



Revista on line de Política e Gestão Educacional  
Online Journal of Policy and Educational Management



<sup>1</sup> Prof. Dr. Samarkand State University, Samarkand, Uzbekistan.

<sup>2</sup> Prof. Dr. Professor at Samarkand State University, Samarkand, Uzbekistan. Docent Dr.

<sup>3</sup> Docent Dr. Samarkand State University, Samarkand, Uzbekistan.

<sup>4</sup> Docent Dr. Samarkand State University, Samarkand, Uzbekistan.

<sup>5</sup> Docent Dr. Samarkand State University, Samarkand, Uzbekistan.

<sup>6</sup> Docent Dr. Bursa Technical University, Bursa, Türkiye.

<sup>7</sup> Docent Dr. Samarkand State University, Samarkand, Uzbekistan.



## NARRATIVE VOICE AND AGENCY: LINGUISTIC CHOICES IN IAN MCEWAN'S ATONEMENT- WITH AN EMPHASIS ON EDUCATIONAL ASPECTS

*VOZ NARRATIVA E AGÊNCIA: ESCOLHAS LINGÜÍSTICAS EM REPARAÇÃO DE IAN MCEWAN – COM ÊNFASE NOS ASPECTOS EDUCACIONAIS*

*NARRATIVA Y AGENCIA: ELECCIONES LINGÜÍSTICAS EN ATONEMENT DE IAN MCEWAN, CON ÉNFAIS EN LOS ASPECTOS EDUCATIVOS*

Surena ZANJANI<sup>1</sup>

zanjanisurena6@gmail.com

Hakan AYDOĞAN<sup>2</sup>

aydoganh@hotmail.com

Nurova Gulchehra TISHABAYEVNA<sup>3</sup>

gulanurova19972@gmail.com

Sitora Ruziyeva ASROROVNA<sup>4</sup>

sitoraruzieva8@gmail.com

Saidova Aziza DAVLATOVNA<sup>5</sup>

aziza.saidova@mail.ru

MeldaMedine SUNAY<sup>6</sup>

sosyologmelda@gmail.com

Mahmadiyev Shavkatjon SUYUNQULOVICH<sup>7</sup>

shavkatmahmadyev1975@gmail.com



### How to reference this paper:

Zanjani, S., Aydoğan, H., Tishabayevna, N. G., Asrorovna, S. R., Davlatovna, S. A., Sunay, M., & Suyunqulovich, M. S. (2025). Narrative voice and agency: linguistic choices in Ian Mcewan's atonement with an emphasis on educational aspects. *Revista on line de Política e Gestão Educacional*, 29(esp4), e025091. <https://doi.org/10.22633/rpge.v29iesp4.20757>

Submitted: 20/11/2025

Revisions required: 25/11/2025

Approved: 04/12/2025

Published: 20/12/2025

**ABSTRACT:** This article examines the relationship between narrative voice and agency in Ian McEwan's *Atonement*. Through linguistic analysis, it shows how shifts in perspective and distinct authorial voices shape the reader's perception of character agency. The study highlights how McEwan's linguistic choices reinforce key themes such as guilt, memory, and moral responsibility. By analyzing selected passages, it demonstrates how the manipulation of language deepens emotional impact and encourages critical engagement with characters' motivations. The article argues that narrative structures both enable and limit characters, revealing tensions between authorial control and individual agency. It also situates *Atonement* within contemporary narrative theory, illustrating how McEwan's stylistic innovations raise questions about identity, truth, and the subjective nature of reality. Overall, the analysis underscores how narrative strategies contribute to the novel's ethical complexity and challenge traditional views of storytelling and character autonomy.

