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A STUDY OF NARRATIVE VOICE AND CONVERSATIONAL AUTHENTICITY IN KAZUO ISHIGURO'S NOVEL "NEVER LET ME GO"

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Abstract: This article studies how Kazuo Ishiguro's novel Never Let Me Go (2005) feels real even though its world is unusual. The study looks at the voice of the narrator, Kathy H. It uses close reading and ideas from narratology and pragmatics. The results show three main things. First, Kathy's first-person voice has two-time levels: the child who lived the events and the adult who tells them. Second, her everyday style (contractions, soft statements, small details) makes her sound like a real person talking. Third, she uses words as if the reader already knows them, so a cruel system looks normal. The article argues that realism here comes from the way Kathy speaks, not from how likely the story world is.

Keywords: narrative voice, linguistic realism, Ishiguro, first-person narration, pragmatics, conversational style

Introduction

Some novels feel real because their stories could happen in real life. Never Let Me Go is different. It tells about clones who are raised to give their organs. This is not our world. Yet many readers say the book feels very real and very close to them. Why does this happen?

This article suggests one answer: the realism comes from the voice of the narrator. Kathy H. tells her life story in a calm, simple, everyday way. She does not start by explaining cloning or organ donation. She starts like a normal person: she says her name, she says what her job is, and she worries a little about what the reader will think of her. Because her voice is so believable, we accept her world before we understand it.

It is important to be clear about one point. Kathy's voice is a literary imitation of speech. It is not a copy of real, spontaneous talk. Ishiguro chooses, edits, and arranges every sentence. So, in this article, linguistic realism means the carefully built picture of a believable speaking person. It does not mean exact copies of real speech or a simple choice of easy words.

The article asks three questions:

How does the first-person voice, with its two-time levels, create a sense of a real person?

Which small language choices make Kathy sound like she is speaking in conversation?

How do these choices make a disturbing world seem ordinary?

Methods

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This is a qualitative study. It uses close reading, which means looking carefully at small parts of the text: a sentence, a phrase, or even one word. The study does not count words. Instead, it asks what each language choice does in its place in the story.

The text studied is the novel itself (Ishiguro, 2005), mainly the opening chapter and the memories of Tommy, Ruth, Hailsham, and the Norfolk trip.

The analysis uses ideas from several fields:

Narratology. Genette (1980) separates voice (who tells the story?) from focalization (whose eyes do we see through?). Fludernik (1996) explains how readers recognize a life story because they know how people usually tell their experiences. Cohn (1978) and Phelan (2005) help to describe how a narrator's mind and honesty are shown.

Oral storytelling and conversation. Labov and Waletzky (1997) show how tellers give events and also show why the events matter. Tannen (2007) describes how repetition, dialogue, and imagery make talk feel close and personal.

Pragmatics. Grice (1975) explains how listeners expect speakers to be clear, relevant, and helpful. Canlı (2021) applies this idea to the same novel. Bakhtin (1981) reminds us that a person's words often carry the voices of other people and groups.

Uzbek linguistics. Safarov (2008), Xudoyberganova (2013), and Yuldasheva (2023) look at language, the human speaker, and politeness. These works do not discuss Ishiguro, so they are used only as general support for the idea that language must be studied together with the person and society that use it.

One rule guides the whole analysis: a language form is important not for what it is, but for what it does. A short word like "I'm" is only informal. It becomes meaningful when it shapes how the reader trusts Kathy or understands her world.

Results

A voice with two-time levels

Kathy is both the girl who lived the events and the adult who now tells them. In the language of Genette (1980), the adult is the voice, but in many scenes, we see through the child's eyes. So, one sentence can show what young Kathy saw and, in the next part, add what adult Kathy thinks now. The grammar of the sentence connects the experiencing "I" and the telling "I".

The reader must notice the gap between the two. The gap is not announced. It appears in small signs: words of doubt such as "might" and "perhaps", the way Kathy reports what others said, and words that show her opinion.

The opening: an ordinary start that hides something strange

The novel begins with "My name is Kathy H." This is a normal way to introduce yourself. It gives us a speaker before it gives us any facts. But the surname is shortened to one letter, and her job as a carer is mentioned as if it needs no explanation. A strange system is placed inside an ordinary introduction.

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A second example is the sentence "So I'm not trying to boast." Here Kathy protects her own image. A person who fears sounding proud adds a soft phrase. This does not tell us anything about the donor system. It shows us a fair, polite, likeable person. As a result, the reader trusts Kathy's social manners first and only later asks about the system in which her "skill" is measured. A big moral problem enters through a small act of politeness.

Style that sounds like talking

Kathy's language has several features that remind us of everyday speech: the pronoun "I", short forms such as "I'm" and "it's", sentences that add extra parts after the main point, and a mix of clear details with statements of doubt. These features make her seem to think while she speaks.

