



Review Article

Language of Change: Literature & Linguistics in a World in Crisis

Behzad Ghonsooly^{1*}, Doaa Taher Matrood²

Assistant Professor, Continues Education Center, Jabir ibn Hayyan Medical University, Najaf, Iraq



ARTICLE INFO

ABSTRACT

Keywords:

Crisis discourse, linguistic agency, literature and resistance, eco-linguistics, sociopolitical narrative

Article History:

Received: 11-07-2025

Accepted: 15-09-2025

Published: 22-09-2025

The purpose of this study is to examine how language, both in literary works and in linguistic systems, operates as a change agent in the midst of global crises, such as climate change, war, pandemics, and sociopolitical upheaval. The function of literature and linguistics as both reflectors and moulders of collective consciousness is gaining increased relevance in a society that is becoming more moulded by uncertainty and fast upheaval. This study investigates how texts not only reflect crises but also actively engage in the construction of alternatives, the formation of identities, and the mobilisation of resistance. It does so by drawing on eco-linguistics, discourse theory, and critical literary studies. A comparative analysis of modern fiction and critical discourse is included in the research. The purpose of this analysis is to investigate how narrative structures and language choices react to, support, or reject prevailing ideologies during times of crisis. The purpose of this study is to illustrate how writers and speakers negotiate power, solidarity, and hope via the use of a combined methodological framework that incorporates critical discourse analysis (CDA), narrative theory, and literary close reading. An emerging multidisciplinary area that tries to reinvent the humanities as instruments for survival and social change in crisis circumstances is the subject of this enquiry, which adds to the field. In the end, it makes the case that literature and linguistics are not only passive mirrors of reality but rather active forces that shape the language of change.

Cite this article:

Ghonsooly, B., & Matrood, D. (2025). Language of Change: Literature & Linguistics in a World in Crisis. *Frontiers in Global Research*, 1(3), 1-3. <https://doi.org/10.55559/fg.v1i3.21>

Introduction

We are now living in a time that is characterised by the escalation of global crises, including but not limited to climatic catastrophes, geopolitical conflicts, pandemics, economic breakdowns, and the ongoing loss of democratic institutions. The use of language, which is often considered to be a neutral medium, is an essential component in the formation of our comprehension of these crises. Discourse is the means by which civilisations establish opponents, manufacture danger, develop solidarity, and envisage futures with regard to the future. In this setting, the fields of literature and linguistics become very important places for the diagnosis as well as the changing of sociopolitical situations. Language is more than just a means of communication; it is also a power that is both dynamic and constitutive. Mikhail Bakhtin argued that language is fundamentally dialogic, meaning that it constantly exists in connection to other people, reflecting and reacting to the circumstances of culture, history, and ideology. On the other hand, literature isn't just a record of what people have done; it's also a way for people to think about and argue about new options. From George Orwell's bleak warnings in 1984 to Arundhati Roy's writings about environmental damage, literary texts become battlegrounds for different views of the world. Both of these shows how the text of a work of literature changes. By telling these stories, people from different social and biological backgrounds can understand each other better and question the ideas that most people hold. In the field of linguistics, especially in its practical and critical forms, the role that

language plays in emergencies is getting more and more attention. For instance, eco-linguistics looks into how language affects how people think about and act in nature, and it often shows how language we use every day can keep us doing things that aren't sustainable.

What is known as Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is the process of dissecting how power is exercised via the use of ordinary language in political speeches, media, and institutional documents. The intersection of these methodologies with literary studies results in the formation of a potent analytical lens that can be used to evaluate the ways in which language may either facilitate or impede social change. The purpose of this research is to investigate the linked roles that literature and linguistics play as vehicles for confronting and modifying narratives that are associated with crises. It raises three primary issues for further investigation:

1. How do narratives of crisis and resilience come to be constructed via the use of literary and linguistic discourses?
2. In what ways can lexical choice, narrative framing, and metaphor play a part in either maintaining or opposing the power structures that are prevalent in society?
3. What are some ways in which multidisciplinary methods that include linguistics and literature might be used as instruments for resistance and renewal?

The purpose of this study is to illustrate how the humanities may actively react to a world that is in crisis by

*Corresponding Author:

✉ duaataher1994@gmail.com (D. T. Matrood)

© 2025 The Authors. Published by Sprin Publisher, India. This is an open access article published under the CC-BY license

<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0>

interacting with theoretical frameworks, past research, and textual analysis. In particular, it emphasises the significance of interdisciplinary study in the process of comprehending how language functions as a weapon for both dominance and freedom, especially in situations when societies are operating under pressure.