**PALAVRAS-CHAVE:** Narrative Voice. Linguistic Choices. Ian McEwan. *Atonement*. Narrative Theory.

**RESUMO:** Este artigo examina a relação entre voz narrativa e agência em *Reparação*, de Ian McEwan. Por meio de análise linguística, demonstra como mudanças de perspectiva e vozes autorais distintas moldam a percepção do leitor sobre a agência das personagens. O estudo destaca como as escolhas linguísticas de McEwan reforçam temas-chave como culpa, memória e responsabilidade moral. Ao analisar trechos selecionados, demonstra como a manipulação da linguagem aprofunda o impacto emocional e incentiva o engajamento crítico com as motivações das personagens. O artigo argumenta que as estruturas narrativas tanto possibilitam quanto limitam as personagens, revelando tensões entre o controle autoral e a agência individual. Também situa *Reparação* dentro da teoria narrativa contemporânea, ilustrando como as inovações estilísticas de McEwan levantam questões sobre identidade, verdade e a natureza subjetiva da realidade. Em suma, a análise ressalta como as estratégias narrativas contribuem para a complexidade ética do romance e desafiam as visões tradicionais de narrativa e autonomia das personagens.

**PALABRAS CLAVE:** Voz Narrativa. Escolhas linguísticas. Ian McEwan. *Atonement*. Teoria Narrativa.

**RESUMEN:** Este artículo analiza la relación entre la voz narrativa y la agencia en *Reparación*, de Ian McEwan. A través de un examen lingüístico, demuestra cómo los cambios de perspectiva y las distintas voces autorales configuran la percepción del lector sobre la agencia de los personajes. El estudio destaca cómo las elecciones lingüísticas de McEwan refuerzan temas clave como culpa, memoria y responsabilidad moral. Al analizar pasajes seleccionados, evidencia cómo la manipulación del lenguaje intensifica el impacto emocional y fomenta el involucramiento crítico con las motivaciones de los personajes. El artículo sostiene que las estructuras narrativas tanto habilitan como restringen a las figuras ficcionales, revelando tensiones entre el control autoral y la agencia individual. Asimismo, sitúa *Reparación* dentro de la teoría narrativa contemporánea, mostrando cómo las innovaciones estilísticas de McEwan plantean cuestiones sobre identidad, verdad y la naturaleza subjetiva de la realidad. En síntesis, el análisis subraya cómo las estrategias narrativas contribuyen a la complejidad ética de la novela y desafían las visiones tradicionales de narrativa y autonomía de los personajes.

**KEYWORDS:** Voz narrativa. Elecciones lingüísticas. Ian McEwan. *Atonement*. Teoría narrativ.

Article submitted to the similarity system



**Editor:** Prof. Dr. Sebastião de Souza Lemes

**Deputy Executive Editor:** Prof. Dr. José Anderson Santos Cruz.

## INTRODUCTION

The interplay between narrative voice and character agency has long been a focal point of literary criticism, particularly within the context of modernist literature. Ian McEwan's *Atonement* serves as a compelling case study for this dynamic, as it intricately weaves together multiple perspectives and voices to create a complex tapestry of moral ambiguity and psychological depth. Central to McEwan's narrative technique is the deliberate manipulation of linguistic choices that shape not only the reader's engagement with the text but also the characters' autonomy within the narrative structure. As Rollyson (2020, p. 11) argues, "the focus of biography is on the subject, not the biographer, yet half the story of a biography is, of course, who is telling the story". This accentuates the inherent influence of the narrator on the narrative itself.

Narrative voice functions as a crucial lens through which readers interpret character motivations and ethical dilemmas. In *Atonement*, McEwan (2005) employs a polyphonic narrative approach, alternating between different characters' viewpoints, most notably through the eyes of Briony Tallis, whose youthful misinterpretations catalyze the novel's central conflict. This narrative multiplicity raises critical questions about the reliability of perspective and the implications for agency.

As Briony grapples with her own guilt and the consequences of her actions, McEwan (2005) invites readers to consider the extent to which narrative authority can shape, distort, or even undermine individual agency. As Richardson notes, "the narrative voice is not merely a vehicle for storytelling but a powerful agent that can influence the characters' realities and the readers' perceptions" (Richardson, 2006, p. 87). Furthermore, as Fisher (1984, p. 2) states, "narratives are fundamental to communication and provide structure for human experience and influence people to share common explanations and understandings".

