

**MSC 2020**  
**International Scientific and Practical Conference «MAN. SOCIETY.  
COMMUNICATION»**

**CATEGORY OF TIME IN MODERN ENGLISH WORKS OF THE  
DYSTOPIAN GENRE**

Oleg Alimuradov (a), Maria Gavrilova (b)\*  
\*Corresponding author

(a) Pyatigorsk State University, Pyatigorsk, Russian Federation Alimuole@mail.ru

(b) Pyatigorsk Medical and Pharmaceutical Institute – branch of Volgograd State Medical University, Pyatigorsk,  
Russian Federation, Gritsenkomaria@mail.ru

**Abstract**

The article presents the experience of reconstructing time category models represented in modern English-language works of the dystopian genre. This genre was selected because it has been gaining in popularity over the recent decades due to its predictive nature and because, according to their authors, the development of new technologies and circumstances has increased the likelihood of a totalitarian society. Several features distinguish modern dystopias from the “classic” examples of works of this genre. Existing approaches to the modelling of artistic time in modern linguistics and linguaphilosophy are summarized by analyzing the main philosophical theories on which linguistic views of time are based. Correlations between the categories of time and space, as well as between real and artistic time within the English-language dystopia are revealed. The place of dystopia in the space of English-language artistic discourse is determined and discussed, the boundaries of the genre in question are defined, and its main differential features are determined. Criteria for selecting lexical units that verbalize time in works of the dystopian genre, as well as an algorithm of textual analysis are presented. The main types of events that determine the direction of the temporal axis of dystopias are identified by analysing time verbalizers, their classification, and quantitative data.

2357-1330 © 2021 Published by European Publisher.

*Keywords:* Category, dystopia, models, structural, time, verbalization



## 1. Introduction

This article focusses on the category of time verbally represented in modern English-language dystopias particularly modeling the dystopian timeline. Works of the dystopian genre have gained great popularity over the past three decades, partly because some have been adapted into films. Another contribution to the popularity of the genre is environmental, social and economic problems that have emerged in the recent decades and which were largely predicted by dystopian authors.

Since dystopian stories are essentially speculative that evolve as a vision of the future, we hold that they cannot be studied adequately without focusing the research on the category of time. This category is one of the basic categories for many sciences, including linguistics (in particular, text linguistics). The status of the category of time has been researched by major philosophers throughout history and their theories laid the foundation for studying this category in other sciences. Our linguistic analysis also requires a philosophical approach to the problem as dystopias are based on a philosophical understanding of the authors' contemporary reality and events occurring in society, as well as the consequences of those events in the near and distant future.

In modern genre studies, there is a need to clearly define the boundaries of literary genres (including the genre of dystopia) and to identify their linguistic and discursive characteristics. As well as the high predictive potential of dystopian fiction, its ability to let the reader examine disaster scenarios and moral dilemmas without having to actually live through them, also justifies the relevance of the linguistic research of dystopias.

In our article we use examples from the following works: “The Hunger Games” by S.Collins, “Matched” by A. Condie, “The Maze Runner” by J. Dashner, “The Second Sleep” by R. Harris and “Divergent” by V. Roth.

## 2. Problem Statement

As the structure and the narrative strategies of dystopias are impossible to understand and analyze without understanding the dystopian time, we have set the following goals for our research:

1) identify the features of dystopia as a genre; 2) investigate the structure of the dystopian timeline listing the elements recurrent in various works the dystopian genre; 3) identify the main ways of verbalizing (explicitly and implicitly) the category of time in English-language dystopias.

## 3. Research Questions

In our work, we addressed the following questions:

- 1) is dystopia a separate genre, and, if so, what features distinguish it?
- 2) what role does the category of time play in dystopian texts?
- 3) what is the structure of the dystopian timeline?
- 4) how can the category of time be verbally represented in dystopian texts?

#### 4. Purpose of the Study

A comprehensive linguistic analysis of the structure of the dystopian timeline, as well as an analysis of ways of verbalizing the category of time in modern English-language dystopias of the late XX<sup>th</sup> – early XXI<sup>th</sup> centuries.

