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Dystopia and Literary Text: A Survey-Based Study

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ABSTRACT

This article provides a comprehensive examination of the theoretical foundations of the dystopian genre and its manifestation in Kazakh literature. It first analyzes the genre-specific characteristics, purpose, and thematic essence of dystopia, such as the loss of individual freedom, totalitarian control, systemic injustice, and estrangement from truth. Canonical works like George Orwell's 1984 and Yevgeny Zamyatin's We are explored as key references, offering a comparative basis for assessing how dystopian themes have evolved within the Kazakh literary context. The central focus of the study is Akhan Tokish's novel Mangurtstan, interpreted as a dystopian vision of Kazakhstan's socio-political trajectory in the 21st century. The article investigates the novel's linguistic hybridity, ideological manipulation of national consciousness, and the mechanisms of authoritarian control within economic and institutional systems. These elements are compared with global dystopian models while emphasizing their uniquely national dimensions. A significant component of the analysis is dedicated to the linguistic features of dystopia in Mangurtstan. The novel uses

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semantic inversion, parody, and bureaucratic language to depict the erosion of meaning, identity, and communication under oppressive regimes. Sarcasm and hybridized multilingual expressions serve not only as stylistic devices but as tools of sharp cultural critique. The study aims to reveal the aesthetic and philosophical importance of dystopian narratives in Kazakh literature and their role in reflecting historical memory and cultural identity. Through descriptive, comparative, and textual analysis, the research contributes to the broader integration of dystopian studies into Kazakh literary scholarship.

Keywords: Anti-Utopia; Dystopia; Utopia; Totalitarianism; Dictatorship; Literary Theory; Genre

1. Introduction

Over the past two to three decades, the research paradigm concerning the theme of dystopia in world literature has significantly intensified, accompanied by a notable increase in scholarly interest. Studies conducted in this area have deepened the conceptual understanding of dystopia and paved the way for its reflection in literary studies from both genre-based and typological perspectives. In particular, issues such as totalitarianism, the antagonism between the individual and society, and the problems of freedom and control-common in dystopian works-are analyzed through the categories of time and space within a historical-comparativist framework.

Such works are now regarded not merely as literary trends or stylistic phenomena but also as philosophical and cultural reflections of the spiritual, social, and political fabric of their time. As a result, the dystopian genre has become a highly relevant and significant subject of study in the context of contemporary literary processes.

The primary objective of this research is to identify the place of the dystopian genre in Kazakh literary criticism by analyzing its poetic and ideological-thematic features. Since this topic has not yet been thoroughly systematized or deeply explored in modern Kazakh literary scholarship, it is regarded as a pressing academic issue. To achieve this objective, the study incorporates empirical research elements based on survey methodology and includes experimental analysis. Furthermore, Aqtan Tókish's novel *Mángúrtstan* is examined using a descriptive-analytical method to uncover dystopian characteristics and narrative structures that reflect resistance to totalitarian systems in Kazakh literature.

The struggle between literature and totalitarianism is essentially a battle between truth and propaganda, freedom and control, the individual and the regime.

The term “totalitarianism” emerged in 1923 in connection with Italian anti-fascism and quickly entered common political discourse, remaining a central topic of ideological debate for nearly a century ^[1]. Scholars often regard totalitarianism as a defining phenomenon of the 20th century ^[2]. According to American sociologist S. Andreski, such regimes had achieved near-total dominance by the late 1940s and early 1950s – 100% in the USSR, 85% in Nazi Germany, and 55% in fascist Italy on the eve of the war ^[3]. The essence of totalitarianism lies in the establishment of complete state control over society ^[4].

In most cases, totalitarian movements initially exploit democratic freedoms only to later abolish them deliberately ^[5]. The goal of such systems is not only to deny truth but also to annihilate humanity's very capacity to perceive it ^[6]. Writers such as G. Orwell ^[7], Y. Zamyatin ^[8], and A. Huxley ^[9] made this political system a central theme of their literary works. Accordingly, alongside postmodernism ^[10], the dystopian genre emerged as a new category within 20th-century literary studies.

2. Literature Review

The characteristics of the dystopian genre and its role in society and literature are currently being studied from multiple perspectives. For instance, researchers have explored the distinction between dystopia and anti-utopia ^[11], the genre-specific features of anti-utopia ^[12], the relationship between logic and totalitarianism ^[13], the foundations of dystopian fiction through the lens of literary critics ^[14], the interaction between totalitarianism and individualism ^[15], as well as its political and social structures ^[16]. Other studies have examined propaganda and surveillance ^[17], Kazakh dramaturgy under totalitarian regimes ^[18], the links between totalitarianism and skepticism ^[6], the conceptual framework of tyrannical rule ^[19], and the intersections of

pragmatism, utopia, and anti-utopia^[20].

Moreover, topics such as utopian anti-utopianism through the object of British anarchism and its reinterpretation of wartime liberalism^[21], rethinking the future of politics and utopianism^[22], anti-apocalypticism^[23], and the political subject of anti-capitalism^[24] have all contributed to identifying various distinctive features of the dystopian genre in literature.