## DEFINING NARRATIVE VOICE AND ITS ROLE IN AGENCY

In the context of Ian McEwan's *Atonement*, narrative voice assumes a multifaceted role that intricately intertwines with concepts of agency, challenging readers to question the reliability and implications of the storytelling process. Briony, for instance, is "one of those children possessed by a desire to have the world just so" (McEwan, 2005, p. 3), demonstrating how her narrative voice is driven by a need for control and order. Theoretical frameworks for understanding narrative voice often draw from narratology, particularly the distinctions made by scholars such as Mikhail Bakhtin and Gerard Genette. Bakhtin's notion of heteroglossia

illuminates the multiplicity of voices within a text, suggesting that each voice carries its own ideological weight and contributes to a polyphonic narrative.

According to Bakhtin (1981), “the novel is a diversity of social speech types, sometimes even diversity of languages, and it is not a mixture but rather a dialogue among them” (p. 262), which is particularly relevant in *Atonement*, where McEwan employs a variety of narrative perspectives to explore the subjective experiences of his characters. Such a technique not only enriches the narrative but also complicates the notion of agency; as characters are filtered through competing voices, their autonomy becomes a site of negotiation between the authorial intent and the characters’ desires. Briony’s passion for tidiness, for example, is satisfied when “the pages of a recently finished story seemed to vibrate in her hand with all the life they contained” (McEwan, 2005 p.7), featuring how her narrative voice is deeply invested in the creation of a coherent and controlled world.

As Genette (1980, p. 189) explains, “focalization is the relationship between the narrative and the characters, and it determines how much the reader knows about the characters’ thoughts and feelings”. In *Atonement*, Briony’s focalization is pivotal; her limited understanding and subsequent misjudgments illustrate the tension between narrative control and individual agency. Briony’s narrative voice is so authoritative that she can only feel immune when “a story was finished, all fates resolved and the whole matter sealed off at both ends so it resembled, at least in this one respect, every other finished story in the world” (McEwan, 2005, p. 6), revealing the extent to which her agency is bound up with her narrative control.

Moreover, contemporary theories of agency, such as those articulated by scholars like James Phelan and David Herman, emphasize the interplay of narrative structure and character action. Phelan posits that narrative voice can either enhance or hinder a character’s agency, depending on how the story is told. Phelan (2007, p. 112) posits, “the narrative voice can serve as a gatekeeper to character agency, determining how much freedom characters have to act within their own stories”. In McEwan’s novel, the shifting narrative voices create a layered complexity that both empowers and constrains Briony’s agency, illustrating the nuanced relationship between narratorial control and character autonomy.

### *McEwan’s stylistic choices in “atonement”*

This analysis will explore several key linguistic elements, including syntax, diction, free indirect discourse, and narrative layering, which collectively illuminate the intricate relationship between language, voice, and agency. The novel’s opening lines, for instance, showcase McEwan’s skill in crafting dialogue that reveals character traits, as seen in the exchange between Briony and her mother, where Briony’s tears of shame are prompted by her mother’s inquiry about her literary creations: “Dearest Miss Morland, what ideas have you

been admitting?” [...] they had reached the end of the gallery; and with tears of shame she ran off to her own room” (McEwan, 2005, p. 2).

To put it technically, Wales (2014, p. 415) maintains, “style encompasses the linguistic habits of a particular writer”. The syntax of Briony’s writing, as seen in *The Trials of Arabella*, also reflects her romantic and melodramatic inclinations: “The reckless passion of the heroine, Arabella, for a wicked foreign count is punished by ill fortune when she contracts cholera during an impetuous dash toward a seaside town with her intended” (McEwan, 2005, p. 3). Conversely, more complex sentence structures may indicate a distancing effect, suggesting moments when the narrative voice assumes greater control over the unfolding events, thereby constraining character agency. In the words of Herman (2013, p. 45), “the syntax of a narrative can shape the reader’s emotional response and understanding of character agency”.

