whorf was the first scholar to express the view that the structure of a language determines its speakers’ world-view: ‘We are thus introduced to a new principle of relativity, which holds that all observers are not led by the same physical evidence to the same picture of the universe, unless their linguistic backgrounds are similar, or can in some way be calibrated’
(Whorf 214). The notion of linguistic relativity has been a point of debate in linguistics ever since and Whorf’s strong claims about the deterministic relationship between language and culture have now been widely discredited (Deutscher 131; Wardhaugh 225; Pinker 57). The still popular ‘weaker’ form of the hypothesis acknowledges differences in semantic and syntactic constraints between languages and states that these constraints lead to a difference in the difficulty or probability of saying the same thing in another language (Wells 15-18). The opposite claim, namely that human culture is reflected in their use of language, has also been made. This implies that culture can influence the way language is used and perhaps even determine some aspects of language (Wardhaugh 220).

Linguists such as John A. Lucy have tried to test notions of linguistic relativity and have found that evidence for linguistic relativity does exist (see for example Language Diversity and Thought: A Reformulation of the Linguistic Relativity Hypothesis (1992)). As recent as 2005, Lucy concluded that

> Just as language universally mediates culture and mind, […] so too it appears to play a role in producing cultural and mental diversity. […] Only by acceptance of the conventions of one or more particular languages can we speak at all and so gain the advantages of having language support for sophisticated cultural and psychological activities. But this same acceptance of a particular language commits us to the specific conventions of that language and to their consequences for our thinking. […]

Comparative work on language diversity is essential in all the human sciences. The reasons for this should now be clear. If the natural process is to think in accordance with our own language, then what we take as neutral reality may in fact be a projection of the emphases of our own language.

(Lucy 60-61)
Lucy acknowledges that it is easier to describe certain concepts in some languages than in others, and that this might influence the expression of those concepts, and thus he appears to believe in a weaker version of Whorf’s theory. Other linguists, most notably Steven Pinker, have completely refuted the theory. Pinker points out that it is sometimes hard to find words to express what is meant, which indicates that ‘what is meant’ is different from that which is expressed through language, showing that it is possible to have thoughts that cannot be expressed in the native language. Furthermore, he argues that it would be impossible to coin new words if it was impossible to think of concepts for which a word is not yet invented (Pinker 57-8). According to Wardhaugh, ‘[t]he most valid conclusion concerning the Whorfian hypothesis is that it is still unproved’ (226). As the debate continues among linguists, psychologists, and neuroscientists, authors of dystopian fiction have picked up on the ominous implications of language as a means of controlling the mind, incorporating this use of language in their novels.

If language were to determine thought as suggested by Whorf, absence of certain concepts in a language would mean the absence of these concepts from the mind. This can be seen in *Brave New World*, in which the Controller uses words that are unknown to most people in 632 A.F.: ‘home’ (30), ‘monogamy and romance’ (34), ‘Christianity,’ ‘liberalism,’ ‘parliament’ (39), ‘democracy’ (40), ‘Shakespeare’ (44), ‘heaven,’ ‘soul,’ and ‘immortality’ (49). The absence of these words have an effect on the thoughts of the speakers of the language, as the notions expressed by these words do not even occur to them. As Huxley points out in his 1946 foreword to *Brave New World*:

> Great is the truth, but still greater, from a practical point of view is silence about truth. By simply not mentioning certain subjects, by lowering what Mr Churchill calls an ‘iron curtain’ between the masses and such facts or
arguments as the local political bosses regard as undesirable, totalitarian propagandists have influenced opinion much more effectively than they could have done by the most eloquent denunciations, the most compelling of logical rebuttals. (xlviii)

Clearly, Huxley contemplated how language can be used to influence thought and behaviour, although it is unlikely that he was aware of Whorf’s theory. The totalitarian powers in *Brave New World* have conditioned their subjects to behave exactly as desired. By clever use of language, creating taboos and speaking openly about what is considered ‘conventional behaviour,’ the subjects are constantly reminded of their conditioning and the thought of straying from this conventional behaviour occurs only to those who are involved in the conditioning process and therefore gain an insight into the origins of popular opinion. Furthermore, only the Savage, having been exposed to different ideas and different languages, in the form of both Zuñi and Shakespearean English, is capable of having a world-view completely different from the other characters.

In *The Handmaid’s Tale*, language also proves to be an important tool to oppress individuality and maintain the status quo. Hilde Staels argues that the use of language in *The Handmaid’s Tale* has much in common with Orwell’s Newspeak, stating that ‘Gilead’s Newspeak makes all other modes of thought impossible’ (457). According to Staels, the Gileadean government achieves this control by excluding ambiguity of meaning. The government uses ‘universal truths, maxims or slogans’ to indoctrinate citizens (457). As Staels points out, ‘The rulers have the power over the use and abuse of language whereas lesser human beings are granted the freedom neither to see nor to speak personally, in their own name. […] It is part of Gilead’s double-think to disguise as privilege people’s mindless, wordless condition’ (457). This abuse of ‘the word’ is pointed out by Offred herself when she
recalls hearing the Beatitudes in the Red Centre: ‘[…] Blessed are the silent. I knew they made that up, I knew it was wrong, and they left things out too, but there was no way of checking’ (HT 100). In spite of knowing that she is being manipulated, Offred acknowledges that she has indeed been indoctrinated to some extent. She is repelled by the short skirts of the Japanese tourists she sees on the streets: ‘They seem undressed. It has taken so little time to change our minds, about things like this’ (HT 38).

Not only are their linguistic taboos that cannot be broken without risking some form of punishment as pointed out in the previous chapter, the handmaids’ speech is also bound to strict rules. The handmaids travel in pairs to do groceries, and greet each other with a standard greeting. Their conversation mainly deals with the weather and Gilead’s fight against the rebels, to which Offred responds with either ‘Praise be’ or ‘Which I receive with joy’ (HT 29). This highly scripted form of conversation deprives the women of any personal talk, and thereby encourages the women to not think of themselves as individuals. Those in power further discourage this sense of individuality by referring to the women as natural resources (HT 75, 93). As Offred points out: ‘My self is a thing I must now compose, as one composes a speech. What I must present is a made thing, not something born’ (HT 76).

The names of the handmaids emphasise their supposed lack of self, as they are named after the Commander and thus referred to as his property. Offred explains that Offred is not her real name, but that her own name is now forbidden: ‘I keep the knowledge of the name like something hidden, some treasure I’ll come back to dig up, one day. I think of this name as buried’ (HT 94). Indeed, Offred has buried her name in her narrative. The treasure hunters among the readers will find it at the end of the first chapter, where Offred reveals the names of several handmaids. All handmaids are accounted for in the following narrative, except for June. Offred, then, must be June. The idea of protecting your ‘true name’ is often encountered in folktales. As Maria M. Tatar points out, ‘[k]nowing the name of your antagonist represents
a form of control […]. Since names are a vital part of personal identity, revealing your name can be dangerous’ (260). In the same ingenious way she provides us with her name, Offred defies the oppression of her individuality by narrating her story.