#### 5. Research Methods

To achieve the research objectives, we used the following general scientific and linguistic methods: the method of analysis, the method of modeling, the method of definition analysis, the method of field structuring of lexical units.

#### 6. Findings

The scientific community has not yet reached a consensus on the status and methods of modeling the category of time, which roughly explains the plurality of approaches to the category of time in various scientific fields. The modern vision of time is rooted in the ideas of Aristotle and Plotinus. The analysis of various philosophical concepts allows us to build a basis for a linguistic understanding of time and particularly to identify regularities in the realization of the category of time in fiction. In our opinion sir Isaac Newton's statement that "time flows, but space is stationary" (Mirgorodsky, 2005, p. 2) is relevant for developing an understanding of time as a textual category. Consequently, we can view textual "space" as a more or less static category, whereas time is a more dynamic category that ensures the progression of the text. This determines the necessity to differentiate these categories in dystopian texts, although space and time are now mostly viewed as an indivisible whole, the *chronotop* (*хрономон* in Russian) (Bakhtin, 2002; Halperin, 2006).

When it comes to dystopias, we are certain that time is more productively studied as a separate category in this genre because the dystopian story is born and evolves mainly due to its specific timeline. In our opinion, it is the temporal text structure that helps to determine whether a text belongs to a specific functional style or genre. Therefore, the category of time is a genre-forming feature in many cases, with the location being far less relevant for the story progression.

Some of the temporal structures that we have identified in dystopias are best explained through the theories of I. Kant and M. Heidegger, for example, the idea that time in the text can go not only linearly and prospectively, but also follow a non-linear and retrospective path since "artistic time" has more properties and characteristics than "real time" (as cited in Gaidenko, 2003).

The cognitive-linguistic understanding of time as a concept is based also on ideas put forward and verified by representatives of exact sciences. Physicists have concluded that time has is related to the observer who measures it; time has become more subjective (Hawking, 2016). If this is the case, a position can be argued that there are three planes making up artistic time: those of the author, the reader and of a character. Time passing differently for each. Therefore, the structure of the general timeline model for a work of fiction can be quite complex. At the same time, it is important to keep in mind that initially the fictitious world passes through the prism of the author's consciousness.

Dystopian fiction is marked by artistic time. Artistic time is a complex concept that includes textual time, plot time, the author's time, characters' time, and readers' time, as represented by both linguistic (lexical-grammatical) and extra-linguistic language means. It has a wider range of properties than the time we are familiar with in the real world.

The above allows us to talk about structural models of time. Currently, there are five main models of the category of time found in fiction: cyclic, linear, retrospective, prospective, and the multi-variant plot model (Bondarenko, 2009; Pen'kova, 2018). Our research shows that for dystopia the linear model with one or more retrospective inclusions (flashbacks) seems to be most typical. This model can also be marked by some elements of cyclicality.

In order to determine the place of dystopia in the system of genres of modern English-language fiction, we analyzed the multitude of fiction genres and concluded that dystopia is a sub-genre of social fiction. A number of reasons justifies such a conclusion. There is an obvious element of science fiction in dystopias because most of them take place in the future, quite often in some distant future. However, dystopias cannot be ascribed solely as science fiction because they focus mainly on contemporary *social* issues, such as social inequality, hunger, religious control, environmental racism, overpopulation, etc. Although dystopia has its origins in utopia (Zhurkova, 2018; Zhurkova & Khomutnikova, 2019), we contend that such differential features as prospectivity, anthropocentrism, a typical set of characters, the concealment of history, total government control (quite often manifested in a policing language), as well as the division of the dystopian timeline by a certain event into "before" and "after", are reasons to consider dystopia as a separate literary genre.

