



A Critical Examination of Language Attitudes in the Novel *Run and Hide* by Pankaj Mishra

Abida Parveen¹ & Dr. Durr-e-Nayab²

¹PhD Scholar, Department of English, The Women University Multan, Punjab, Pakistan,
Email: abidasohail112017@gmail.com

²Assistant Professor, Department of English, The Women University Multan, Punjab, Pakistan,
Email: durrenayab@wum.edu.pk

ARTICLE INFO

Article History:

Received:	April	15, 2025
Revised:	May	16, 2025
Accepted:	May	27, 2025
Available Online:	June	03, 2025

Keywords:

Novel, thematic analysis, Fairclough model, language attitudes and social inequalities.

Corresponding Author:

Dr. Durr-e-Nayab

Email:

durrenayab@wum.edu.pk

ABSTRACT

This research seeks to explore the intricate relationship between language attitudes and social inequalities in the context of the novel Run and Hide by Pankaj Mishra. Hence, the main objective is to reveal the way language in this particular novel seems to be as a symbol of power, class and identity within the boundaries of sociopolitical landscape of contemporary India to highlight the way a language can be shaped by social hierarchies. However, the second objective is to reveal how the narrative of this novel seems to critique social inequalities that a language can bring with. Fairclough (1989) approach of critical discourse has been employed as the framework of this study. Hence, the data has been analyzed under the lens of thematic analysis. The findings revealed an individual's access to power and resources is often mediated by their linguistic proficiency, which can either facilitate or hinder their ability to succeed within a hierarchical social structure.



Introduction

It is widely acknowledged that language plays a crucial role in shaping social structures, influencing individual identities, and maintaining power dynamics within societies. Hence, the relationship between language and social inequality has been a central concern in several sociolinguistic studies, with scholars examining how linguistic practices seem to contribute to the perpetuation or disruption of power hierarchies. In the context of South Asia, a region marked by linguistic diversity, historical colonialism, and complex social stratifications, the role of language in reinforcing social inequalities becomes even more pronounced.

South Asia, encompassing countries like India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nepal, and Sri Lanka, is home to hundreds of languages, many of which are associated with distinct social, cultural, and ethnic groups. In this multilingual context, language often acts as a marker of social identity, demarcating boundaries between different communities. The colonial legacy of the British Empire further complicated these dynamics, as English became the language of power, governance, and elite status, while indigenous languages were relegated to subordinate positions. As a result, the societal value of languages in South Asia is not only determined by their linguistic features but also by their social, political, and economic functions. This uneven distribution of linguistic prestige has led to a hierarchy of languages, where languages associated with higher social classes, education, and political power are regarded as more prestigious than those spoken by marginalized groups (Kachru, 1983).

The role of language in creating and maintaining social inequality is a theme that is widely explored in South Asian literature. Literary works often depict the struggles of marginalized communities whose voices are suppressed or misrepresented in the mainstream linguistic and social discourse. These texts reveal how language can serve as both a tool for empowerment and a mechanism of exclusion. For instance, in India, literature in regional languages like Hindi, Tamil, or Bengali often highlights the tension between local and national identities, where the language spoken by the upper class or the dominant group is seen as a means of achieving social mobility (Nair, 1994). In contrast, indigenous languages and dialects are often linked to lower social status, further entrenching divisions based on caste, ethnicity, and class.

In the same way, in Pakistan, the dominance of Urdu and English over regional languages such as Sindhi, Pashto, and Balochi mirrors similar power dynamics. English, in particular, has become the language of the elite, government, and higher education, while the regional languages are marginalized in the public sphere. Pakistani literature, especially that written in Urdu and English, frequently engages with these linguistic inequalities, exploring how they affect social relationships, individual aspirations, and the collective consciousness of various communities (Bokhari, 2004). In literary works, characters' attitudes toward language—whether they are striving for upward mobility through English or resisting the dominance of Urdu—often reflect broader social tensions. Such depictions highlight the intersection of language, class, and power, revealing how language attitudes are shaped by social inequalities.

In addition to the effects of colonialism and language hierarchy, caste, class, and gender also intersect with language use in South Asian societies. In India, for example, the use of certain languages or dialects is deeply entwined with caste-based identity, with lower-caste individuals often relegated to speaking languages or dialects considered less prestigious (Omvedt, 2001). These caste-based divisions are further complicated by the intersection of gender, as women in marginalized communities face double discrimination based on both their social class and their gender. In this context, the language spoken by women—particularly those from lower castes or rural areas—is often regarded as less refined or less authoritative than that of upper-caste men. South Asian literature frequently exposes these layered inequalities, offering critical reflections on the role of language in perpetuating gendered and caste-based discrimination.