The narration is an act of rebellion in itself, but Offred does more than simply tell her story. She plays with the language. Whereas the theocratic government tries to prevent any ambiguity in meaning, Offred relishes ambiguity, carefully analysing the meaning of words:

I sit in the chair and think about the word chair. It can also mean the leader of a meeting. It can also mean a mode of execution. It is the first syllable in charity. It is the French word for flesh. None of these facts has any connection with the others. (HT 120)

Offred holds on to words she associates with the past, considering the meaning of the words ‘undone’ (HT 35) and ‘humungous’ (HT 37). As she is lying on her bed, Offred contemplates the difference between ‘lie’ and ‘lay’ and appears to be able to claim a sense of agency through this (HT 47). Playing with language and defying the laws concerning language thus reminds her of her identity as an individual unwilling to conform to the new world, as she states: ‘I intend to get out of here’ (HT 144).

Playing Scrabble with the Commander offers Offred another chance to play with words. According to Joseph Andriano, playing Scrabble is what Offred does throughout the novel: ‘Gilead spells outs its text; June crosses it.’ One way she does this is by remembering Aunt Lydia’s teachings and by undercutting these; she ‘crosses’ Aunt Lydia’s prayer with her own text (HT 204-205). Andriano argues that by actually playing Scrabble, Offred has the chance to be a person again, rather than just a ‘two-legged womb’ (HT 146). Playing Scrabble is an act of transgression because reading and writing is strictly forbidden for women in
Mario Klarer argues that the oral culture that results from the women’s forced illiteracy does not allow the women to place the present in relation to the past, resulting in ‘a sense that one lives in permanent present time.’ Atwood argues that literacy and its ability to aid historical thinking is an important factor in establishing democracy:

It could be well argued that the advent of the printed word coincided with the advent of democracy as we know it; that the book is the only form that allows the reader not only to participate but to review, to re-view what's being presented. With a book, you can turn back the pages. You can't do that with a television set. Can democracy function at all without a literate public, one with a moral sense and well-developed critical faculties? (Atwood qtd. in Klarer)

Klarer appears to agree with Atwood, claiming that the ban on reading and writing that is in place for women in Gilead provides the dominant men with ‘all the advantages of a highly developed text-processing culture,’ which can be used against ‘the women who are condemned to orality.’ Offred can be seen to be trying to hold on to her capability of comparing the present to the past by considering the ways she used to use language: ‘What are you waiting for? they used to say. That meant Hurry up’ (HT 303).

Klares shows that literacy is not only useful for thinking about the past, but can also help anticipating the future. Writing then becomes a means to create new meanings, as the Commander and Offred do while playing Scrabble and spelling non-words (HT 220). Those in power also use their ability to create new words and meanings in order to influence society’s thoughts, neologisms such as ‘unwomen’ (HT 20) and ‘unbaby’ (HT 122). The oppressors’ methods appear to be successful enough to prevent any major uprisings among
the oppressed women, although it does not manage to completely eradicate subversive thinking. It is not clear whether this is because the influence of language on thought is not that strong, or because the women in the novel can still remember being free individuals.

What is interesting about Elgin’s novel, is that it does not only show language as a tool for a totalitarian power to maintain its power and exercise control over its subjects, it also presents language as a tool for those who are oppressed to break free from their oppression (Anderson 92). In Douglas R. Hofstadter’s *Gödel, Escher, Bach*, Elgin read an analogy to Gödel’s theorem, which states that ‘any formal system within which a certain amount of elementary arithmetic can be expressed and some basic rules of arithmetic can be proved […], if consistent, is incomplete, and the consistency of the system cannot be proved within the system itself’ (Smith 3). The analogy paraphrases Gödel’s theorem as follows:

If any record player - say Record Player X - is sufficiently high-fidelity, then when it attempts to play the song ‘I Cannot Be Played on Record Player X,’ it will create just those vibrations which will cause it to break …

So it fails to be Perfect. And yet, the only way to get around that trickery, namely for Record Player X to be of lower fidelity, even more directly ensures that it is not Perfect. It seems that every record player is vulnerable to one or the other of these frailties, and hence all record players are defective. (Hofstadter 77)

In a similar vein, Elgin proposed that ‘for any language there are certain perceptions that it cannot express because they would result in its self-destruction’ (Elgin 177, emphasis in the original), hypothesising that contemporary English is unable to express women’s perceptions, and that if it would become able to express these perceptions, it cease to be English. From this, Elgin deduced that if you were to introduce a language that could express these
perceptions into American culture, American culture would cease to be (Elgin 177-178). Elgin chose to work out her hypothesis in a science fiction novel, realising that this would allow her to reach a wider audience than she would be able to reach through a scholarly article (Elgin 180). In her article ‘A Woman-Made Language,’ Karen Bruce presents the hypotheses that are being tested in the novel. Firstly the weak form of the relativity hypothesis, which states that language influences thought. Secondly that following Gödel’s theorem, any new perceptions introduced into a language would cause its destruction and any new language introduced into a culture would cause that culture’s destruction, and thirdly that change in language leads to social change.

Elgin provides the readers of her novel with ample examples of the idea that introducing a language that carries new perceptions into a culture, will lead to this culture’s self-destruction. The novel even claims that if these other perceptions are truly ‘alien’ and not ‘humanoid,’ not only will they destroy human culture, but they will destroy human beings themselves: ‘[…] no human mind can view the universe as it is perceived by a non-humanoid extra-terrestrial and not self-destruct’ (NT 66). In the novel, Elgin is testing her theory under extreme conditions. By creating humanoid and non-humanoid aliens, she shows that indeed, new perceptions and new languages can be introduced into a culture, although this might slightly alter that culture. Admittedly, the linguists, who are mostly exposed to these humanoid alien languages, have developed a subculture, a way of living quite different from the way other human beings in the book live. However, no human being, whether a linguist or not, is able to be exposed to non-humanoid perceptions without self-destructing, illustrating an extreme version of Elgin’s theory.

Elgin’s third hypothesis is illustrated by the creation in the novel of a women’s language, providing the women with a means to express that which is inexpressible in Panglish. That the introduction of this new language would lead to social change follows
directly from Elgin’s application of Gödel’s theorem to language: as culture would self-destruct due to the introduction of a new language, social change is brought about. I will come back to the role of Laádan in bringing about social change in the fourth chapter, in which I will specifically deal with language and gender. In relation to linguistic relativity, Elgin shows her support for the ‘weaker’ form of this theory, arguing that languages ‘constrain and structure human perceptions’ (Elgin qtd. in Wells 16) and using her novel as a setting to test various hypotheses based on the idea that language influences thought and vice versa. In her novel she shows a believe that humankind is not confined by linguistic relativity: everyone is able to perceive matters differently from what they are inclined to due to the constraints of language. However, it is unlikely that perceptual patterns will change, unless a different manner of perceiving matters is explicitly shown to them (Wells 134).