Most dystopias touch upon issues involving personal and/or social morals, ethics and emotions (Dossanova & Nurmahanova, 2015; Gavrilova, 2018). Therefore, the categorial structure of dystopian fiction basically contains three correlating types of categories: ethical, moral and emotive. Time seems to be the meta-category that allows ethical/moral/emotional dilemmas to aggravate, come to a climax and eventually find a resolution.

One of the basic emotive categories found in dystopias is fear, e.g.: (1) "Thomas *was almost more afraid of* their surprise visitor *than he was of the Grievors* just outside the window".

The (meta-)category of time is located on the border of linguistic and extra-linguistic categories and closely correlates with such dystopian categories as the image of the author, the textual space, coherence and cohesion, completeness, creativity, as well as fear and conscience.

The timelines of modern English-language dystopias consist of a number of key events that form nodes on these lines. One such node is the *divortional point* (our term – *M.G., O.A.*) that divides all the events of the dystopia into "before" and "after" this point. Divortional points have both a plot-forming and genre-forming function. On the one hand, such points are starting points for the development of the plot, even if they are not represented explicitly (they may be hinted at through character reminiscences, as in "The Hunger Games", or they may be mentioned vaguely by some of the characters while trying to explain the course of other events, as in "The Maze Runner"). On the other hand, a divortional point on the timeline is a differential feature of dystopia as a genre. Such a point is usually A global disaster, such as a pandemic or global conflict. For example, in "The Second Sleep", this point is *the Apocalypse*: (2) "The *period before the Apocalypse*, not the present, was an old man's obsession...".

It was the event that divided the timeline (or the temporal axis) and became the basis for the formation of a whole new society where the main events of the novel take place.

We have developed a classification of key events that constitute the timelines (temporal axes) of dystopias. Such events can be *sincontinual* (our term– *M.G., O.A.*), *complex*, or *events-lacunae* (our term– *M.G., O.A.*). It is the events-lacunae that are important for the formation of the temporal structure of a dystopian work, since these events help the main plot to unfold, while they are often described implicitly. Events-lacunae can also form *secondary* timelines (temporal axes). This, for example, occurs in “The Maze Runner” where we have identified three secondary temporal axes, mainly represented by events-lacunae. These events are implicitly verbalized in two main ways. Firstly, by lexical units that have implicit semantics (Alimuradov, 2006) of time that become explicit in the third and subsequent steps of the definition analysis as in the following example: (3) “**You’ve been sent to the Glade, Greenie, and we’ll be expectin’ ya to survive and help us do what we’ve been sent here to do**”.

In (3) the author uses Present Perfect Passive Voice form to lead the reader to believe that the characters are not in the Maze by choice and there are people who sent them there. Also, it indicates that the action began in the past, but we might not know when and by whom. The verb *send* reveals the semantics of time: **1. send** – to cause or order (a person or thing) to be taken, directed, or **transmitted** to another place;  **2. transmit** – to **pass** or cause to go from one place or person to another; transfer;  **3. pass** – if you **pass** a period of **time** in a particular way, you spend it in that way (Collins English Dictionary).

The second way of representing events-lacunae in dystopian fiction is by lexical units, whose semantic correlation with time is only revealed with a broad context in mind.

Secondary temporal axes can also be verbalized by some explicit lexis. Let's look at the following example: (4) “*What this means is that **they’re watching us**,*” Minho said. “*Just like they **did** in the Maze*”.

This example illustrates how the progression of the secondary timeline connected with the organization that built “The Maze” affected the events of the main timeline of the story and even became its starting point. The speaker explicitly states that the organization whose regular practice is spying on people (“the presence of observers or a character tracking system” is a recurrent dystopian feature) also created the Maze.

Working with dystopian texts, we developed a general algorithm that allowed us to identify the main trends in the verbalization of the category of time in the genre under analysis. The first step of this algorithm was the selection of lexical units (LU) that reflect the events of the main and secondary temporal axes. The analysis and selection of basic lexical and syntactic units became the second step of the research in this direction. During the third step, time verbalizers were divided into two main groups: explicit and implicit. Each type of verbalizer has a specific function. Explicit verbalizers are used to describe timeline properties (for example, duration): (5) “The supplies come up *at the same time every week*. Hey, look.”