As Phelan (2007, p. 112) argues, “the choice of diction in a narrative can profoundly influence the reader’s understanding of character motivations and ethical dilemmas”. Furthermore, “one of the most important characteristics of literary discourse is its recurrent linguistic patterning, or ‘cohesion,’ a patterning which may be found to operate at all levels of the grammar; and it is especially that the linguist can throw light on the language of a text, demonstrating both what the linguistic system in the work is and how it operates in that particular text” (Traugott & Pratt, 2008, p. 10).

In line with this, Richardson (2006, p. 78) proposes, “free indirect discourse allows the reader to experience the character’s thoughts while maintaining a critical distance from the narrative”. As Briony assumes the role of author within the narrative, she confronts the implications of her previous actions and the power dynamics inherent in narrative construction. This self-reflexivity not only underscores the ethical responsibilities of the storyteller but also positions Briony’s agency as both a product of her narrative choices and a site of ongoing conflict.

Briony’s introspection, as seen in her comment about her squirrel’s skull, “no one knew about the squirrel’s skull beneath her bed, but no one wanted to know” (McEwan, 2005, p. 6), spotlights her awareness of the power dynamics at play in storytelling and her own responsibility as a narrator. As stated by Waugh (1984, p. 134), “the act of storytelling is inherently tied to the ethical considerations of the narrator’s role”. In addition, Zara Altair (2016, p. 176) stipulates, “your narrative voice determines the perspective from which the story is told, while the tone sets the mood and atmosphere of the story”.

### *The effects of first-person and third-person narration*

The immediacy of the first-person voice invites readers to empathize with Briony, yet it simultaneously raises questions about her reliability. Her youthful naivety and subsequent

remorse complicate the notion of agency, as readers must grapple with the implications of her self-justifications and misinterpretations. As Briony reflects on her experiences, she realizes, “what other authority could she have? Only when a story was finished, all fates resolved and the whole matter sealed off at both ends so it resembled, at least in this one respect, every other finished story in the world, could she feel immune [...]” (McEwan, 2005, p. 9).

This insight into her inner turmoil spotlights the urgency of her desire for control over her narrative. Waugh (1984, p. 134) reiterates that, “the act of storytelling is inherently tied to the ethical considerations of the narrator’s role”. In contrast, The third-person voice allows McEwan to explore the ramifications of Briony’s actions on others, thereby pointing out the interconnectedness of their fates. For instance, “mayhem and destruction were too chaotic for her tastes, and she did not have it in her to be cruel” (McEwan, 2005, p. 6) illustrates Briony’s moral compass, reinforcing the complexity of her character. Additionally, “her passion for tidiness was also satisfied, for an unruly world could be made just so” (McEwan, 2005, p. 7) reveals her desire for order, further complicating her motivations. In accordance with Herman (2013, p. 45) asserts, “the syntax of a narrative can shape the reader’s emotional response and understanding of character agency”.

McEwan’s narrative strategy thus foregrounds the theme of self-deception, as Briony’s attempts to rewrite her past through storytelling further complicate her agency. The description of her as “one of those children possessed by a desire to have the world just so” (McEwan, 2005, p. 6) epitomizes her introspective nature, illustrating the effect of the third-person narration in creating distance while inviting reflection. Richardson (2006, p. 78) believes, “free indirect discourse allows the reader to experience the character’s thoughts while maintaining a critical distance from the narrative”. Moreover, the implications of this duality bring to attention the ethical responsibilities of the storyteller, as Briony confronts the limitations of her earlier perceptions and the moral weight of her narrative choices. As Phelan (2007, p. 112) elucidates, “the choice of diction in a narrative can profoundly influence the reader’s understanding of character motivations and ethical dilemmas”.