As shown in this chapter, linguistic relativity is a prevalent theme in dystopian fiction and it is by no means necessary to create an entire new language to influence thought and behaviour. It seems as though the idea that language influences the thoughts of its speakers is generally accepted among these authors and their audience, and is not just a popular point of debate for linguists. While some of the authors, like Elgin, are clearly aware of the notion of linguistic relativity, it is very unlikely that Huxley had heard of it when writing *Brave New World*. Nevertheless, language still proofs an important tool for the World Controllers to manipulate citizens to think and behave in certain ways, showing that Huxley acknowledged the power of language in controlling human behaviour and thought in spite of his unfamiliarity with Whorf’s works at the time. In the next chapter, the notion of linguistic relativity is explored in relation to gender in particular, focusing on the influence of language on notions of gender identity.
Chapter Three: Controlling the Family

The previous chapters have already shown the important role of language in dystopian societies. This chapter will focus on the use of language in the micro-society of the family. Jeanie Griffin has researched the way family dynamics are manipulated by totalitarian regimes in dystopian fiction, arguing that individuals’ primary allegiance is not to the state, but to their family. In order for society to remain stable, both families and society should have the same goals. If these goals are not the same, the family can become a threat to the totalitarian regime and this is why in dystopian fiction those in power often seek to control the family unit in an effort to control the individual members of these units (Griffin 2-3). In this chapter the emphasis will lie on language as an instrument to control families.

Griffin distinguishes three ways in which the family unit can be manipulated. Some regimes hold on to the traditional idea of the nuclear family and use the idea of the nuclear family to stimulate loyalty and cooperation, while other regimes invent new family structures that meet the demands of the society in which they are created, allowing society as a whole to benefit from these alternative family structures. The last method involves the destruction of the family unit, annihilating the notion of family altogether and thereby preventing individuals from acting in the interest of their family rather than the interest of society as a whole (Griffin 3). In none of the four novels to be discussed is the traditional nuclear family glorified or presented as an ideal. The novels therefore mainly provide examples of altered and obliterated family structures. However, traces of the traditional, nuclear family can be found in these novels, allowing for an exploration of how notions of traditional family structure are used to discourage the creation of a nuclear family and instead encourage alternative family units or even the destruction of the family unit. This chapter will first describe these notions of the traditional family unit as described in the novels, before exploring the alternatives of the traditional family as presented in these novels.
In *Brave New World*, the nuclear family and even natural reproduction and parenthood no longer exist. Mary E. Theis rightly argues that in the World State, ‘the very idea of motherhood is considered an obscenity […] and sexual exclusivity, which often leads to motherhood, is considered anti-social and immoral’ (Theis 34). The feelings of the citizens of the World State towards the traditional family are reflected in their use of language and their response to words related to the traditional family, as already described in some detail in the first chapter of this thesis. Words such as ‘mother’ and ‘father’ have become linguistic taboos in the World State and, where necessary, have been replaced by neologisms such as ‘decant.’ Indeed, in the World State, the tabooed notion of motherhood has become obscene – ‘mother’ being described as a ‘smutty word’ (*BNW* 30) – and the idea of fatherhood is reduced to a dirty joke:

The word (for ‘father’ was not so much obscene as–with its connotation of something at one remove from the loathsomeness and moral obliquity of child-bearing–merely gross, a scatological rather than a pornographic impropriety); the comically smutty word relieved what had become a quite intolerable tension. (*BNW* 131-2)

This passage illustrates that it is mostly the idea of childbirth that is upsetting to the inhabitants of the World State. This does not mean that the idea of conceiving a child is not considered disturbing at all. The characters’ response to the word ‘father’ shows that the act of conceiving a child is also a controversial topic in the World State, although perhaps not quite as shocking as actually giving birth. This is also illustrated by the presence of abortion centres; apparently, the Savage is not the only child to have been conceived by World State citizens. However, he appears to be the only one that was actually born, and thus, together with his mother, is the closest thing to a nuclear family to be found in the World State.
In *The Handmaid’s Tale*, Offred is torn away from her own traditional family unit in order to become part of an alternative family structure. Throughout the narrative, she often remembers her own family and she admits that it is the remaining hope for their survival that keeps her alive (*HT* 116). According to Fiona Tolan, Offred ‘craves these glimpses of normality as others crave the perfect utopian society’ (146). The traditional, nuclear family is still valued in Gilead, however, only those who are worthy can have a family of their own and play a traditional part in this family. Traditional families still exist, consisting of a husband, an ‘econowife,’ and children. However, the women who have not been found worthy of becoming someone’s wife, but who can still be of use to society, become part of alternative family structures. In some cases, like Offred’s, this means leaving their own nuclear family behind.

Although not central to the stories, the nuclear family unit is still the standard for most people in *Native Tongue* and *Never Let Me Go*. The non-linguists in *Native Tongue* live in traditional, nuclear families, but the story focuses on the linguists, who did not feel safe living in the small unit of the traditional family and now live in large commune-like family structures. Great-grandfather Verdi describes how the linguists used to live in nuclear family units:

[… ] when I was a child, we linguists lived in proper houses like anybody else, and we had our own family tables. None of these great roomfuls of people like eating in a cafeteria and everybody all jumbled in together like hogs at a through… (*NT* 75-7)

These traditional family units are broken op during the Anti-Linguist Riots of 2130, which great-grandfather Verdi can still remember:
That was when the families had made the shift from living in individual homes like everyone else and had set up the communal Households, where there would be security in numbers. (*NT* 81)

These passages show that it is only out of necessity that the linguists form alternative family structures. The other people, still living in traditional family units, feel that they take better care of their families than the linguists, as Smith tells Thomas Chornyak: ‘JEezus, you talk about your kids like they were stocks and bonds, or the effing *corn* crop… you don’t care about them’ (*NT* 92, emphasis in the original). However, Thomas feels that it is because of the linguist’s children that the other children can live normal lives in traditional families:

There would not be enough money to provide all *your* children with the good life, Smith, if ever we uncaring linguists decided that our children should know that good life, too. You *love* your children, you see, on the weary backs of ours. (94-5)

The clones in Ishiguro’s *Never Let Me Go* have no family. As clones they have no parents and they cannot start a family of their own because they are sterile. Ishiguro does not offer his readers a chance to view the lives of the normals, neither are families and family relationships ever mentioned at Hailsham. However, miss Emily points towards the family unit as the main reason for the clones’ existence: ‘However uncomfortable people were about your existence, their overwhelming concern was that their own children, spouses, their parents, their friends, did not die from cancer, motor neurone disease, heart disease’ (*NLMG* 258). Apparently, the traditional, nuclear family is still going strong, so strong that the normal do not hesitate to sacrifice the lives of the clones to save the lives of their family.

As mentioned above, totalitarian regimes often try to manipulate the family structure so that the goal of the family becomes similar to that of the regime. These alternative family
structures help the regime to control society according to their ideology. This becomes clear when taking a closer look at family structure in *The Handmaid’s Tale*. In the novel, Offred describes her third ‘family,’ which is built around the traditional core of the husband and wife. Apart from a handmaid, Offred, there are also two ‘Marthas’ in the family: the domestic servants Cora and Rita. Furthermore, there is a chauffeur: Nick. The theocratic government in *The Handmaid’s Tale* is looking to encourage procreation. It becomes clear when reading the novel that birth rates have dropped and many people have become sterile, causing a fall in the population. Because of the religious nature of the regime’s ideology, only procreation within families is allowed. In cases in which the wife appears to be sterile, the family is extended to include a handmaid, who can have a child on behalf of the wife. Women are not allowed to live alone and widows therefore become part of these extended families as Marthas, who take care of the household. They too live under the control of the husband, the Commander.