Recent linguistic research on the dystopian genre has increasingly focused on how language constructs, reinforces, or resists ideological discourse in literary texts. Scholars have examined the stylistic and discursive mechanisms of totalitarian language, such as semantic inversion, euphemism, and narrative control, within canonical dystopian works^[25]. Fairclough's critical discourse analysis and Halliday's systemic functional linguistics have provided theoretical frameworks to explore how dystopian texts encode power relations, social control, and identity suppression through language^[26,27]. In particular, linguistic hybridity and parodic structures have been interpreted as resistance strategies against oppressive regimes in fictional narratives^[28,29]. Studies have also addressed the role of propaganda, surveillance discourse, and ideological rhetoric in shaping reader perception and textual world-building^[30,31]. These linguistic perspectives offer valuable insights into the intersection of language, power, and dystopian aesthetics, yet remain underexplored in the context of Central Asian literature.

The novelty of our research lies in its survey-based investigation of the dystopian genre. Our primary aim is to demonstrate the significance of this genre within Kazakh literary studies and to analyze it through the lens of literary texts.

3. Methodology

3.1. Participants

The experiment involved 21 healthy participants aged between 18 and 20. No restrictions were imposed regarding participants' gender or cultural background in the selection process, as the goal was to ensure the representativeness of the sample. A key requirement for participation was normal visual and auditory perception, as this was es-

sential for maintaining the sensory-cognitive clarity of the study.

Additionally, participants were required to be fluent in reading and comprehending texts in the Kazakh language, since all research materials were presented exclusively in Kazakh. The selection criteria also excluded individuals with visual impairments (e.g., color blindness) or reading-related difficulties (such as dyslexia or cognitive disorders). These conditions were established in advance to enhance the reliability and validity of the research findings.

3.2. Materials and Questions

During the experimental study, the semantic and conceptual foundations of the dystopian genre were examined, along with its main functions, objectives, and the range of problems it addresses. In accordance with the research objective, a set of pre-designed questions was developed, and the responses collected from participants were compiled as empirical data. These responses served as the primary source of information and formed the analytical basis for revealing the literary, philosophical, and socio-cultural significance of the dystopian genre.

Survey Questions Used in the Study:

Category 1: Level of Awareness (Knowledge and Familiarity)

1. Have you previously encountered the concept of dystopia?
 - A) Yes, I am familiar with it.
 - B) I have a vague idea.
 - C) No, I am not familiar with it.
3. Please identify the works that belong to the dystopian genre:
 - A) George Orwell – 1984
 - B) Tölen Äbdik – Jat perzent
 - C) Dulat Isabekov – Gauhartás
 - D) Fyodor Dostoevsky – White Nights
10. Do you think there are works in Kazakh literature that can be classified as belonging to the dystopian genre? If yes, please specify.

Category 2: Theoretical Understanding (Purpose, Meaning, and Features of the Genre)

2. What is the main purpose of the dystopian genre?
 - A) To present ways of achieving a perfect society.

- B) To warn about potential difficulties in the future.
 - C) To portray the true nature of society.
 - D) To create an engaging plot only.
4. What are the typical features of a dystopian society?
- A) A depiction of a democratic society.
 - B) The positive impact of technology on human life.
 - C) The realization of an ideal society.
 - D) The loss of freedom of thought.
5. What does the symbol of “Big Brother” in 1984 represent?
- A) The care of a family member.
 - B) Totalitarian surveillance.
 - C) Future technological advancements.
 - D) The ideal leader of society.
6. What were the main factors that influenced the emergence of the dystopian genre?
- A) Wars and political regimes.
 - B) Scientific and technological progress.
 - C) Economic crises.
 - D) All of the above.
9. Why is the dystopian genre important in the modern world?
- A) It shows people only the positive aspects of real life.
 - B) It helps prevent future societal mistakes.
 - C) It criticizes new technologies.
 - D) It is a timeless literary genre.

Category 3: Reader’s Emotional Response

7. What emotions are most commonly evoked by the dystopian genre?
- A) Hope and optimism.
 - B) Fear and anxiety.
 - C) Calmness and confidence.
 - D) Interest and amazement.

Category 4: Values (Social and Human Aspects)

8. Which key values are often lost in dystopian societies?
- A) Freedom and individual rights.
 - B) Justice and equality.
 - C) Language and culture.
 - D) All of the above.

The survey questions used in this study are structured into four thematic categories, each designed to assess dif-

ferent dimensions of readers’ understanding, perception, and emotional engagement with the dystopian genre. The purpose of these questions extends beyond data collection – they also provide a foundation for linguistic interpretation by revealing how respondents cognitively and discursively relate to dystopian texts.

Category 1: Awareness and Familiarity aims to measure the respondents’ baseline knowledge of dystopia and their ability to identify key works within the genre. Questions 1 and 3 help evaluate cultural literacy and genre recognition, which serve as important indicators of how readers might interpret dystopian discourse and its linguistic patterns.

Category 2: Theoretical Understanding explores the respondents’ grasp of the genre’s purpose, features, and socio-political underpinnings. Questions 2, 4, 5, and 6 address key semiotic and ideological markers – such as surveillance, loss of freedom, and symbolic figures like “Big Brother” – which are essential for analyzing the semantic and rhetorical structures typical of dystopian narratives. These responses also inform how linguistic devices function in shaping ideological critique.