### *Linguistic constructs and their impact on identity formation*

This analysis will examine the ways in which linguistic choices—encompassing diction, syntax, and narrative perspective—shape character agency and, in turn, contribute to the broader themes of memory, guilt, and redemption. Duranti (2004, p. 465) indicates, “the very act of speaking in front of others who can perceive such an act establishes the speaker as a being whose existence must be reckoned with in terms of his or her communicative goals and abilities”. At the heart of this exploration is Briony Tallis, whose linguistic expressions serve as



a crucial vehicle for her identity formation. Initially portrayed through the lens of her youthful imagination, Briony's language is imbued with a sense of innocence and naivety.

Her early attempts at storytelling reflect a desire for agency and control, as she seeks to impose order on her experiences through narrative. As she observes, "the imagination itself was a source of secrets: once she had begun a story, no one could be told" (McEwan, 2005, p. 5). This insight into her inner turmoil stresses the urgency of her desire for control over her narrative. As Waugh (1984, p. 134) suggests, "the act of storytelling is inherently tied to the ethical considerations of the narrator's role", showcasing the moral implications of Briony's narrative choices.

However, as the plot unfolds and the ramifications of her actions become apparent, the linguistic constructs she employs begin to reflect a growing awareness of her moral failings. The shift from playful, imaginative language to more somber and reflective diction marks a significant transformation in Briony's identity, as she grapples with the consequences of her choices. "Language is not a neutral medium; it is a site of struggle and conflict" (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 67), suggesting that Briony's evolving language mirrors her internal conflicts and the complexities of her identity. Additionally, Lee (2025, p. 70) states, "language plays a crucial role in shaping identity by providing a means of expression and communication".

The idea that "pretending in words was too tentative, too vulnerable, too embarrassing to let anyone know" (McEwan, 2005, p. 5) underscores the exposure inherent in her attempts to articulate her remorse, which are fraught with the limitations of her previous misconceptions. As highlighted by Richardson (2006, p. 78), "the interplay of narrative voice and character thought reveals the complexities of agency", showcasing how McEwan's narrative techniques deepen our understanding of Briony's character.

The dialogue and narrative descriptions reveal the ways in which characters influence one another's identities through their linguistic exchanges. For instance, Cecilia's assertive language contrasts sharply with Briony's earlier hesitance, emphasizing the divergence in their respective understandings of agency. As she asserts, "What other authority could she have? Only when a story was finished, all fates resolved and the whole matter sealed off at both ends [...]" (McEwan, 2005, p. 6).

This dynamic underscores the notion that agency is not solely an individual pursuit but is also shaped by relational contexts and interpersonal dialogues. Kristeva (1984, p. 45) furthers this by expressing that, "identity is formed through the interplay of voices and discourses", reinforcing the idea that Briony's identity is influenced by her interactions with others. The desire for order is evident when she reflects that "her passion for tidiness was also satisfied, for an unruly world could be made just so" (McEwan, 2005, p. 7). This recursive relationship between language and memory draws attention to the fluidity of identity, suggesting that characters are continually reshaped by their linguistic expressions and the narratives they

construct about themselves. In other words, “narrative identity is formed through the integration of past experiences into a coherent story” (Ricoeur, 1984, p. 115), featuring the role of storytelling in shaping self-perception. Briefly, the interplay of diction, syntax, and narrative perspective not only shapes the characters’ identities but also underscores the ethical dimensions of storytelling.

The notion that “a universe reduced to what was said in it was tidiness indeed, almost to the point of nullity” (McEwan, 2005, p. 9) suggests that while language can impose order, it may also simplify complex emotions. By examining the impact of linguistic choices on character agency, this analysis contributes to a deeper understanding of the complexities of identity as portrayed in McEwan’s narrative, ultimately enriching the reader’s engagement with the text.