In this example, in addition to duration, a cyclical element is represented with the help of the lexical units *at the same time* and *every*.

Many implicit verbalizers name events. For example, the LU *Maze* is an implicit verbalizer of time, since it marks the period when the characters stayed in the Maze, and we also see a number of events “before the Maze” and “after the Maze”: (6) “Though he’d only gotten back some of his memories, he sensed that he and she had maybe even been more than friends **before the Maze**”.

Our analysis shows that many timeline models constructed on the basis of modern English-language dystopias have a similar structure and enjoy mostly implicit verbal representation.

For example, space/location-denoting lexis used in dystopias in certain positions can be interpreted as verbalizing time, whereas the opposite is not possible. For example, these are names of cities, countries, or buildings that up to a certain point had one name, but after some events (usually after a divortional point) came to be known differently, as in the following example: (7) “The building that **was once called the Sears Tower—we call it the Hub**—emerges from the fog, a black pillar in the skyline”.

In (7), the LU *Sears Tower* in combination with *once called* acquires the semantics of time. The old name, therefore, is a reference to a whole epoch that was cut short by some divortional event or events. Such contexts serve to corroborate our hypothesis that the categories of time and space, though closely connected in fiction in general, should be considered separately when analyzing dystopias.

One more very important element of the dystopian timeline is flashbacks, both positive and negative, which are usually launched by various triggers; for example, in “The Hunger Games” the characters plunge into flashbacks after coming in contact with various items that act as such triggers: (8) “He stops to gather a bunch of **wildflowers** for me. When he presents them, I work hard to look pleased. Because he can’t know that the **pink and white flowers are the tops of wild onions** and only **remind me of the hours I’ve spent gathering them with Gale**”.

In (8) the trigger is represented by LU *wildflowers, pink and white flowers, the tops of wild onions*, while the flashback itself is represented explicitly by the verb *remind*.

Another important element of the temporal structure of dystopian novels is the dreams of the main characters WHICH serve various purposes. For example, in “The Maze Runner”, they reveal past events and show what led to the development of the main storyline. The main character participated in the development of the Maze where he eventually found himself, and whose riddle he must solve in order to pass further tests. All this information he learnt from his dreams. Thus, the author attaches great importance to dreams in the construction of the temporal structure of the novel: (9) “Once again, he **dreamed**. He’s a little older **this time**, probably **seven or eight**”.

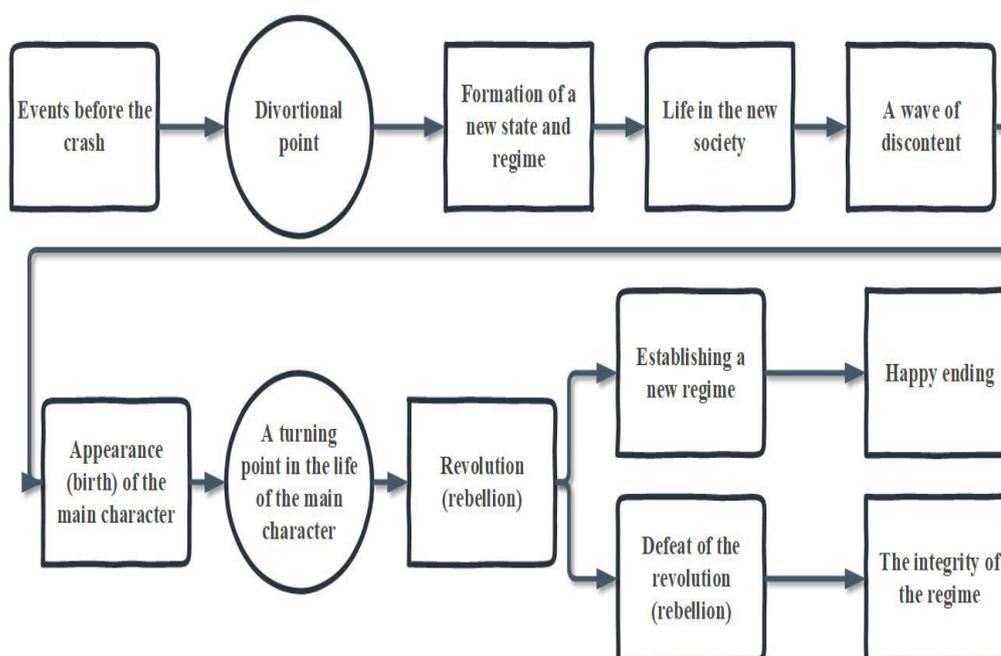
In (9), LU *this time* shows that the main character has recurrent dreams, and they occur in a certain chronological order.