The exploration of language attitudes in South Asian literature also extends to the postcolonial period, where the legacy of colonial language policies continues to influence contemporary linguistic practices. The question of language choice in postcolonial literature—whether to write in the colonial language (e.g., English) or in an indigenous language—remains a contentious issue. Postcolonial authors often grapple with the complexities of linguistic identity, negotiating between the language of the colonizer and the language of their people. This tension is evident in the works of writers like Salman Rushdie, Arundhati Roy, and Kamala Das, whose works explore the

tensions between English and native languages, reflecting the continuing influence of colonialism on postcolonial identity formation (Rushdie, 1981; Roy, 1997). The choice of language in these literary works becomes a symbol of both resistance and accommodation, reflecting the broader societal struggles over cultural autonomy, national identity, and social justice.

Hence, this research seeks to explore the relationship between language attitudes and social inequalities in the particular work of a south Asian writer Pankaj Mishra to examine how literary works reflect, challenge, or perpetuate social divisions based on language use.

Statement of the Problem

Language plays a crucial role in shaping social identities and power dynamics within the boundaries of a country. Hence, through this particular research study, the researcher is determined to explore the relationship between language and class and how language becomes a cause to lead social inequalities in the context of the novel *Run and Hide* by Pankaj Mishra. Apparently, there is a less amount of work that has been on the thematic representation of language attitudes and their possible influence on social hierarchies in terms of contemporary South Asian Literature. Hence, the present study aims to fill this gap by analysing how the characters the language choices of the characters of this particular novel mirror societal inequalities on broader level such as caste and class. So, the study aims to provide insight how a language can be a tool for social exclusion and power empowerment.

Research Objectives

1. To explore the way language structures power dynamics in the the novel *Run and Hide* by Pankaj Mishra.
2. To examine the impact of language attitudes on the social mobility and opportunities of marginalized groups in the particular novel.

Research Questions

1. How language seems to structure power dynamics in the context of the novel *Run and Hide* by Pankaj Mishra?
2. What sort of impact language attitudes seem to leave on the social mobility and opportunities of marginalized groups?

Significance of the Study

This research is significant for several reasons. First, it highlights the role of language as a medium through which power dynamics and social inequalities are enacted and reproduced. By examining the attitudes toward language in *Run and Hide*, the research provides an insight into how literary works reflect and critique real-world social structures. Second, this analysis contributes to the field of sociolinguistics, particularly in understanding how language can perpetuate or challenge social hierarchies in post-colonial and contemporary societies. Lastly, it will help to raise awareness about the often-overlooked role of language in shaping social identities and inequalities, contributing to more inclusive and equitable discourses.

Literature Review

Mukherjee, (2018) His characters reflect the ambivalence toward linguistic capital, as they strive to assimilate into global elite circles while grappling with the alienation from their native cultural roots. Such narratives underscore the role of language attitudes in reinforcing social inequalities, particularly in the neoliberal era.

Abbas and Iqbal (2018) observed the attitudes of Pakistani youth towards Urdu, English and Punjabi language through their qualitative research. There were 445 students in population. Moreover, the study adopted the mentalist approach and used questionnaire as the data collection tool. The data was analysed under the lens of SPSS along with descriptive and inferential statistics. The findings revealed integrative motivation among students towards Urdu and Punjabi and instrumental motivation with English language along with a sense of superiority.

Garrett (2010) highlight the intersection of language attitudes with power dynamics, emphasizing that these attitudes often reinforce social inequalities. In the South Asian context, where linguistic diversity intersects with class, caste, and gender, language attitudes become a powerful tool to maintain or challenge existing hierarchies (Annamalai, 2005). Pankaj Mishra's *Run and Hide* offers a fertile ground to critically examine these intersections, as it captures the nuances of language, identity, and power struggles in post-globalization India.

Didur (2009) conducted a quantitative research on Mishra's novel entitled *The Romantics* within a objective to explore the protagonist's struggle to reconcile diverse cultural influences in his personal life with a political context dealing with Hindu identity in late 1980s and early 20th century in India. However, the findings observed the uneven effects of modernity on Indian society in the midst of escalating violence in the late 20th century.

Research Methodology

The research is based on qualitative method due to its potential to enable the researchers to get an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon under their investigation. Pankaj Mishra's novel *Run and Hide* has been the source of data. Meanwhile, the researcher has selected a particular sample related to the topic from this particular novel by employing purposive sampling technique. However, thematic analysis method has been utilized while analysing the data.