Literature Review

1. Crisis has been a common motif in literature for a very long time. Literature has served as both a record and an analysis of major changes that have happened. You can see this in the plague stories in Boccaccio's *Decameron*, the post-apocalyptic futures in Octavia Butler's work, and the climate fiction in Margaret Atwood's work, among other things. Raymond Williams and Terry Eagleton are two literary critics who have spoken about how literature may help us see the conflicts that are always there in society throughout periods of change. Literature does this in every society. Williams's theory of "structures of feeling" shows how literature shows the emotional effects of changes in society, while Eagleton links literary style to ideological critique. Buell and Nixon's recent study has shown how environmental literature may be a kind of political engagement that makes readers aware of environmental challenges and encourages them to take action to solve them. These scholars say that literature doesn't only explain crises; it also shapes how we feel and think about them.

2. What linguistics and discourse can do in emergencies There are ways to understand how meaning is made, shared, and argued over that linguistics may help with. Norman Fairclough and Teun van Dijk are two researchers in the area of critical discourse analysis (CDA) who say that language is full of power, especially in the media and institutions. This kind of thinking has changed the way people talk about climate change, war, pandemics, and migration stories. For example, studies of the vocabulary used in climate change talks show how metaphors like "carbon footprint" and "green revolution" shape how people think about environmental issues, which affects both policy and conduct. Eco-linguistics is a field of study that blends environmental awareness with language studies. Its purpose is to find out how language normalises harmful actions towards the environment and offers alternatives via the idea of "stories-we-live-by," which Arran Stibbe came up with. The stories that exist in everyday phrases and that effect how we relate to the natural environment are looked at for this topic.

3. The connections between literature and linguistics Researchers like Paul Simpson and Sara Mills have demonstrated how narrative voice, metaphor, and focalisation all play a role in ideological framing. They have done this by connecting literary style with everyday speech. Literary linguistics, sometimes called stylistics, is a growing branch of linguistics that looks at how little details in language create big meanings in literary works, especially when culture is under stress. For example, the choice between first-person and third-person narration, the use of irony, and the manipulation of tense may all have a big effect on how much the reader agrees with different ideological viewpoints. These fields are all interested in how language affects how people think, act, and the way society is set up. Linguistics helps us understand how meanings are created at the level of phrases, words, or language in more detail. On the other hand, literary studies usually focus on themes and symbols.

Previous Studies

There have been a lot of recent studies that provide us ways to look at language in times of crisis, but these models

frequently originate from diverse fields of study. Stibbe (2015) looked at how dominant ecological discourses in Western media foster worldviews that aren't sustainable by making exploitative stories seem normal. He spoke about big metaphorical frames like "the economy as a machine" or "nature as a resource" that hide how complicated the environment is and foster consumerism. He also uncovered additional common ways to frame things metaphorically.

Chilton (2004) utilised CDA to analyse political speeches and show how metaphors like "axis of evil" make enemies seem less human and support war. His study of the language employed during the Bush administration shows how words can be used to persuade and hurt people, particularly when the country is in danger. This insight has big effects on how we understand populist rhetoric, nationalism, and policy talk today.

Nixon (2011) looked at the idea of "slow violence" in the context of environmental fiction. This term refers to harm that happens slowly and is frequently hard to see, such pollution or the extinction of species. He remarked that literature is very important for making brutality like this apparent and emotionally powerful, as a counterpoint to the spectacle-driven coverage of crises in the mainstream media. He stated this because he thought that literature may help people grasp the issue better. Mukherjee (2020) looked at how South Asian writers reacted to the COVID-19 pandemic in the world of literature. In his study, the author focused on themes of loneliness, caring, and resistance. She learned through her studies that poetry and short stories were ways for people who were on the fringes to speak out and for communities that were locked down to come back together. Even while these studies have added to the field, most of them only look at either literary criticism or language analysis, and don't combine the two. So, we need models that connect multiple areas of study and incorporate both literary understanding and clear language. This research suggests this approach by using both textual and discourse analysis.

Methodology and Data Collection

A qualitative, multidisciplinary approach is used in this research project. Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and careful literary reading are both components of this technique. There were three current texts chosen for analysis: The Testaments, written by Margaret Atwood and published in 2019, Two years later, in 2018, Richard Powers's *The Overstory*

In the year 2020, the essay "The Pandemic is a Portal" written by Arundhati Roy Although these texts come from a variety of genres, including eco-fiction, dystopian fiction, and nonfiction essays, they all deal with crisis narratives and strategically use language to visualise transition. The CDA Framework CDA is concerned with the manner in which language structures social reality. Utilising Fairclough's three-dimensional paradigm, the research investigates the following topics: Identifying crucial vocabulary choices, metaphorical constructions, and rhetorical tactics is an important part of the textual analysis process. Exploring the ways in which texts are generated, circulated, and consumed within certain sociopolitical situations is the focus of the area of practice known as discursive practice. Social practice involves establishing connections between the texts and larger ideological and institutional systems.

Evaluation of Literature

For the purpose of interpreting characters, plots, narrative voices, and intertextual allusions, many approaches of close reading are used. Particular focus is dedicated to the following:

- Metaphors of regeneration and resistance (for example, "trees as witnesses" and "testimonies as redemption")

As an example, epistolary tales and prophetic voices are examples of framing methods.