One more curious element of the dystopian story is the substances that affect the minds of the character. We argue that such substances also serve as a component of the dystopian temporal structure because they change the main characters’ perception of reality and thus affect the course and speed of time progression for them. For example, in “Matched”, such a substance is red pills. Every citizen in society has three pills: a green one for a daily sedative, a blue one to sustain a person for several days without food, and a red one whose function is not revealed until the end of the novel. There is a lot of speculation in society about what this pill can do. We finally discover that it erases the last twelve hours of a person’s memory, changing his perception of the passage of time as in the following extract from the novel: (10) “**All it does is clear your mind. Of course. I know now why we’re going to take them. So we forget what happened to Ky, so we forget that the Enemy is winning the war in the Outer Provinces, that the villagers there are all dead. And I realize why they didn’t have us take the tablets when something happened to the**

*first Markham boy: because we needed to remember how dangerous Anomalies can be. <...> What story will we all believe instead of his true one? ”.*

As we can see in (10), with the help of the red pill, the government controls the minds of citizens, eradicating inconvenient moments from their memory. The red pills affect the perception of reality by those who take them. A significant period of time is erased, the passage of time is temporarily interrupted for the characters and later the authorities replace these memories. The substitution of memories and management of the past are important signs of the totalitarian regime of the dystopian society; those signs affect the dystopian timeline.

Generalizing the experience of modeling the temporal axes of contemporary dystopias, we have put together the key events that constitute the temporal axis of most dystopias in the form of a scheme (Figure 01).



**Figure 1.** Dystopian temporal axis

## 7. Conclusion

Time is a concept that will probably always interest scholars. The special attention of linguists to the category of time is explained by the need to identify the essence of this category in relation to language and text and to determine how “the time of objective reality” and “the time of reality of the text” relate.

Time is a genre and plot-forming category for contemporary English-language dystopias, and is represented in a number of peculiar ways. Generally, we hold that the genre in which the author decides to work determines how he will build the temporal axis in his text.

Time in dystopias characteristically has two periods and a “divortional point” separating the timeline. The second feature of the genre is that dystopias often describe A possible future FOR humanity and thus act as a warning.

The texts of modern English-language dystopias have properties typical of most literary texts, such as coherence, integrity, cohesion, etc., as well as properties typical of texts belonging to a particular genre:

building tension, invented language, character flashbacks, etc. Recurrent in dystopian texts are such extralinguistic categories as CHOICE, DUTY, FEAR, LOVE, etc. integrated into a complete system with the help of the category of time.

In general, the temporal dystopian structure contains the following components that may be considered obligatory: a divortional point (indicated explicitly or implicitly), flashbacks, triggers setting off flashbacks, regular or irregular dreams that may substitute flashbacks or add to their effect, the manipulation of tense-aspect forms and an emphasis on temporal transitions with the help of stylistic devices.

This analysis of dystopian texts shows that the *explicit* verbalizers of time fall within the following percentage distribution: 1) prepositions and temporal conjunctions – 37%; 2) LU nominating time measurements – 32%; 3) phrases with the noun *time* – 18%; 4) nouns and noun-phrases indicating the time of day – 9%; 5) periphrases – 4%.