According to those in power, who are represented by the Aunts in the Red Centre, these new, alternative family structures provide the women with more safety and even more freedom than they used to have. As Aunt Lydia says: ‘There is more than one kind of freedom […] Freedom to and freedom from. In the days of anarchy, it was freedom to. Now you are being given freedom from. Don’t underrate it’ (*HT* 34). By saying this, Aunt Lydia refers to the two concepts of freedom as they were famously described by Isaiah Berlin in his inaugural lecture delivered before the University of Oxford in 1958. Berlin says about freedom that ‘[l]ike happiness and goodness, like nature and reality, the meaning of this term is so porous that there is little interpretation that it seems able to resist’ (121) and this is shown by Aunt Lydia’s use of the term. She is referring to the notions of negative and positive freedom, which Berlin defines as follows:

The first of these political senses of freedom or liberty […], which […] I shall call the ‘negative’ sense, is involved in the answer to the question ‘What is
the area within which the subject – a person or group of persons – is or should be left to do or be what he is able to do or be, without interference by other persons?’ The second, which I shall call the positive sense, is involved in the answer to the question ‘What, or who, is the source of control of interference that can determine someone to do, or be, this rather than that?’ (121-2)

Aunt Lydia seems to claim that the women of Gilead have ‘negative’ liberty rather than ‘positive’ liberty. However, throughout the novel, it is shown that the people of Gilead have no choice in what they can and cannot do: the women of Gilead are not allowed to read or write, they cannot choose their own clothing, let alone their own partners, or have their own jobs or possessions. Furthermore, Gilead knows no freedom of religion or speech. That which the handmaids are free from, according to Aunt Lydia, is the threat of sexual violence. As Tolan puts it,

Gileadean society successfully takes back the night from the pornographers and abusers. […] This […] causes a new liberty for the women who previously suffered rape or fear of sexual abuse. […] But the enjoyment is minimal because, in restricting the liberties of men, the women have not found liberation. (153)

According to Tolan, Aunt Lydia has a contradictory opinion of freedom when compared to Berlin’s two concepts of liberty. Aunt Lydia views ‘positive liberty’ or ‘freedom to’ as a freedom that results in hedonistic, immoral behaviour. Her notion of ‘negative liberty’ or ‘freedom from,’ which she promotes among the handmaids as an improvement of their security is what Berlin describes as liberalism, which is freedom from governmental interference. Ironically, it is governmental interference that provides the handmaids with their ‘freedom from’ sexual violence and abuse. Even family structure is controlled by those in
power, who decide which role each woman plays within the family and how they are expected to behave within this role. As Tolan points out, ‘the dystopia that occurs in the novel is largely an examination of questions of liberty: how to regulate the utopian impulse so that it does not, either intentionally or inadvertently, position others in an anti-utopia’ (145).

The power balance within the family is reflected in the use of language within the family. All women have the most conversational interaction with other women of an equal position. There is hardly any interaction between the sexes or between the different classes of women. For example, Offred is not included in the gossip and small talk of the Marthas, and the only conversations she is allowed to have, are those with her fellow handmaids, which are very limited in terms of topics that are deemed appropriate for discussion. By regulating the family and interaction within the family, the behaviour of individuals within society is also regulated. It is less likely for the oppressed majority to stand up against the theocratic regime when they cannot communicate their discontent to each other. By not only changing the structure of the family, but also dictating how family members communicate, the theocratic regime can rest assured that society will continue to function according to their ideology.

*Native Tongue* is different from *The Handmaid’s Tale*, because the family structure has not changed due to manipulation by those in power, but in response to society. The interesting thing about this change in the family structure is that as a response to the threat from outside of the family, the family appears to become a small totalitarian society. According to psychologist and sociologist Erich Fromm, this is a natural response for those who feel oppressed:

For those who had little property and social prestige, the family was a source of individual prestige. There the individual could feel like ‘somebody.’ He was obeyed by wife and children, he was the centre of the stage, and he naïvely
accepted his role as his natural right. He might be a nobody in his social relations, but he was a king at home. (121)

Whereas the linguists have a negative reputation in society, the male linguists achieve a sense of power by turning their household into a small totalitarian state. Within their homes, they rule their wife and children, often in a cruel manner, and this allows them to maintain a sense of pride and self-esteem. In spite of this different reason for having an alternative family structure, there is a striking similarity between the two novels when it comes to the position of women within the family. The linguists, too, view women as mere vessels for producing children:

‘It isn’t the woman,’ Aaron said pleasantly, ‘who adds the Alien languages to the Household assets. It is the MAN. The man goes to the trouble of impregnating the woman […]. To attribute any credit to the women who plays the role of a receptacle is primitive romanticism, Kenneth, and entirely unscientific.’ (NT 11)

It is not difficult to see how this attitude towards women is similar to one described by Atwood. Therefore, when ‘menopause comes to bless’ the women, they are quickly banned to the Barren House, as this means they are no longer of use for the linguists (NT 32).

The Barren House is the place where the women are freed from the men’s presence and find themselves able to talk in private. It is in this safe haven that the women create Láadan. Apparently the men failed to recognise the danger of allowing the women to live unattended. In this, the Lines are different from Offred’s family, which is structured to keep the oppression of women going while trying to solve the problem of underpopulation. The linguists’ alternative family structure does not necessarily contribute to the government’s idea of society led by men, although the men of the Lines seem to support this notion. Arguably,
this new family structure even contributes to the women’s cause, as it provides them with an opportunity to create a secret language. This shows that individuals are more difficult to control if their position within the family is not controlled.

In an extreme effort to control individuals, the leaders of the World State in *Brave New World* have completely annihilated the family. Mary E. Theis points out that loss of maternal guidance is necessary for the dystopian totalitarian regime to achieve complete control of individuals: ‘to dramatize the extent of the state’s total control of an individual, his isolation and oppression are *invariably* associated with either the complete abolition of the maternal role as primary educator or with the complete regulation of family life that permits neither parent to educate their children’ (Theis 33-4, emphasis in original). Not only do the people of the World State live alone, refraining from any kind of long term relationship, as Mary E. Theis points out, the state takes on the role of a mother who makes sure her ‘children’ remain helpless and unable to exist without her (Theis 158). Through conditioning, all citizens are brought up with the same values and beliefs, ensuring their dependence of and loyalty to the state. Language plays an important role in conditioning the people of the World State to live alone and not engage in long term relationships. As children, the people are conditioned by means of hypnopaedia to believe that ‘every one belongs to everyone else’ (*BNW* 34). This hypnopaedic catchphrase appears several times throughout the novel and is often used by people to explain their actions or to motivate others to be more promiscuous. The conditioning is so effective that Lenina is absolutely horrified at the idea of marriage:

‘Listen, Lenina; in Malpais people get married.’
‘Get what?’ The irritation had begun to creep back into her voice. What was he talking about now?
‘For always. They make a promise to live together for always.’
‘What a horrible idea!’ Lenina was genuinely shocked. (*BNW* 167-8)
For Lenina the idea of getting married is completely new and goes against everything she has been conditioned to believe.