### *The influence of tense and voice on narrative reliability*

This choice establishes a sense of retrospection, allowing Briony to confront her earlier actions with the awareness of their consequences. For instance, “She was one of those children possessed by a desire to have the world just so” (McEwan, 2005, p. 3) marks Briony’s need for control, while the use of past tense creates distance, enabling readers to observe her character traits. The use of past tense not only situates the narrative within a defined temporal framework but also complicates the notion of reliability; as Briony reflects on her past, her interpretations are inevitably colored by her present understanding, leading to potential distortions in her recounting of events. Indeed “the act of remembering is inherently selective, shaping the narrative in ways that may obscure the truth” (Herman, 2013, p. 45), signifying the complexities of Briony’s retrospective account.

Put it differently, “the use of present tense can create a false sense of immediacy that complicates the reader’s understanding of the narrative” (Waugh, 1984, p. 134), reinforcing the tension between memory and experience. As the narrator states, “her effective status as an only child, as well as the relative isolation of the Tallis house, kept her... from girlish intrigues with friends” (McEwan, 2005, p. 4), the retrospective voice provides context that shapes Briony’s character.

Briony’s first-person voice is laden with her subjective interpretations, which are often marked by guilt and self-deception. As she grapples with her role in the tragic events, her narrative becomes an act of atonement, where the reliability of her account is constantly in question. All things considered, “the interplay of narrative voice and character thought reveals the complexities of agency” (Richardson, 2006, p. 78), emphasizing how McEwan’s narrative techniques deepen our understanding of Briony’s character.



Additionally, the temporal dynamics in *Atonement* makes prominent the ethical implications of narrative reliability. As Briony attempts to reconstruct her past through storytelling, the act of narrating becomes a means of seeking forgiveness and understanding. However, this desire for atonement is overshadowed by the inherent difficulty of accurately representing the past. The statement, “in fact, they were welcomed as the Tallises began to understand that the baby of the family possessed a strange mind and a facility with words” (McEwan, 2005, p. 5), illustrates the narrator’s subjective interpretation, making prominent the complexity of Briony’s identity. McEwan’s manipulation of tense and voice serves to elevate the fallibility of memory and the subjective nature of truth, suggesting that narratives are continually shaped by the storyteller’s intentions and biases.

Ricoeur (1984, p. 115) asserts that “narrative identity is formed through the integration of past experiences into a coherent story”, reinforcing the notion that Briony’s narrative is both a personal and ethical endeavor. Simply put, the interplay between past and present tenses, alongside the shifting narrative voices, enriches the narrative while simultaneously challenging the reliability of Briony Tallis’s account. Ultimately, the notion that “a universe reduced to what was said in it was tidiness indeed, almost to the point of nullity” (McEwan, 2005, p. 7) underscores the complexities inherent in narrative structure. This analysis underscores the intricate relationship between temporal dynamics and narrative reliability, contributing to a deeper understanding of the complexities inherent in McEwan’s work.

## HOW LINGUISTIC CHOICES SHAPE PERCEPTION AND INTERPRETATION

This analysis will explore how specific linguistic strategies—encompassing diction, imagery, tone, and narrative structure—contribute to the ways in which readers engage with the text and form interpretations of character agency and moral responsibility. As Gibson (1966, p. 7) puts, “the resources of language are such that we can signal the kind of person we want to be taken for, and the kind of audience we are addressing”. One of the most significant linguistic choices in *Atonement* is McEwan’s use of evocative diction that captures the emotional depth of the characters’ experiences.