- Language that is gendered and ecological (for example, anthropomorphized nature and metaphors that come from mothers)

The Most Important Discoveries

Throughout The Testaments, Atwood exposes the ideological mechanics of authoritarianism via the use of tales that are intertwined with one another and language that is religious. In order to challenge patriarchal fundamentalism, she reappropriates biblical motifs and demonstrates how language can serve both oppression and emancipation.

- Through the use of arboreal metaphors and a nonlinear narrative, Powers proposes an ecological awareness that is anchored on interdependence and slowness. This is accomplished by decentering human experience. In addition to bolstering the novel's thematic focus on plurality and systems thinking, his polyphonic storytelling approach is also worth mentioning.

- Through the use of the "portal" as a transitional region between dystopia and potential, Roy's essay combines poetic metaphor with political criticism. Through the use of historical battles, she establishes a connection between the epidemic and wider colonial and capitalist institutions. This placement of language as both a burden and a doorway are shown.

Discussion

According to the findings of the research, there is a common thematic concern that is present in both the texts and the methodologies: crisis as both a crisis and a time of possibilities. Crisis is a phenomenon that, from a linguistic and literary perspective, encourages redefinition. It disrupts dominant discourses and facilitates the development of alternative narratives. Not only do authors and speakers use language to explain the world, but they also use it to reinvent it. Throughout The Testaments, Atwood reclaims narrative from authoritarianism via the use of biblical language and polyphonic voices. This suggests that storytelling itself may be an act of revolt. Within the context of the Anthropocene, the polycentric novel form that Powers employs in The Overstory provides a language paradigm for interconnectedness but also humility. A metaphor that serves as both a language rupture and an imaginative challenge, Roy's "portal" metaphor is an encouragement to think differently and to act jointly than one could otherwise. The CDA demonstrates how power is exercised via the use of metaphor, pronouns, and tense structure. An examination of literature reveals how narrative techniques, such as the employment of unreliable narrators or nonlinear time, challenge straightforward explanations of cause and consequence. These tactics develop an enlarged perspective of crises that goes beyond the portrayals that are prevalent in mainstream media, inspire critical thinking, and urge empathy via their use. Taking all of these results into consideration, it seems that literature and linguistics provide complimentary perspectives through which to comprehend and react to a crisis. Moreover, they demonstrate that language is a type of action, which is very significant. According to Audre Lorde, "Poetry is not a luxury." It is an essential need for our continued existence.

Conclusion

Within the context of a world in crisis, this article has argued that language is more important than it has ever been, not just in terms of how we communicate or perceive, but also in terms of how we envisage alternative solutions. When brought together, the fields of literature and linguistics provide a potent arsenal that may be used for addressing complexities, fighting against injustice, and constructing futures. Reclaiming their position as active agents of change rather than passive observers is something that the humanities need to do. The study of the language of transformation allows us to start speaking that language. When it comes to future research, teaching, and advocacy, the junction of literature and linguistics provides a rich terrain filled with opportunities.

References

- Atwood, M. (2019). *The Testaments*. Nan A. Talese.
- Buell, L. (2005). *The Future of Environmental Criticism*. Blackwell.
- Chilton, P. (2004). *Analysing Political Discourse*. Routledge.
- Eagleton, T. (2003). *After Theory*. Basic Books.
- Fairclough, N. (1995). *Critical Discourse Analysis*. Longman.
- Lorde, A. (1984). *Sister Outsider*. Crossing Press.
- Mills, S. (2005). *Gender and Politeness*. Cambridge University Press.
- Mukherjee, P. (2020). Pandemic prose and poetic resilience. *South Asian Review*, 41(2), 110–127.
- Nixon, R. (2011). *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor*. Harvard University Press.
- Orwell, G. (1949). 1984. Secker & Warburg.
- Powers, R. (2018). *The Overstory*. W. W. Norton & Company.
- Roy, A. (2020). The pandemic is a portal. *Financial Times*. <https://www.ft.com/>
- Simpson, P. (2004). *Stylistics: A Resource Book for Students*. Routledge.
- Stibbe, A. (2015). *Ecolinguistics: Language, Ecology and Stories We Live By*. Routledge.
- Stibbe, A. (2021). *Ecolinguistics: Language, Ecology and Sustainability*. Routledge.
- van Dijk, T. A. (1998). *Ideology: A Multidisciplinary Approach*. Sage.
- Williams, R. (1976). *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society*. Oxford University Press.
- Zeng, R., Li, M., & Yang, J. (2020). COVID-19 discourse in Chinese media. *Discourse & Communication*, 14(6), 573–595.
- Bakhtin, M. (1981). *The Dialogic Imagination*. University of Texas Press.
- Roy, A. (2011). *Walking with the Comrades*. Penguin Books.