Category 3: Emotional Response (Question 7) captures the affective dimension of reader experience, offering insight into the pragmatics of dystopian texts. Understanding the emotional reactions evoked by specific linguistic constructions contributes to a deeper stylistic and discourse-level interpretation.

Category 4: Social and Human Values (Question 8) focuses on value systems often challenged or lost in dystopian societies. This helps illuminate the ethical and conceptual frameworks embedded in dystopian language, which frequently reflects broader discourses of control, resistance, and cultural erosion.

Overall, the inclusion of these questions serves not only as an empirical foundation but also as a linguistic entry point into the interpretation of dystopian discourse. The survey data support the analysis of how language encodes ideological constructs and how readers decode these meanings in relation to their cultural and literary context.

3.3. Procedure

The experiment was conducted using the Google Form online platform.

The in-person component of the experiment took place at Academic Building No. 8 of Karagandy University named after Academician E.A. Buketov. Instructors (B.Zh., A.M., Y.O.) provided participants with detailed explanations of all stages of the research process, ethical standards, and the meaning of the questions.

Participation in the study was entirely voluntary, and all ethical and confidentiality principles were strictly observed. It is important to note that no factors during the experiment posed any risk to the participants' life or health.

3.4. Research Instrument

A questionnaire designed via the Google Forms online platform was used as the primary research instrument. Google Forms is a multifunctional online tool designed for creating electronic forms for data collection, online testing, and polling. This platform is widely utilized for conducting surveys with clients or organizing assessments among students and learners in educational institutions.

The survey method is a data collection approach aimed at systematically gathering primary information from a group of individuals regarding their opinions and attitudes on a specific topic. We relied on previous studies that have applied this method in literary text analysis^[32]. In the present study, the survey method was employed to assess participants' knowledge and understanding of the dystopian genre.

3.5. Data Analysis

To analyze the data collected in the study, the descriptive method was employed. This method is based on identifying the object of study and systematically describing its key characteristics and parameters. The object refers to the set of phenomena or elements selected for investigation, serving as the primary subject of observation and description.

The descriptive method is grounded in analytical operations and allows for a detailed examination and interpretation of the structure of the research material. Through this approach, the readers' level of reception and perception of the literary work was comprehensively explored and analyzed.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1. Linguistic Construction of Dystopia in Akhan Tokish's *Mangurtstan*

The dystopian genre is characterized not only by thematic markers such as control, surveillance, and identity erosion, but also by distinct linguistic and stylistic patterns that reinforce its ideological structure. In *Mangurtstan*, Akhan Tokish^[33] deliberately employs language as a primary semiotic resource to construct a dystopian worldview. The analysis below draws on Halliday's systemic functional linguistics (SFL)^[34], Simpson's stylistic model of point of view^[26], and Wodak's critical discourse analysis (CDA) to identify how bureaucratic discourse^[35], emotional flattening, semantic inversion, national metaphor, and linguistic hybridity function within the novel.

4.1.1. Bureaucratic Discourse as a Tool of Control

The pervasive use of formal, impersonal, and institutionally encoded language in *Mangurtstan* reflects a key discursive strategy through which the dystopian world is both constructed and maintained. Drawing on Halliday's ideational metafunction^[34], we observe that language in this context is not merely representational but actively participates in shaping social reality. The frequent deployment of bureaucratic phrases—especially those surrounding punitive measures, such as extended prison sentences for reading literature—illustrates how language naturalizes systemic oppression. These statements are typically rendered in an agentless passive voice, devoid of personal pronouns, emotional markers, or subjective modality. For example, sentences such as “The term has been extended” or “Access to reading materials is restricted” erase the identity of the actor, thereby diffusing responsibility and reinforcing the anonymity of state power.

According to Wodak's Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA)^[35], such linguistic strategies are central to the legitimization of authoritarian control. Institutional discourse often hides its ideological aims beneath the surface of neutrality and objectivity. In *Mangurtstan*, this strategy functions not only at the level of individual utterances but also permeates the narrative voice itself, contributing to the

emotional detachment and cognitive flattening that characterizes the dystopian atmosphere. The mechanical tone of administrative language strips events of their moral weight and reduces human experience to quantifiable, manageable data.

Moreover, the bureaucratic style serves a double purpose in the novel: while it dehumanizes characters within the narrative world, it simultaneously elicits discomfort and critical reflection in the reader. This technique aligns with Simpson's model of point of view, where the external narrator adopts an authoritative tone that contrasts sharply with the protagonist's internal silence or confusion. This stylistic disparity between the narrative surface and the reader's inferred empathy produces discourse dissonance, a state in which language fails to align with perceived truth or emotion.

In broader socio-political terms, the use of bureaucratic discourse in *Mangurtstan* mirrors real-world mechanisms of linguistic control under totalitarian regimes. Language becomes a weapon of normalization: by routinizing surveillance, punishment, and obedience through neutral phrasing, the text reveals how authoritarianism colonizes not only actions but thought processes. The linguistic codification of oppression thus emerges as one of the most insidious forms of ideological manipulation – a system in which control is no longer questioned because it is linguistically invisible.