Although readers of *Brave New World* in the twenty-first century will be able to grasp the intended horror of complete annihilation of the family, to an audience that has had time to get used to the idea of divorce, single parent families, and same sex marriage, this idea might not be as shocking as it was to Huxley’s contemporary audience. When Huxley wrote his novel at the beginning of the twentieth century, family was still a symbol of stability and security, with a clear structure in which every family member had a specific role (Barrett and Kukhareva 23). In a response to the rigid Victorian notions of family, debates arose in the 1920s and 1930s concerning, among other matters, birth control and the role of women in the family, resulting in the family planning movement (Barrett and Khukhareva 24). Taking these historical facts into account, together with a rising interest in the notion of eugenics, it is likely that Huxley was writing in response to these developments. His vision is one of a world that has none of the securities offered by the traditional (Victorian) family, as both the notion of family planning and of eugenics have been taken too far, resulting in a world that must have been truly horrifying for the contemporary reader.

Mary E. Theis explains the importance of the annihilation of the family for maintaining stability, stating that ‘all human emotions and attachments, and thereby also the essence of the family,’ are regarded as a threat to social stability, as these might encourage people to suffer and to think, leading to political awareness (Theis 34). This is confirmed by Controller Mustapha Mond:

The world’s stable now. People are happy; they get what they want, and they never want what they can't get. […] they're plagued with no mothers or fathers; they've got no wives, or children, or lovers to feel strongly about;
they're so conditioned that they practically can't help behaving as they ought to behave. (*BNW* 193-4)

Mustapha Mond admits that the family has been annihilated deliberately to maintain social stability. Without this stability, the Controllers might not be able to keep people satisfied and it would be very difficult to maintain the status quo. Now that nobody has a reason to be unhappy, there is also no reason to overthrow those in power. Stability is insured and the Controllers can rest easy.

The clones in *Never Let Me Go* do not live in a family setting either. The institution they live in bears a strong resemblance to an orphanage. This resemblance is not very strange; after all, these children have no parents and are most likely test-tube babies. As pregnancy can threaten the health of the clones, it is undesirable for them to procreate. However, the clones are sterile and therefore there is no need for those in power to try to convince them of not having families as is the case in *Brave New World*. The students of Hailsham are not prevented from having relationships, however, they are aware that they are different from the normals and do not seem concerned with starting a family. They must know what families are, though, because Kathy often mentions reading books, among which Victorian novels (*NLMG* 113). Although it is likely that the students know what families are, families are never directly mentioned in the novel, and neither are the words ‘parents,’ ‘father,’ ‘mother,’ and other words that denote family members. It is possible that the guardians are deliberately avoiding these subjects. However, it is noteworthy that the students do not bring up these matters either. Family and related terms, then, appear to be linguistic taboos at Hailsham.

Kathy never once expresses a desire to become a mother herself, and neither do the other students. Although she does not admit to having thought about the possibility to have children herself, she does show that she has imagined the happiness of someone who initially
appears unable to have children, but who in the end has a baby (NLMG 70). She does this even though she realises that the song that inspires her to imagine this is about something else. This shows that she is interested in the idea of having a family, although she is not keen to admit it to herself or others. This interest in the idea of family can also be seen in the students’ obsession with their ‘possibles.’ Their curiosity for these people and their strong will to find them is natural, as these ‘possibles’ are the closest thing to family for the students. At the same time, they are wary to find these ‘possibles,’ afraid that they will find something they rather had not known. However, this is not different from an adopted child looking for his or her biological parents: these children too can experience curiosity and fear at the same time.

The four novels show that, as Jeany Griffin has already pointed out, dystopian fiction often shows altered family structures, or even the obliteration of the family altogether (Griffin 71). However, it is also shown that contrary to Griffin’s beliefs, the family structure is not always altered or obliterated to serve the totalitarian government’s purpose. Of the four novels, the family is deliberately altered by those in power in The Handmaid’s Tale and obliterated altogether in Brave New World. It is in these two novels that the governments use several means, among which language, in order to manipulate individuals to accept the alteration or obliteration of the family. In Never Let Me Go, it is unnecessary for the ruling powers to discourage the clones to start families, because the clones are unable to conceive children, quite probably due to sterilisation ordered by those same ruling powers. If there is a role for language, it is through linguistic taboo that clones are discouraged to have a family; there is no talk about family in their daily life. Although of the four novels, Native Tongue is the novel that most explicitly deals with language, language seems to have little to do with the family structure. The Lines have decided themselves to live in an alternative family unit, and there seems to be no need to ‘sell’ this type of family structure to those expected to live in it or to outsiders. In fact, outsiders mockingly refer to the linguists’ houses as dens and do not
seem to understand why the linguists live the way they do. Although it is in the linguists’ interest to be liked by the other people, and they make an effort to behave in an acceptable manner, they do not actively try to manipulate individuals into understanding linguists or sympathising with them. It seems, then, that the more a totalitarian government is interested in actively manipulating the family structure and influencing the way individuals live their lives, the more language is used in order to change the way people think about the family.
Chapter Four: Language and Gender

But it is still true that before a woman can write exactly as she wishes to write, she has many difficulties to face. To begin with, there is the technical difficulty – so simple, apparently; in reality, so baffling – that the very form of the sentence does not fit her. It is a sentence made by men; it is too loose, too heavy, too pompous for a woman’s use.

- Virginia Woolf, ‘Women in Fiction’ (1929)

Following the rise of feminism, sociolinguists have been increasingly concerned with the relation between gender and language. Central to sociolinguistic research is the question whether and how language influences the unequal power relationships between women and men. In this chapter I will use the term ‘gender’ to indicate an identity that is constructed from both social and cultural factors, as opposed to the term ‘sex,’ which indicates a distinction between men and women based on biological factors, namely the sexual organs (Pavlidou 412-3). This chapter will first give an account of important notions in feminist sociolinguistics, before exploring the relation between language and gender in dystopian fiction, focusing on language as a means of expressing views about gender, performing gender, and maintaining or challenging patriarchal society.

It is a popular notion in feminist sociolinguistics that the world has been ‘named’ from a male perspective. Following the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis, some feminists believe these sexist features of language to be more than just a reflection of social reality. They believe that sexist language reinforces and reproduces a reality of male dominance (Cameron, ‘Naming’ 150). The notion of sexist language has led some feminists to attempt to make language gender-inclusive. The idea is that linguistic change will raise awareness about linguistic representations and may lead to more accurate representations of both women and other
groups that are being discriminated against (Litosseliti 19). Some feminists have even expressed the desire for a women’s language that is able to express a world-view from a female perspective. However, linguists have objected against the idea of a women’s language, declaring it utopian; although language does indeed change over time, they see no possibility to reinvent language from scratch (Cameron, Feminist Critique 9). Furthermore, it is important to realise that ‘[t]hough it certainly serves the interests of a particular group (men), sexism is not so much the ideology of an organised interest group as it is our default way of thinking and talking’ (Cameron, Feminist Critique 89).

Differences between the linguistic behaviour of men and women have been studied from several frameworks. Firstly, the ‘deficit model’ suggests that women’s use of language is deficient when compared to that of men. Differences in interaction have also been viewed as a product of the unequal power relationships between men and women in the ‘dominance framework’; men and women develop their conversational style according to their position in society, the men holding a dominant position and the women being viewed as a subordinate group. Finally, the ‘difference model’ acknowledges that there are differences between men and women, but it does not view women’s use of language as deficient compared to that of men. Rather, differences are attributed to segregation of the sexes during childhood and adolescence, when language and linguistic behaviour is acquired. It is argued that behavioural differences in these early stages of development cause differences in communication and possible difficulties in understanding between men and women (Pavlidou 418; Cameron, McAlinden, and O’Leary 50; Cameron, ‘Ketchup’ 82; Cameron, Feminist Critique 14-5).