However, the results show that these features do not work alone. A contraction changes only the tone. A sentence-start link word helps the story flow. An added clause changes when and how strongly something is said. A hedge, such as "perhaps", lowers the speaker's certainty. Together they make a memory seem natural and personal. The realism comes from the work these forms do together, not from how many informal words appear.

A speaker who seems to talk to someone

Kathy's account is written as a monologue, but it works like a dialogue. She seems to talk to a listener whose reactions she can guess. We see this in her small gestures: a soft phrase before a possible boast, a short explanation before a memory, or a change of direction that expects the listener to follow.

In pragmatics, this is called common ground: the speaker acts as if both sides already know certain things. Kathy uses words such as "carer" without explaining them. The more naturally she uses these words, the more the reader must ask what they mean. The study calls this pragmatic normalization: because the word is used without explanation, it seems acceptable and familiar, and the disturbing world is quietly accepted.

This is different from a mystery story, where a narrator hides one key fact to surprise us. Kathy does not hide a secret on purpose. She speaks from inside a world where these things are ordinary, because she was taught to see them that way.

Quiet words with heavy meaning

At first, the word "care" sounds kind and helpful. Later, the story makes it part of a system that prepares people for organ removal. The word does not change, but its meaning for the reader does. Kathy never explains this change. The story around the word does the work. The same is true for other words used by the Hailsham community, such as terms connected with the Cottages or with donors. These words came before Kathy; they have a history inside her small social world, as Bakhtin (1981) would say.

Feeling without open judgment

Kathy rarely says directly that something is cruel. Yet her story is full of judgment. When the other children laugh at Tommy, she tells us about embarrassment, being left out, and how people reacted. This is how she felt it as a child. Now, as an adult teller, she lets the reader think about those feelings again. In this way a school with ordinary unkindness becomes part of a much

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bigger, institutional cruelty. Following Labov and Waletzky (1997), Kathy gives the situation first and leaves the meaning for later.

Phelan (2005) is helpful here. Kathy's honesty has different parts. She may report exactly how a classmate acted but not understand why the system was accepted. She may repeat what Ruth said but miss why Ruth said it. It is more accurate to say that her trustworthiness is spread across these parts than to call her simply "unreliable."

Discussion

First-person realism as "managed closeness." The results show that Kathy's voice brings the reader close to her feelings: worry, jealousy, thankfulness, and embarrassment. But it also keeps some distance. The reader cannot always tell whether a memory is honest or a way of protecting herself, or whether a belief is a fact or just something the community shared. This uncertainty is not a weakness. It shows the limits of one person's experience: a speaker can truthfully say what she believed and still be wrong about what those beliefs allowed.

Realism comes from function, not form. This agrees with the view that informal words do not make a text real by themselves. What matters is their effect: they guide the reader's guesses, limit what Kathy seems to know, and place her in her relationships with Ruth, Tommy, and the school. A similar point is made by Tannen (2007): closeness and involvement are created through the way people talk, not only through the words they pick.

Two kinds of silence. Kathy often leaves things unexplained. Yet these gaps should not all be explained in one way. They may come from shared knowledge, from emotional avoidance, from lack of information, or from the writer's control of pace. Yuldasheva (2023) notes that polite softening is different from keeping information back. In Kathy's case, polite softening can be seen in the grammar of a sentence, but narrative silence is visible only in how the whole story gives information. A careful reading should look at what comes later and what other characters knew before choosing a reason.

Comparison with other studies. Canlı (2021) studies how broken expectations about clear and helpful speech affect conversation and plot in this novel. The present article agrees but adds a point: conversation is not found only in the talk between characters. The act of first-person telling is also a communication between narrator and reader, and it needs the same kind of analysis. Uzbek studies of language and the human speaker (Safarov, 2008; Xudoyberganova, 2013) support the idea that Kathy's way of speaking shows who she is and what her society allows her to be. They are used here as a general frame, because these authors do not write about Ishiguro.

Personhood and its limits. Kathy's small details, such as her likes, friendships, and corrections, show a real individual in a system that treats people as replaceable. This is the main tension of the novel: her voice shows that she is a unique person, but her words and categories still come from the society that limits her. Her voice shows freedom and limitation at the same time.

This study is based on close reading of one novel and does not use a computer-based or statistical method. The conclusions about the reader's response describe a likely reading, not measured results. Future work could test them with reader surveys or with a larger collection of texts.

Conclusion

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Never Let Me Go feels real not because its world is likely, but because Kathy's voice is believable. Her two-level first-person voice, her everyday style, her polite self-protection, and her use of unexplained words all work together. They make the reader trust Kathy as a person before the reader understands the system that shaped her. Because of this, the novel shows how a society can make cruel rules look normal to the people who live inside them. The main lesson for the study of literary language is simple: we should ask not only what a form is, but what it does in the story.

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