Data Analysis

Language as an Expression of Identity

Beyond its role in signaling social class, language in *Run and Hide* is also a powerful tool for expressing personal and cultural identity. The protagonist Arun's language choices throughout the narrative reflect his inner conflict and negotiation of multiple identities. On the one hand, he is drawn to the elite's language—formal, English-based, and cosmopolitan—because it symbolizes power, education, and a route to social elevation. On the other hand, his connection to his roots and his family's regional language remains strong, even though this language is associated with a lower social status in the broader societal context.

Mishra carefully constructs the protagonist's interactions with both English and native languages to show how language can be a site of tension and negotiation. The protagonist's use of English in certain contexts—especially in formal settings—may be seen as an attempt to assimilate into a more privileged class, but it also alienates him from his cultural heritage. This tension reveals the double-edged nature of language as both a tool for social mobility and a barrier to authentic self-expression. The novel thus explores how language not only reflects identity but also shapes it, influencing the protagonist's sense of belonging and his relationships with others.

Language and Ethnicity: A Subtle Hierarchy

In the context of the particular novel, ethnicity plays a significant role in shaping how language is perceived and valued. The novel portrays ethnic minorities whose languages, accents, or dialects

are often viewed with prejudice by the dominant groups. For example, characters from rural or ethnic minority backgrounds frequently find themselves at a disadvantage due to the way their speech is perceived as “inferior” or “uncultured.” These characters may struggle to navigate spaces where the “standard” language is a symbol of power, wealth, and education, but their linguistic styles, shaped by their cultural heritage, carry stigmas that marginalize them.

Mishra uses these ethnic divisions to critique social inequalities based on both class and ethnicity. The novel subtly shows that linguistic discrimination is not only an issue of class but also one of ethnicity, as people from minority ethnic groups are doubly disadvantaged—by both their economic position and their ethnic identity. This intersection of class and ethnicity through language underscores the multilayered nature of social inequalities in contemporary South Asia, where language acts as both a marker and a tool of exclusion.

The Role of Language in Shaping Social Relationships

Throughout the novel, Mishra illustrates how language influences the nature of relationships, both personal and professional. The protagonist’s interactions with friends, mentors, and adversaries are all shaped by their respective linguistic registers. The disparities in the ways characters use language mirror the power dynamics in these relationships. For example, characters who speak in a polished, formal manner often assume positions of power and authority, while those who speak informally or with a regional accent are treated as subordinate or less important.

This power dynamic is particularly evident in the protagonist’s relationship with a mentor figure, whose refined speech marks him as a gatekeeper to higher social and educational opportunities. The protagonist’s attempts to “fit in” by adapting his language use highlight the ways in which language can be both an instrument of social aspiration and a tool of subjugation. This thematic element underscores the significance of language not just as a tool for communication, but as a subtle enforcer of societal hierarchies.

Language and Social Exclusion

One of the most poignant aspects of *Run and Hide* is the portrayal of language as a barrier to social inclusion. Characters who speak English with regional accents or in non-standard dialects find themselves excluded from prestigious circles, denied opportunities, or marginalized in their pursuit of social mobility. This social exclusion, driven by linguistic prejudice, parallels broader systemic inequalities that affect individuals from less privileged backgrounds.

Mishra illustrates that while language can be a source of power for those who master the “correct” form of speech, it can also be a source of profound exclusion for those who do not. The protagonist’s journey reflects this struggle as he attempts to navigate a world where language is both a means of survival and a determinant of one’s place in society.

Language as a Political Tool

Finally, Mishra portrays language as a political tool used to assert dominance and control. Throughout the novel, characters manipulate language to assert authority, challenge social norms, or resist oppression. The language of protest, of dissent, and of rebellion is subtly embedded within the narrative, highlighting the ways in which language can be a force for social change. For instance, characters who resist the hegemonic linguistic norms—by speaking their native language or challenging the linguistic expectations of power—embody a form of resistance that reflects the broader political landscape of South Asia.

The political significance of language in the novel extends beyond personal interactions, touching on national and global issues. Mishra uses the protagonist's experiences with language to highlight how linguistic politics are intertwined with issues of national identity, globalization, and the fight for social justice. The novel's critique of linguistic hierarchies invites readers to consider the role of language in broader struggles for equality and recognition.

Findings and Discussion

The novel under this investigation can be perceived as an intricate portrayal of how language can be used as a tool of social distinction and a reflection of deeply entrenched societal hierarchies. The themes of power, identity, and marginalization unfold through the characters' experiences, where language plays a significant role in reinforcing or challenging social inequalities.