Cameron points out that linguistic behaviour is not just dependent on gender, but that context is also very important. The presence of a woman might make other kinds of talk possible for men and vice versa, whereas it might also render particular types of talk impossible. However, no matter what the context is, linguistic behaviour usually serves as a
strategy to ‘perform’ gender and put the identity of the speaker as feminine or masculine on display (Cameron, ‘Performing’ 73-4). This ‘performative’ approach suggests that both men and women use language ‘in order to be, and be perceived as, gendered’ (Cameron, Feminist Critique 17).

Feminists have claimed that women are ‘silenced’ in society. This is most often done through prohibitions and taboos. Although it may seem as though no such restrictions to women’s speech apply in modern Western cultures, certain language is still regarded as unsuitable for women to either use or hear. According to Cameron, it is generally assumed that women should avoid obscene language and that men should avoid using obscene language in the presence of women. Furthermore, in some religions it is still forbidden for women to lead the liturgy, whereas other career choices, for example that of public orator or stand-up comedian, can still be met with surprise and even loathing. In places where women are actively suppressed, literacy is discouraged among women as it is believed that literacy will provide them with access to subversive ideas, which might ultimately lead to rebellion. This is not just true for women, but can be seen as a reoccurring factor in the oppression of groups of people (Cameron, Feminist Critique 4-5).

Languages seem to affect perceptions of gender in several ways. It can serve to reaffirm existing stereotypes about gender and is seen by many feminists as an important means by which patriarchal society is upheld, as it is hard to imagine there being room for equality when sexism appears to be part of the main communication system. Furthermore, language is used by both men and women to reaffirm their gender: they use language in a way that is expected of them based on their sex and thereby reaffirm their status as either male or female. In the following paragraphs, the relation between language and gender in dystopian fiction will be explored, focusing on how language use can provide readers with clues about the relation between men and women in dystopian societies, but also on how language is
actively used to either protect or challenge (patriarchal) society.

In Huxley’s World State, women are not overtly oppressed by men. However, it would be optimistic to conclude that men and women are regarded as equal. The first sign of men being dominant in society comes from the employment of men and women. Although women do hold jobs, the men fill the top positions. For example, at the Central London Hatchery and Conditioning Centre, where most main characters are employed, the Director is a man, as are the ‘scientists,’ whereas all nurses are female. Furthermore, the Controller, one of the ten most powerful people in the World State, is also a man, and no female Controllers are mentioned. The only female with a leadership function is Miss Keats, who is the head mistress of Eton. However, Huxley perhaps only used Miss Keats to show just how twisted society has become in 632 A.F. with a woman acting as head mistress of a famous boys’ college and girls being enrolled as students along with the boys.

The dominance of men can also be seen in the language use of the main characters. Deborah Cameron has pointed out that ‘terms such as penetration, fuck, screw, [and] lay […] turn heterosexual sex into something men do to women’ (Ehrlich and King 165). The absence of terms expressing women’s experiences confirm the existence of a dominant male perspective in language. Although the characters of Brave New World are not as explicit as Cameron, they do discuss sexual intercourse. The men talk of ‘having girls’ (BNW 37) and ‘trying girls’ (BNW 39), much to the dismay of Bernard Marx: ‘‘Talking about her as though she were a bit of meat.” Bernard ground his teeth. “Have her here, have her there. Like mutton. Degrading her to so much mutton”’ (BNW 39). The women do not seem to feel degraded by this language, as Lenina tells Bernard: ‘That is, […] if you still want to have me’ (BNW 50). Although the term ‘to have’ as a euphemism for sexual intercourse is not exclusively used by men, there are far more instances in which the term is used by men than by women. As the characters’ sexual behaviour is conditioned from childhood by the ruling
powers, it is however not surprising that the women accept the men’s way of speaking about sex. Even today, sexist use of language prevails because of a lack of awareness among both men and women.

The main characters’ language use also shows an aspect of gender equality. When arguing that language is inherently sexist, feminists often point to the habit of referring to grown women as girls, whereas women do not usually refer to grown men as boys. In *Brave New World*, men and women constantly refer to each other as boys and girls and they are also referred to as boys and girls in the Community Singery’s song (*BNW* 73). Although feminists often argue that the use of the term girl for a grown woman is derogatory, in *Brave New World*, this no longer seems to be the case, as men are also commonly referred to as boys. As far as gender equality is concerned, then, the World State is not far removed from modern Western society: although there are still examples of inequality and sexist language, women are not actively oppressed or degraded by men.

At the opposite end of the spectrum we find *The Handmaid’s Tale*, in which women are deliberately oppressed by men. This oppression is partially achieved by linguistic means, some of which have been discussed in the previous chapters. Apart from only allowing the handmaids to speak among each other in scripted phrases and forbidding all women to read and write, naming is an important means by which male dominance is expressed in Gilead. According to Dale Spender, ‘[n]ew names […] have their origins in the perspective of those doing the naming rather than in the object or event that is being named’ (98). Like objects, the women in Gilead are labelled according to their function in society. Possible labels include ‘Martha,’ ‘Wife,’ ‘Handmaid,’ ‘Econowife,’ and ‘Unwoman.’ Furthermore, the handmaids are not allowed to keep their own name and are named after the Commander to which they are assigned by adding the suffix ‘of’ to the name of the Commander, resulting in names such as ‘Offred,’ ‘Ofwarren,’ and ‘Ofglen.’ The new names for the handmaids clearly suggest the
possessive nature of the relationship between the Commander and his handmaid: she is his property. Shocking as this change of names might seem, it is not all that different from the tradition of women taking their husband’s last name after having married him. This tradition has been of concern to many feminists and still is today, as the change of names used to mark a change of owner: the woman left her father’s possession to become that of her husband. Thus, family names reflect patriarchal lines of descent and obliterate women’s ancestry. Dale Spender argues that naming can have a significant influence in the maintenance of particular world-views, like the idea of women as property of their fathers and husbands: ‘When one group holds a monopoly on naming, its bias is embedded in the names it supplies and these “new” names help to maintain and strengthen the bias’ (98). This also explains why those in power have decided to replace the name of the United States of America with a new, biblical name.

Naming can thus be viewed as a way of controlling the named. Indeed, it has been argued that Adam naming Eve in Genesis 3 is an example of the man attempting to control the woman (Bechtel 114). Like the Commander, when naming Eve, Adam focuses on Eve’s reproductive value, naming her ‘because she was the Mother of all living’ (King James Version, Gen. 3.20), providing Gilead’s authorities with biblical pretext for their acts towards the handmaids. Apart from saying something about the object or person being named, naming ‘is also an accurate pointer to the ideology of the namer’ (Clark 184) and in the case of The Handmaid’s Tale it shows the men reassuring themselves that they have the right to exploit women, who are, after all, mere objects in the men’s possession.