Ultimately, this narrative strategy does not simply represent totalitarian power; it enacts it. By reproducing the stylistic conventions of administrative discourse, *Mangurtstan* immerses the reader in a linguistic environment where power is ubiquitous yet intangible, omnipresent yet impersonal. In doing so, the novel compels readers to interrogate the very language they consume, highlighting the urgency of linguistic awareness in contexts of ideological domination.

4.1.2. Emotional Neutrality and Discursive Suppression

In *Mangurtstan*, the emotional flatness of character speech functions as a key stylistic and ideological device, reinforcing the dystopian atmosphere of alienation and psychological control. Drawing upon Simpson's model of point of view, this phenomenon can be understood as a

deliberate linguistic encoding of the characters' psychological suppression. Characters speak in short, logically sequenced, emotionally neutral utterances that reveal little about their inner states. The absence of expressive syntax, intonation markers, or affective vocabulary contributes to a monotonous tone that reflects a society where emotional expression is not only discouraged but structurally suppressed.

This emotional detachment is not merely a stylistic feature; it represents a deeper erosion of subjectivity and inner freedom. In Halliday's terms, the interpersonal metafunction of language—responsible for enacting social roles and emotional positioning—is severely diminished. Instead of fostering connection or individual expression, language becomes a defensive mechanism, a way to avoid punishment or ideological conflict. The characters speak as though rehearsing memorized lines or delivering bureaucratically approved responses, devoid of personal conviction or spontaneity. This resonates with Wodak's Critical Discourse Analysis, which emphasizes how ideology operates at the micro-linguistic level to regulate meaning, emotion, and even silence.

The effects of this emotional suppression extend beyond character portrayal and into the reader's experience. As readers encounter these emotionally flattened dialogues and monologues, they are placed in a position of interpretive discomfort. The lack of empathetic cues forces the reader to actively search beneath the surface for meaning and truth, mirroring the alienation felt by the characters themselves. This technique fosters cognitive dissonance, a hallmark of dystopian narrative, by presenting a surface of emotional neutrality that masks a deeper psychological and ideological trauma.

Furthermore, the recurrence of this affectless speech across characters – regardless of age, status, or setting – suggests a systemic linguistic condition, rather than an individual psychological trait. It is not that characters choose not to feel, but rather that the language available to them has been stripped of its affective function. In this way, the novel illustrates how language, when controlled or hollowed out by authoritarian systems, can fail to carry emotional meaning altogether. What remains is a sterile medium – functional, yet spiritually vacated.

In conclusion, emotional neutrality in *Mangurtstan*

operates as a powerful discursive strategy that reinforces themes of dehumanization, ideological conformity, and existential despair. Through stylistic minimization and suppression of affective language, the novel not only depicts the external structures of control but also dramatizes their internal consequences—linguistic, psychological, and ethical.

4.1.3. National Symbolism and Metaphorical Encoding of Freedom

Unlike the typical spatial sterility of dystopian settings, Mangurtstan invokes national imagery – especially spring—as a metaphor for freedom. According to Halliday’s textual metafunction, this choice serves both thematic and cohesive purposes. The expression “Freedom always arrives in spring” functions as a cultural metaphor rooted in Kazakh semiotics, where spring symbolizes rebirth and hope. However, this seasonal symbol is confined to dreams and hallucinations, creating a metafictional distance between linguistic hope and socio-political reality. The tension between signifier and referent underscores the ideological dissonance typical of dystopian rhetoric.

4.1.4. Semantic Inversion and Ideological Reframing

Semantic inversion constitutes one of the most salient linguistic mechanisms in dystopian literature, functioning as a tool for ideological manipulation through the systematic distortion of culturally and emotionally charged terminology. In Mangurtstan, Akhan Tokish deploys this strategy with precision, recontextualizing familiar lexical items to reflect the logic of a totalitarian regime. Words traditionally associated with positive values—such as freedom, nursing home, and new life—are stripped of their conventional meanings and reassigned new, often contradictory, interpretations that serve the state’s ideological apparatus.

The term freedom, for example, no longer signifies personal autonomy, moral agency, or civic liberty. Instead, it denotes conditional compliance with institutional norms. A citizen is considered “free” only insofar as they conform to the expectations and behavioral codes set by the regime. This reframing exploits the modality system described by Halliday’s interpersonal metafunction, whereby modal

verbs (e.g., must, should, can) are used to construct obligation or permission within institutional discourse. In Mangurtstan, freedom is modalized into a passive state—authorized but not chosen, granted but not lived.

Similarly, the phrase nursing home is repurposed as a euphemistic term for state-imposed isolation. In traditional Kazakh culture, caring for elders within the family is considered a sacred duty and cultural norm. In contrast, Mangurtstan enforces legal mandates that forbid multigenerational living, framing institutional separation as a form of “care.” The nominalization of social actions into abstract policy terms obscures the violence of such separations. Halliday emphasizes how nominalization can de-agentize and objectify experience, turning dynamic relationships into inert administrative categories.

The term new life—typically associated with rebirth, progress, or hope—is similarly inverted. Within the novel’s ideological framework, it signifies erasure: the elimination of past memories, traditional values, and personal identity. It is a “life” devoid of emotional, cultural, or historical substance. This inversion mirrors Orwellian doublespeak, where language is weaponized to mask oppression as progress. As Wodak ^[35] notes in her analysis of authoritarian discourse, such inversions serve to produce semantic opacity, making resistance difficult because the terms of critique have already been co-opted.