The *implicit* verbalizers of time in dystopias show the following percentage distribution: 1) verb forms – 35%; 2) nouns – 32%; 3) combinations *noun+noun* – 10%; 4) author's coinages – 8%; 5) combinations *verb form+locative* – 8%; 6) combinations *noun+locative* – 5%; 7) triggers represented by various parts of speech – 2%.

The analysis of the temporal structure of contemporary English-language dystopias demonstrates that the category of time is significant. For their authors, time is a tool for creating additional tension in the plot, allowing them to show the uncertain position of the characters and, thereby emphasizing the mystery and unpredictability of the events to come.

## References

- Alimuradov, O. A. (2006). Lingvisticheskij smysl kak fenomen, proizvodnyj ot znacheniya [Linguistic Meaning as a Phenomenon Derived from Meaning]. *Pyatigorsk State Linguistic University Bulletin*, 4, 5-20.
- Bakhtin, M. M. (2002). *Problemy poetiki Dostoevskogo* [Problems of Dostoevsky's poetics]. Russian dictionaries.
- Bondarenko, I. V. (2009). 'Model' vremeni' kak instrument analiza dual'noj sushchnosti vremeni, realizovannoj v yazyke i diskurse ["Time Model" as a Tool of Analysing Dual Essence of Time Implemented in Language and Discourse]. *Voprosy Kognitivnoy Lingvistiki* [Issues of Cognitive Linguistics], 20(3), 59-65.
- Dossanova, A. Z., & Nurmahanova, J. B. (2015). Otsenochnaya kategorizatsiya npravstvennyh ponyatij na osnove otsenochnyh predikatov «HOROSHO - PLOHO» [Evaluative Categorization of Moral Actions, Concepts Based on the Evaluative Predicates GOOD - BAD]. *Voprosy Kognitivnoy Lingvistiki* [Issues of Cognitive Linguistics], 42(1), 50-54.
- Gaidenko, P. P. (2003). Problema vremeni u Kanta: vremena kak apriornaya forma chuvstvennosti i vnevremennost' veshchej v sebe [Kant's Problem of Time: Time as a Priori form of Sensuality and the Timelessness of Things in Themselves]. *Voprosy filosofii* [Russian Studies in Philosophy], 9, 134-150. [in Rus.]
- Gavrilova, M. B. (2018). Kategorial'naya sistema, reprezentiruemaya v sovremennyh angloyazychnyh proizvedeniyah zhanra antiutopii [Categorial System Represented in Modern English-language Dystopias]. *Aktual'nye problemy filologii i pedagogiceskoj lingvistiki* [Current Issues In Philology And Pedagogical Linguistics], 3(31), 149-162. [in Rus.]
- Halperin, I. R. (2006). *Tekst kak ob"ekt lingvisticheskogo issledovaniya* [Text as an Object of Linguistic Research]. KomKniga.

- Hawking, S. (2016). *A Brief History of Time*. Random house.
- Mirgorodsky, A. I. (2005). Sootnoshenie neopredelennostej prostranstva i vremeni [The Ratio of the Uncertainties of Space and Time]. <http://mirgorodsky.ru/sootnoshenie-neopredelyonnostey-prostranstva-i-vremeni/>
- Pen'kova, Y. A. (2018). Ot retrospektivnosti k prospektivnosti: grammatikalizaciya predbudushchego v yazykah Evropy [From Retrospective to Prospective: Grammaticalization of Future Anterior in the Languages of Europe]. *Voprosy Jazykoznanija* [Topics in the Study of Language], 2. 53-70.
- Zhurkova, M. S. (2018). Meaning Level of the Text and the Way to its Analysis. *The European Proceedings of Social and Behavioural Sciences*, XXXIX, 482-488. <http://doi.org/10.15405/epsbs.2018.04.02.68>
- Zhurkova, M. S., & Khomutnikova, E. A. (2019). The Genesis of Dystopian Meaning Structure and its Relation to Utopian Literary Tradition. *Advances in Social Science, Education and Humanities Research*, 298, 186-190.