Unsettling as the similarity between the naming of the women in The Handmaid’s Tale and Western society’s naming habits is, the ‘Historical Notes’ at the end of the novel provide a chilling example of male speech closely resembling modern day male speech. As Harriet Bergmann describes: ‘Women have seemingly returned to a nominal equality with
men, since they are able to attend conferences and chair meetings, but it is still, or perhaps once again, perfectly acceptable to make jokes and puns with women as their subjects’ (852). Whereas the nation has overcome a situation in which women were overtly oppressed and degraded, women are still treated differently from men. As Bergmann points out, some change and liberation has been accepted in Post-Gilead society, and therefore the men feel free to be sexist, which, unfortunately, is not that different from modern day society (852-3).

Professor Pieixoto compares Offred to Eurydice, regretting not being able to ask Offred for the ‘complete’ story. Orpheus wished to re-produce Eurydice for the sake of his own happiness and, similarly, Offred becomes the victim of Pieixoto’s possessiveness: his interpretation of the tale might bring him glory in the academic world, and thus he marginalises Offred as a person and the tale as her personal experience, claiming the story and his misinterpretation of it for his own success. ‘By the definition of the gods, Orpheus will sing his song and Eurydice will be ignored, not looked at, out of the picture, marginalised once again as the occasion for the art made by the male singer’ (Bergmann 853). This is further illustrated Pieixoto’s lack of interest in what Offred has told about her own experiences: ‘[s]he could have told us much about the workings of the Gileadean empire, had she had the instincts of a reporter or a spy. What would we not give, now, for even twenty pages or so of printout from Waterford’s private computer’ (HT 322). Clearly, important history is both written and experienced by men. The women are mere witnesses of history, yet they are never a part of it.

Native Tongue is an obvious product of 1960s and 1970s second-wave feminism, which is marked by the promotion of women’s emancipation. Feminist sociolinguistic research during second-wave feminism was therefore concerned with discrimination and sexist language, mainly focusing on differences and dominance in male-female interaction (Litosseliti 23). As a result, feminist linguists found the need to invent a women’s language,
which would free them from the sexist connotations of existing languages (Bruce). This idea of a women’s language, Láadan, is central to Native Tongue and Elgin, as a linguist, uses the novel as a thought experiment. As Karen Bruce argues, one of the aims of this experiment is to test the hypothesis that change in language brings about social change. Láadan functions as the linguist women’s weapon in an attempt ‘to change the androcentric character of society and liberate women from patriarchal control’ (Bruce). Elgin employs stereotypical descriptions of both men and women in order to emphasise their differences. As Bruce points out, the men and their language are shown to be ‘inadequate to express interpersonal relationships and human emotions – traditionally feminine [traits].’ This is a rather essentialist view of gender. As Deborah Cameron explains, ‘essentialism means assuming, in other words, that there is some crucial characteristic that all women have in common, and on the basis of which we can classify them as women’ (Feminist Critique 16). Essentialism is not just limited to assumptions about women, but also applies to assumptions about men, sexuality, and race. Essentialism has become largely discredited in third-wave feminism, which ‘is concerned with the diversity, multiplicity, performativity, and co-construction of gender identities within specific contexts and communities of practice, and on the politics of power construction and subject positions’ (Litosseliti 23).

Rather than offering equality, Elgin’s Láadan marginalises the male experience in favour of the female experience. As Bruce argues, ‘the feminine is always treated as normative in Láadan.’ She illustrates this by pointing out that Láadan has a ‘generic feminine’ that refers to both women and people in general, much like ‘man’ in English. In order to specify that a person is a man, a suffix is required, similar to the suffix used in English to specify femininity, as in ‘authorress.’ This morphological peculiarity renders ‘the feminine normative and the masculine deviant’ (Bruce). This essentialist attitude towards gender identity and language can be explained in the context of second-wave feminism. By opposing
sexist male English with a sexist female alternative, Láadan emphasises sexism in existing languages and functions to raise awareness and challenge sexist tendencies in society and language. The essentialist logic of second-wave feminism implied that language could not possibly express both male and female experiences (Bruce). However, from the perspective of third-wave feminism, Láadan is highly problematic. As Bruce points out, ‘if gender equality is the aim of the feminist movement, a gynocentric language that marginalises men is no more desirable than an androcentric one that excludes women.’ Furthermore, the idea that one language can express all female experiences implies that women are all the same, rather than a heterogeneous group of people with different perceptions. This assumption completely ignores possible influences on perceptions by other factors such as race, culture and class (Bruce). According to Bruce, the purpose of Láadan is to destroy masculinist culture, as Elgin believes that the introduction of a new language conveying new perceptions can destroy a culture, as discussed in the previous chapter. The result of Láadan would therefore be the empowerment of women and the end of patriarchal culture (Bruce).

The women, however, are part of the culture into which Láadan is being introduced, and consequently, their behaviour is influenced by the introduction of the new language. According to Bruce, ‘the women have stopped behaving in what the men of the lines would consider to be a typically feminine manner.’ Although it seems at first as though the women display an ideal submissive behaviour, it soon becomes clear that they ‘have simply opted out of following the script assigned to them by patriarchal society’ (Bruce). It is ironic that a language, created on the basis of essentialist notions of gender results in the breaking down of essentialism; the women’s behaviour can no longer be characterised as typically feminine, and this is what worries the men. The social change the women strive for, then, does not only affect the behaviour of the men, but appears to affect the behaviour of the women even more. On the one hand, Láadan can be viewed as the women’s rescue, freeing them from the
constraints of stereotypical female behaviour as expressed by sexist Panglish. On the other hand, Láadan breaks the illusion of gender as a fixed property of human beings that can be defined by certain characteristics. Thereby, Laádan as a language becomes obsolete, as the homogeneous group of people for which it was intended, turns out not to exist.

Although *Never Let Me Go* does not focus on gender differences, it is concerned with marginalised individuals who are treated as a homogeneous group. The fact that the Hailsham students and the other donors are clones has implications for the way they are treated by the normals and their status as deviant from these normals is reinforced by the euphemist language discussed in the previous chapters. Although Hailsham teaches its students to assimilate into the world of the normals, this does not allow them ‘to escape a fundamental condition of their existence: the denial of their right to agency and self-determination on the grounds of their status as less than human’ (Carroll 59). The clones play a role in Western society that has been fulfilled by other minority groups in the past and that has been fulfilled by women throughout history. The response of the clones is not very different from the behaviour women have often displayed: resignation. For all the progress that has been made since the rise of first-wave feminism, centuries of resignation have preceded this progress.

Rachel Carroll argues that ‘*Never Let Me Go* generates an apprehension of what it is to discover that one’s humanity has been called into question: what it is to find that one’s memories, desires and aspiration are perceived to be suspect, inauthentic or illegitimate’ (63). In this light, Kathy’s narrating of her memories can be seen as an act of resistance against the notion that her memories are irrelevant because she as a human being is irrelevant.