These strategic inversions generate cognitive dissonance in the reader. Familiar terms appear, but their meanings are uncannily altered. The surface legibility of the language clashes with the ideological subtext, forcing the reader into an active role of semantic negotiation. This process aligns with Fairclough’s model of discourse, in which meaning is not fixed but contested, shaped by power relations embedded in linguistic form. Tokish leverages this tension to expose how language, when centrally controlled, not only reflects ideology but becomes its most insidious instrument.

Ultimately, semantic inversion in Mangurtstan is not simply an aesthetic device; it is a mode of political critique. By reconstructing meaning at the lexical level, the novel dramatizes the fragility of language under authoritarian regimes. Words become hollow shells, their referents displaced, their values corrupted. Yet in this hollowness lies a challenge to the reader: to reclaim meaning through

critical awareness, and to recognize that linguistic distortion is often the first sign of ideological violence.

4.1.5. Linguistic Hybridity, Parody, and Cultural Alienation

One of the most striking examples of linguistic degradation in the novel is a song composed in a hybrid pseudo-language combining Kazakh, Russian, and English. This multilingual parody reflects not only code-mixing but also the semantic fragmentation of national identity. As Wodak notes ^[35], hybridity in language can both reflect cultural contact and serve as a site of ideological conflict. Here, the satirical form masks deeper anxieties: the reader is first amused, then unsettled by the absurdity of linguistic disintegration. The song's format—a rhymed, performative genre—intensifies its memorability while simultaneously functioning as social critique.

Through the systematic application of stylistic and discourse analysis models, *Mangurtstan* reveals itself as a linguistically rich dystopian narrative. The novel's strategic use of bureaucratic tone, emotional flattening, metaphor, inversion, and parody illustrates how language operates

as both an instrument of control and a space of resistance. By anchoring this analysis in established linguistic frameworks, the study not only interprets *Mangurtstan* as a literary work but also situates it within broader conversations on language, power, and ideology in post-Soviet dystopian discourse.

4.2. Theoretical Aspects of Dystopia (Purpose, Meaning, and Features of the Genre)

Turning to the findings of our research, four key questions were formulated regarding the theoretical aspects of the genre in order to assess respondents' basic knowledge about dystopia.

As illustrated in **Figure 1**, the survey revealed a striking lack of familiarity with the concept of dystopia among respondents. Only 19% of the 21 participants confidently recognized the term, while 9.5% reported limited awareness and a significant majority—71%—had no prior exposure to the genre. From a linguistic and cognitive standpoint, this finding is crucial: it suggests that dystopia as a term does not occupy an active or salient position within the mental lexicon or semantic field of most respondents.

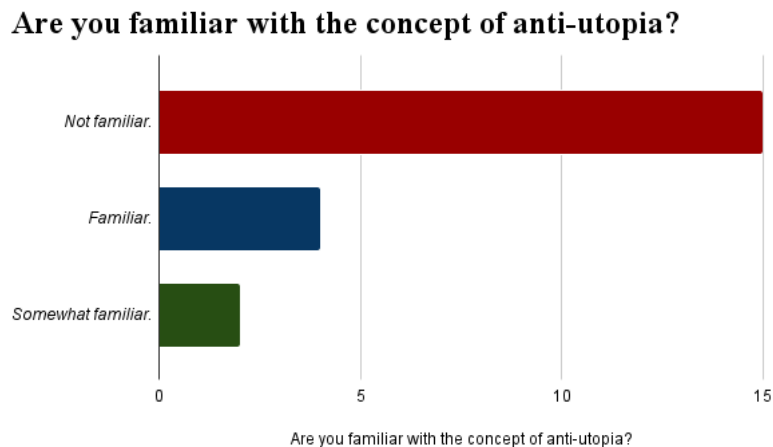


Figure 1. Reader's cognitive level (knowledge and familiarity).

This lack of conceptual grounding has important implications for the interpretation of the linguistic structures surrounding dystopian discourse. According to cognitive linguistics, the meaning of a term is not solely derived from dictionary definitions but is shaped by conceptual schemata, prototype theory, and semantic networks devel-

oped through experience and exposure. The minimal recognition of dystopia in the participants' responses implies a weak or underdeveloped schema, thereby affecting their ability to engage with or interpret genre-specific linguistic cues.

Moreover, the unfamiliarity with dystopia limits the

respondents' ability to recognize genre-specific lexical patterns, metaphorical constructs, or discourse features typically embedded in dystopian texts—such as semantic inversion, ideological euphemisms, or institutional jargon. As Halliday's ideational metafunction suggests, language reflects and constructs experiential reality. If the genre of dystopia is not part of the respondent's experiential framework, then the linguistic structures associated with it (e.g., terms like Big Brother, thoughtcrime, or surveillance) may fail to trigger the expected ideological and emotional resonance.

This informational and cognitive gap also reveals a broader sociolinguistic dynamic—namely, the marginal status of dystopian discourse in the literary consciousness of the surveyed demographic. Such absence has implications for literary pedagogy and discourse accessibility: if linguistic codes associated with dystopia are unfamiliar, the genre risks being semantically opaque or inaccessible to large segments of readers.