One of the most significant findings in this analysis is the way language in *Run and Hide* serves as a powerful marker of social class. The characters who speak in English are portrayed as being part of the urban elite, with access to wealth, privilege, and modernity, while those speaking in regional dialects or vernacular languages are marginalized or ignored. The protagonist, who comes from a lower socio-economic background, experiences both an aspiration to adopt the language of power (English) and a simultaneous alienation from it. This linguistic stratification reflects the way society has historically divided itself along class lines, where English, as a colonial legacy, continues to serve as a symbol of power and social mobility.

Language also plays a central role in shaping the national identity and, consequently, the social inequalities that arise within the nation. Mishra's novel explores the tensions between those who use Hindi or regional languages and those who use English, with the former group often facing systemic neglect. This linguistic divide mirrors the post-colonial struggle in India, where English is perceived as the language of globalization and progress, while indigenous languages are relegated to the margins.

Mishra, through his characters, critiques the dominance of English in the spheres of politics, education, and business. The novel highlights how individuals from rural or working-class backgrounds often face discrimination due to their inability to master the language that has become synonymous with success in the modern world. The protagonist's struggle to reconcile his regional identity with the demand for English fluency underscores the difficulty in navigating the demands of a globalized society while staying connected to one's roots. The novel makes it clear that those who cannot speak English are often excluded from the opportunities and privileges afforded to those who do, reinforcing the social inequality tied to language.

Mishra subtly critiques how language is used as a tool to reinforce patriarchal structures within Indian society. The expectations placed on women to speak in a particular way reflect the broader societal expectation for women to conform to certain roles. The novel highlights how language can be a reflection of gendered power dynamics, where men's language is seen as more valid or dominant, while women's speech is often marginalized or dismissed as unimportant. This creates an additional layer of inequality, as women's voices are suppressed not just by social systems but also by the linguistic norms imposed on them.

Conclusion

Pankaj Mishra's *Run and Hide* offers a nuanced examination of how language attitudes are intricately linked to social inequalities. Through his portrayal of language as a marker of class, national identity, gender, and regionalism, Mishra highlights the ways in which language

perpetuates divisions within society. The novel shows how individuals' access to power and resources is often mediated by their linguistic proficiency, which can either facilitate or hinder their ability to succeed within a hierarchical social structure.

The findings of this study reveal that language is not merely a tool for communication, but a powerful instrument for shaping social realities. It plays a critical role in the construction of identity, the perpetuation of social divides, and the reinforcement of systems of power. In post-colonial societies like India, the legacies of colonialism continue to influence language attitudes, perpetuating inequalities across various social strata. Mishra's novel serves as a poignant reminder of the ways in which language can either empower or marginalize, reflecting the broader social and political inequalities that define contemporary Indian society.

Through this thematic analysis, it becomes evident that addressing linguistic inequality is an essential component of addressing broader social injustices. Mishra's work, while rooted in the specific context of India, offers valuable insights into the global dynamics of language, power, and inequality, making it a critical text for understanding the intersections of language and social justice.

References

1. Abbas, F. & Iqbal, Z. (2018). Language attitudes of Pakistani Youth toward Urdu, English and Punjabi: A comparative study. Northern University of Malaysia. Retrieved from researchgate.
2. Annamalai, E. (2005). Nation-building and language in South Asia. *Language Policy*, 4(2), 187–207.
3. Bourdieu, P. (1991). *Language and symbolic power*. Harvard University Press.
4. Chakraborty, A. (2016). Globalization and the postcolonial condition: A study of Pankaj Mishra's *Run and Hide*. *Journal of Postcolonial Writing*, 52(3), 275–289. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17449855.2016.1143969>.
5. Didur, J. (2009). "An unremembered time" : Secular criticism in Pankaj Mishra's *The Romantics*. *The journal of commonwealth literature*, 44(2). 65-85.
6. Garrett, P. (2010). *Attitudes to language*. Cambridge University Press.
7. Kachru, B. B. (1990). *The alchemy of English: The spread, functions, and models of non-native Englishes*. University of Illinois Press.
8. Mohanty, A. K. (2006). Multilingualism of the unequals and predicaments of education in India: Mother tongue or other tongue? In O. García, T. Skutnabb-Kangas, & M. Torres-Guzmán (Eds.), *Imagining multilingual schools: Languages in education and globalization* (pp. 262–279). *Multilingual Matters*.
9. Mukherjee, M. (2018). *Postcolonial modernity and the language question in India*. Routledge.