Kathy’s memoirs are not written as a defence of her status as a human being, addressed at the normals who question her identity. Instead, the narrative is addressed to her peers, fellow donors who she assumes must have had similar experiences to hers and who are therefore able to relate to her narrative. This is illustrated by her frequent use of the phrase
‘how it was where you were…’ (NLMG 13, 67, 94). This form of address serves to complicate ‘othering’ Kathy as a clone by the reader, while at the same time emphasising the discrepancy between implied and actual reader (Suter). Kathy’s resignation is shown through her minute description of memories and a refusal to focus on an alternative future. Indeed, as Rebecca Suter points out, the reader slowly realises that Kathy never did have a choice in life. ‘While she may wish now that she had acted differently on small matters such as engaging in pointless arguments with her friends, or letting her friend Ruth steal her sweetheart, in the broader picture she never possessed any agency’ (Suter). It is through the reconstruction of her memories that Kathy comes to realise that she never had any control over her own destiny and that her story will never be known to others (Suter). Similar to Kathy’s story, women’s stories have been silenced, their ancestry obliterated by men’s family names, their history unknown. The rediscovery of female authors by feminists in an effort to reclaim history and emphasise women’s part in history shows that women suffering oppression, like Kathy, have found comfort in writing down their stories, even though they were aware that their story would remain unread. Rebecca Suter argues that Kathy’s memories provide her ‘not only with greater self-awareness, but also with a last source of solace as she accepts her hard fate.’

Kathy’s act of ‘solidarity,’ writing about her experiences and memories as a normal might do, assuming that her experiences and memories matter, can be viewed as an act of subversion. As Deborah Tannen points out, ‘power and solidarity are bought with the same currency: the same linguistic means can be sued to create either or both’ (Tannen 263). An utterance of solidarity can in fact point towards rebellion. By expressing to be similar to the dominant other, the subordinate challenges his oppressor’s right to dominate him. As Tannen puts it, ‘[s]imilarity is antithetical to hierarchy’ (267). This would mean that apart from offering self-awareness and comfort, Kathy’s narrative is an act of rebellion. This also has implications for the way we view women’s writing. As for many centuries, women were not
allowed to write and publish, and women had to use men’s pseudonyms in order to be read. Their act of writing, of assimilation to men who also wrote, can be seen as an act of rebellion. The first signs of feminism, simmering under the surface of a sexist society, waiting to be heard.

This chapter has shown that language often expresses dominant views about gender in dystopian society, and that the study of the use of language in dystopian fiction can help ascertain the relation between men and women in the dystopian societies described. Dystopian fiction can serve to shed a light on the power relations between men and women in contemporary society by exaggerating these relations, as shown by the overt oppression of women in both *The Handmaid’s Tale* and *Native Tongue*, or by holding up a mirror to its readers, as can be seen in the naming of the handmaids after their Commanders in *The Handmaid’s Tale*. Even in novels in which the relationship between men and women is not one of the main themes, the language used can provide us with an understanding of the underlying relationships between men and women, or oppressor and oppressed, that help shape the image of a dystopian world. In these worlds, language plays an important role, not only in expressing dominant views and reaffirming stereotypical gender roles, but also in the defiance of these dominant views. This can be seen in the subtle act of writing, but also in the more overt act of rebellion by creating a women’s language.
Conclusion

This study has aimed to show that even in cases in which it is not an obvious theme, control of and through language is still a prevalent notion in all four novels. These novels, published between 1932 and 2005 by both male and female authors, provided an overview of different dystopian works. Sociolinguistic theories, most notably linguistic relativity and notions of language and gender, proved very helpful when studying the role of language in these novels. Throughout the different chapters, it became clear that in all novels, language functioned to influence the perceptions of both characters and readers, and language was a means of not only maintaining control, but also a means of resistance.

Starting with small examples of changes in language in the form of linguistic taboos, euphemisms, and neologisms, the first chapter has shown that language is manipulated to some extent in all novels discussed. When analysing the four novels, it became clear that these taboos and euphemisms used were different from those known in contemporary society and therefore could be regarded as a deliberate manipulation of language in order to influence both the characters’ and the readers’ perceptions of the situation described. Although neologisms are to be expected in novels set in the (near) future, it was shown that neologisms are not only introduced by the author to describe a future setting with new technological advancements, but can also be used as a means to influence the characters’ perceptions of a situation. This is shown by Ishiguro, whose world, which is set in England in the recent past, does not need neologisms to be described, but nevertheless is replete with new words to convey old meanings, which not only influence the way the characters respond to their situation, but also come to haunt the reader.

Whereas the first chapter has shown that all authors are aware of the impact small changes in language can have, the second chapter introduced the notion that language can influence the thought process itself, and in three out of the four novels, language is
deliberately used to do just that. Most notably, language was used by the ruling powers in *Brave New World* to condition children in their sleep in order to maintain social stability, whereas the women in *Native Tongue* used language to fight existing notions of gender and bring about social change. The theocratic government of Gilead in *The Handmaid’s Tale* recognised the dangerous influence of language and imposed linguistic taboos, as well as a ban on reading and writing in an effort to maintain control. Although not clear from the text, it is quite possible that the neologisms in *Never Let Me Go* have been introduced deliberately by the ruling powers in order to prevent an uprising among the clones. This would mean that the impact of language is not only recognised in all four novels, but also used to the advantage of either the oppressors or the oppressed.

Although language can be a useful tool in order to control society, chapter three has shown that it is difficult to control individuals if their loyalty is with their family in the first place. In three out of four novels, those in power opt for total control by either altering family structures or annihilating the notion of family altogether. Suzette Haden Elgin shows that when the government fails to control family structure, it fails to control the individual, providing those who are oppressed with an opportunity to resist their oppression. Similarly, in *Brave New World*, the Savage is the only character who values family and refuses to adhere to the World Controllers’ ideology. In all novels, where manipulation of the characters’ ideas about family is needed, language is a powerful tool in the hands of the oppressor.

Recognising the possible influence of language on the way people perceive matters means rethinking our perceptions of everyday situations and fellow human beings. With the rise of second-wave feminism, sociolinguistic research focused on the influence of language on the way we perceive gender. This thesis has shown that language can tell much about the relation between men and women in dystopian societies. Furthermore, language can be used to reinforce or resist these existing power relations. Language reflects gender relations in
dystopian fiction the same way it does in our own society, and authors of dystopian fiction can use language to hold up a mirror to their readers. This is quite obviously the case in both *The Handmaid’s Tale* and *Native Tongue*. However, even when the relation between men and women does not appear to be an important theme, studying the language of dystopian novels can still provide clues about the relations between men and women and/or oppressor and oppressed in the dystopian society imagined by the author.

All in all, the use of sociolinguistic theories has been proven useful in the analysis of language in dystopian literature. Sociolinguistics can offer a framework other than the usual analysis of language within literary sciences, such as the analysis of figures of speech and tone. Although these too are useful when comparing works of literature or researching a particular genre, sociolinguistics is concerned with both the effects of language on all aspects of culture and vice versa, and by acknowledging the intricate relation between language and culture that was already pointed out by both Wilhelm von Humboldt and Edward Sapir, literary scholars can come to new insights about literary works and genres and their relation to contemporary society.
Appendix

Ihre verschiedenheit ist nicht eine von Schällen und Zeichen, sondern eine Verschiedenheit der Weltansichten selbst. (Von Humboldt 20)

Dass Sprachen mit keinen, oder sehr unvollkommnen grammatischen Formen störend auf die intellectuelle Thätigkeit einwirken, statt sie zu begünstigen, fliesst, wie ich gezeigt zu haben glaube, aus der Natur des Denkens und der Rede. (Von Humboldt 62)
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