In this context, the low baseline familiarity is not merely a statistical result but a linguistic indicator of how

literary discourse circulates unevenly within cultural and educational systems. It calls attention to the unequal distribution of interpretive competence, which in turn influences how readers engage with the stylistic and ideological dimensions of literature.

Therefore, the findings underscore the necessity of integrating genre-specific discourse markers and conceptual literacy into educational frameworks. Only through increased exposure and explicit linguistic framing can readers develop the semantic readiness required to decode the complex textual practices of dystopian fiction.

As illustrated in **Figure 2**, a significant proportion of respondents (57.1%) selected “democratic society” as the defining feature of a dystopian world. This response is conceptually inconsistent with the core semantic attributes of the dystopian genre, and points to a deeper cognitive and semantic misalignment. From a linguistic standpoint, such misinterpretation suggests a misactivation of semantic frames and conceptual schemata associated with key genre terminology.

What are the characteristics typical of a society in a anti-utopia?

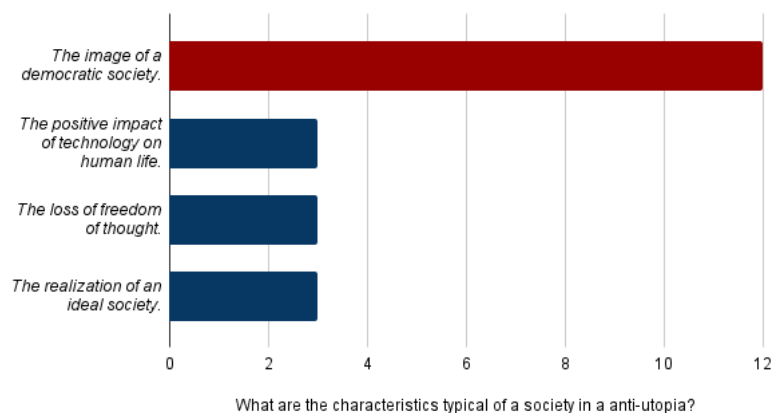


Figure 2. Question four.

The dystopian genre is fundamentally anchored in the conflict between individual freedom and systemic authority. At the heart of its semantic structure lies the erosion of thought autonomy, the suppression of critical consciousness, and the total regulation of behavior through surveillance and ideological conditioning. According to Halliday's ideational metafunction, language reflects not only external phenomena but also encodes experiential and

conceptual realities. When the term dystopia is semantically associated with democracy—its conceptual opposite—it reveals that respondents are not engaging with the established lexical field of dystopian discourse.

This interpretive deviation can be described through cognitive linguistics as a case of schema conflict or frame misapplication. Respondents activate a democratic schema (freedom, choice, rights) instead of the dystopian schema

(control, repression, fear), thereby misreading the genre's underlying ideological architecture. This dissonance between form and meaning also corresponds to semantic inversion—a key technique in dystopian fiction itself, where language is deliberately manipulated to invert truth and falsity, freedom and submission.

This dynamic is evident in canonical dystopian texts. In George Orwell's 1984, citizens of Oceania operate as mechanized units under totalitarian rule, stripped of agency and spontaneity, acting in accordance with reflexive obedience to Party doctrine ^[13]. Similarly, in Yevgeny Zamyatin's *We (Biz)*, the characters exist within a hyper-rationalized collective, deprived of individuality, critical faculties, and even emotional nuance ^[24,35]. These representations exemplify the de-individualization of discourse, where language becomes an instrument of depersonalization and uniformity.

The fact that a majority of respondents failed to identify loss of freedom of thought as a defining dystopian trait reveals not only a gap in literary familiarity but also a limited discursive literacy—an inability to map abstract genre concepts onto their corresponding linguistic and ideological markers. As Wodak notes ^[35], ideological language is often normalized and internalized through repetition and familiarity. When the respondents misattribute democra-

cy to dystopia, it may reflect a broader societal confusion about political language and genre categories, indicating the need for explicit instruction in genre-specific discourse structures.

In summary, the findings point to a linguistic-semantic deficit that hinders accurate genre recognition and interpretation. The responses demonstrate that without a well-developed semantic competence grounded in literary discourse, readers may invert or neutralize the ideological dimensions of key terms. For the dystopian genre – where linguistic manipulation is both thematic and structural – this misalignment holds significant implications for both reader reception and educational practice.

As illustrated in **Figure 3**, when asked to interpret the meaning of the symbol “Big Brother” from George Orwell's 1984, only 19% of respondents correctly identified it as totalitarian surveillance. Meanwhile, 38.1% described Big Brother as “the ideal leader of society”, and 28.3% associated it with “the care of a family member”. These results suggest that a majority of participants relied on surface-level semantic associations, rather than drawing from the intertextual or ideological context of the novel. This finding demonstrates a significant deficit in symbolic literacy and genre-specific semiotic competence.

What does the symbol of “Big Brother” represent in the novel 1984?

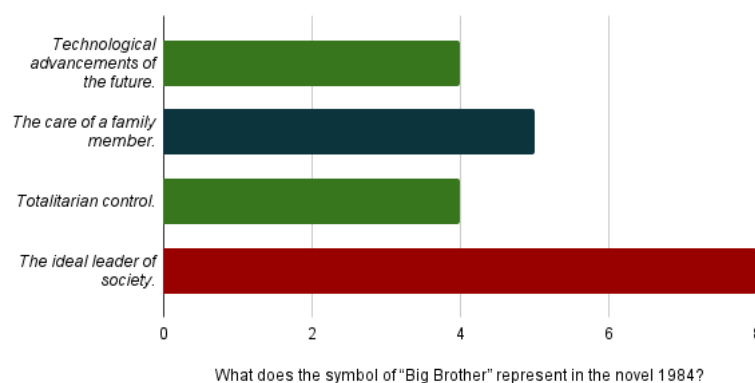


Figure 3. Question five.

From a semiolinguistic perspective, this misinterpretation reflects a disconnect between signifier and intended signified, indicating a failure to decode established dystopian iconography. In Orwell's novel, Big Brother functions

not merely as a fictional character, but as a metasymbol representing absolute state control and surveillance over thought, speech, and behavior ^[4]. The slogan “Big Brother is watching you” has entered global political discourse as

shorthand for the erosion of privacy and the omnipresence of ideological regulation.

According to Halliday's interpersonal metafunction, linguistic symbols encode social relationships and power dynamics. The incorrect associations with kinship and ideal leadership reveal that the respondents projected personal, culturally familiar meanings onto the term "Big Brother," bypassing its dystopian connotations. This suggests a semantic shift driven by associative cognition, whereby the term "brother" activates familiar emotional schemas (e.g., family, protection), while the socio-political implications of surveillance remain cognitively inactive.

This phenomenon may also be interpreted through cognitive linguistics as an example of prototype interference: respondents default to the most prototypical meaning of the lexical unit brother, leading to misclassification of the concept in a dystopian framework. This reinforces the idea that symbolic comprehension is not merely a matter of vocabulary, but of genre-specific discursive conditioning.

Furthermore, the responses point to a broader semiotic deficiency in understanding how symbols, metaphors, and signs operate within dystopian narratives. The symbol of Big Brother is central to the semiotic system of totalitarian discourse, wherein language and visual imagery are

weaponized to produce obedience, fear, and ideological conformity. As Wodak and Meyer^[26] argues, such symbols function as discursive triggers, anchoring emotional and cognitive responses to political authority. When these symbols are misunderstood or trivialized, the ideological critique embedded in the narrative is effectively neutralized.

Therefore, the findings from **Figure 3** underscore the need to develop semiotic awareness in literary interpretation. Without this skill, readers are unable to decode key markers of dystopian discourse, leading to fundamental misreadings of the genre. In educational terms, this highlights the importance of teaching genre-specific symbolic semantics—not just as literary devices, but as ideological mechanisms encoded in language.

As shown in **Figure 4**, responses to the question "What were the main factors that contributed to the emergence of the dystopian genre?" were distributed as follows: 42.9% of respondents selected "Scientific and technological progress," 28.6% chose "Wars and political regimes," 14.3% opted for "Economic crises," while only 14.3% correctly selected "All of the above". These results indicate a limited understanding among participants regarding the historical, socio-political, and cultural context that shaped the dystopian genre.

What were the main factors that influenced the emergence of the anti-utopian genre?

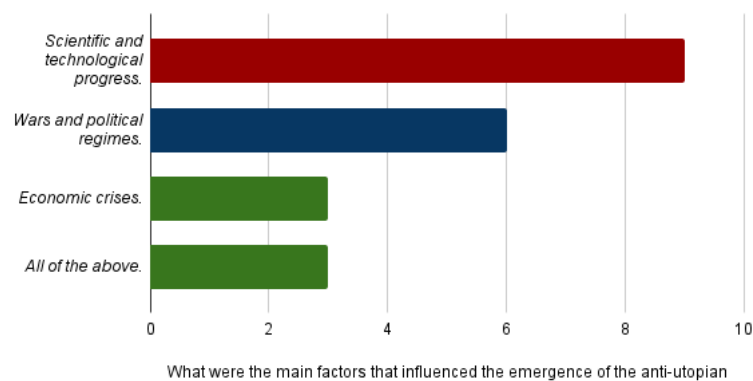


Figure 4. Question six.

From a linguistic perspective, such response patterns reflect a narrow semantic framing of the genre's conceptual field. Rather than recognizing the interplay of multiple factors, participants tended to isolate individual elements, revealing a kind of cognitive reductionism and discursive

fragmentation.

In classical dystopian literature, scientific advancement, authoritarian regimes, and economic disruption are often interwoven to create the oppressive systems portrayed in the narrative. For instance, in Yevgeny Zamy-

tin's We, citizens' lives are meticulously regulated by the "time tablet" (часовая скрижаль), a system that embodies the repurposing of technological order into a mechanism of dehumanization ^[36]. Here, language constructs technology not as a neutral tool but as a discursive device of control.

According to Halliday's ideational metafunction, such texts reveal how language encodes systemic power and institutional dominance. The lexical representation of concepts like "schedule," "order," and "calculation" illustrates how technological discourse can be restructured to normalize surveillance and conformity. This reflects semantic inversion, where progress is linguistically coded as oppression, and control is framed as efficiency.

As Wodak asserts ^[35], totalitarian discourse often appropriates scientific and bureaucratic language to legitimize ideological systems. Respondents' tendency to identify scientific progress as the primary cause of dystopia, without acknowledging its interdependence with political and economic factors, may reflect the surface-level uptake of such reframed discourses rather than a deeper analytical grasp.

Therefore, the results in **Figure 4** highlight participants' discursive limitations in recognizing the genre's multidimensional causality. This underscores the need for literary and linguistic pedagogy to move beyond thematic recognition toward a more nuanced analysis of how language mediates ideological constructs within genre formation.

4.3. The Poetics of Dystopia in Contemporary Kazakh Literature: A Textual Analysis

A significant example of dystopian content in Kazakh literature is *Mángúrtstan*, a novel by Aqtan Tókish ^[36]. To begin with, the title of the novel derives from the word "mángúrt," which historically referred to individuals whose cognitive abilities were destroyed through brutal practices such as having their heads bound tightly, a term originating in times of warfare ^[17,37]. Today, *mángúrt* has come to symbolize a society still trapped in mental enslavement and dependency.

The novel presents a dark vision of Kazakhstan's potential future. It opens with the release of the main character after spending 14 years and 9 months in a penal colony. One of the most striking features is the author's ability to

depict a convincingly dystopian atmosphere. Conditions in the colony are severe: inmates receive sentence extensions for reading books, gain five additional months for reading newspapers, and can face up to five years in prison for using a mobile phone – illustrating the oppressive regime's domination over the minds of its subjects.

In a comparative context, the group of self-supporters in *Mángúrtstan* mirrors the proles in Orwell's 1984. There is no unemployment in the country, and phenomena that seem absurd by today's standards are normalized in the novel. For example, when calling young people's phones, one hears sounds of incoming bombs, thunder, tiger growls, or galloping horses. These bizarre audio signals symbolize a deeply altered national consciousness or a population affected by ideological poisoning.

A notable parallel with foreign dystopias is the presence of the bank card system. Whereas in Y. Zamyatin's *Biz*, citizens' daily needs are provided via pink coupons, in *Mángúrtstan* the bank card serves a similar yet differently purposed function. It grants access to senior care homes, three meals a day, medical services, clothing, and public transportation.

Another consistent element of the dystopian genre—total surveillance—is vividly portrayed in *Mángúrtstan*:

"They have recorded the voices of the entire population. All phone conversations with your voice are stored in a database and added to your personal file" ^[33].

This passive compliance and the observational role of the populace align closely with the conventions of dystopian literature.

5. Conclusions

The linguistic and empirical analysis conducted in this study yields several key conclusions about the reception and understanding of dystopian literature among contemporary Kazakh readers, especially youth:

Semantic Invisibility of the Genre: The majority of respondents demonstrated low awareness or complete unfamiliarity with the concept of dystopia, indicating that the genre occupies a marginal position in the cognitive and cultural schemas of readers. This reflects a limited integration of global literary discourse into national literary education.

Discursive Misalignment with Genre-Specific Features: Participants often misidentified core characteristics of dystopian societies—such as totalitarian surveillance and loss of autonomy—as democratic or benevolent constructs. This reveals semantic dissonance and cognitive misalignment, suggesting that dystopia as a discursive formation is either misunderstood or conflated with unrelated socio-political frameworks.

Breakdown of Semiotic Recognition: The symbol of “Big Brother”, widely recognized in literary criticism as a metonym for totalitarian control, was often misread by respondents as a caring or ideal figure. This underscores a deficiency in semiotic literacy and highlights a surface-level engagement with metaphor and allegory in literary texts.

Fragmented Understanding of Genre Origins: The majority of participants attributed the rise of dystopian fiction to isolated factors—mainly scientific progress—failing to recognize the genre’s polycausal foundation in technological, political, and economic upheavals. This reflects not only a historical disconnect but also a narrow semantic framing of the genre’s evolution.

Linguistic Marginalization of National Dystopia: Aqtan Tókish’s *Máńgúrtstan*, a novel rich in linguistic hybridity and ideological inversion, remains largely unknown to readers. This signals a broader issue of literary visibility and suggests the need to introduce nationally produced dystopian texts into educational and cultural discourse.

From a linguistic perspective, the study affirms that dystopian texts rely on semantic inversion, bureaucratic discourse, and discursive flattening to construct ideological tension. Readers’ failure to recognize these strategies points to a gap in critical language awareness—a skill essential not only for literary interpretation but also for resisting ideological manipulation.

Thus, while the culture of reading and interpreting dystopia in Kazakhstan is still nascent, the findings also suggest a latent potential for growth. The emergence of curiosity, albeit accompanied by interpretive struggles, may signal the early formation of a more critical and linguistically literate readership capable of engaging with complex literary and political narratives.

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Informed Consent Statement

Informed consent was obtained from all subjects involved in the study.

Data Availability Statement

The experiment involved 21 healthy participants aged between 18 and 20. A week later, students voluntarily participated in a free experiment. The participants felt good during the experiment, and no one made any complaints about their health. The experiment was conducted in the computer room of building No.8 of Karaganda University named after Y.A. Buketov. The instructor familiarized the students with the purpose of the research work and the progress of the research. The research questions were compiled in Google Forms. There were no problems as to the research questions in the questionnaire. All the questions were related to dystopia..

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Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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