The carefully selected vocabulary not only conveys the weight of Briony Tallis’s guilt but also serves to elicit empathy from the reader. For example, the opening line, “Dearest Miss Morland, what ideas have you been admitting?” (McEwan, 2005, p. 1), creates a sense of intimacy and urgency, influencing how readers interpret the characters’ thoughts and feelings. As a matter of fact, “McEwan’s language is both precise and evocative, allowing readers to feel the weight of Briony’s guilt” (Wood, 2008, p. 45), stressing the emotional resonance of McEwan’s diction. Moreover, McEwan employs varied tone throughout the novel,

shifting between moments of lightness and gravity. This tonal modulation influences how readers perceive critical events and character dynamics. For instance, the initial playfulness in Briony's narrative voice during her childhood contrasts sharply with the somber reflections that follow the catastrophic misunderstandings she instigates. The description of characters, such as "the reckless passion of the heroine, Arabella, for a wicked foreign count" (McEwan, 2005, p. 2), creates a sense of melodrama and moral judgment, shaping the reader's perception of Arabella's character and actions.

This transition not only heightens the emotional stakes but also encourages readers to reassess their interpretations of Briony's agency. Waugh (1984, p. 134) ratifies this by remarking that "the shifts in tone throughout the narrative compel readers to reconsider their judgments of the characters", exposing the complexity of moral interpretation in the text.

The narrative structure itself is a linguistic choice that intricately shapes reader engagement. By employing a non-linear narrative and shifting perspectives, McEwan invites readers to piece together the story from fragmented recollections and varying viewpoints. For example, the reflection on societal scrutiny—"Could they be perpetrated without being known in a country like this, where social and literary intercourse is on such a footing? [...]" (McEwan, 2005, p. 1)—evokes a sense of surveillance that shapes the reader's perception of the social context. This structural complexity mirrors the intricacies of memory and the subjectivity of truth, compelling readers to actively participate in the construction of meaning. As they navigate the layers of Briony's narrative and the perspectives of other characters, readers are drawn into a process of critical reflection that challenges simplistic interpretations of agency and guilt. "The fragmented narrative structure reflects the complexities of memory and the subjective nature of truth" (Richardson, 2006, p. 78), reinforcing the active role of the reader in interpreting the text.

Furthermore, the use of free indirect discourse allows readers to access the inner thoughts of characters while maintaining a degree of narrative distance. This technique creates a nuanced exploration of character psychology, particularly in Briony's case, as her thoughts and feelings are intricately woven into the narrative fabric. The imagery of her dolls—"her straight-backed dolls in their many-roomed mansion appeared to be under strict instructions not to touch the walls" (McEwan, 2005, p. 3)—highlights her need for order and control. The blending of narrative voices encourages readers to empathize with Briony while simultaneously questioning her reliability.

This dual engagement fosters a richer understanding of the ethical complexities inherent in her character, as readers must confront the tension between her intentions and the consequences of her actions. "The use of free indirect discourse complicates the reader's understanding of character agency" (Herman, 2013, p. 45), enhancing the layered nature

of McEwan's narrative technique. In addition, McEwan's exploration of themes such as memory, trauma, and atonement is deeply intertwined with linguistic choices that shape reader interpretation. The act of storytelling itself becomes a site of engagement where readers must grapple with the implications of narrative authority and the responsibilities of the storyteller. The phrase "the coins a villain concealed in his pocket were 'esoteric'" (McEwan, 2005, p. 5) reflects Briony's immature and romanticized view of storytelling, prompting readers to consider the ethical ramifications of her narrative.

This engagement with the text encourages a critical examination of how narratives are constructed and the ways in which they can be both redemptive and deceptive. "Narrative identity is formed through the integration of past experiences into a coherent story" (Ricoeur, 1984, p. 115), reinforcing the ethical dimensions of Briony's storytelling. Wales (2014, p. 415) proposes that "style encompasses the linguistic habits of a particular writer".

## CONCLUSION

In *Atonement*, Ian McEwan intricately weaves together narrative voice, character agency, and linguistic choices to create a complex tapestry that interrogates the nature of truth, memory, and moral responsibility. Through the strategic manipulation of narrative techniques —encompassing shifts in perspective, variations in tense, and nuanced diction— McEwan invites readers to engage deeply with the text, prompting critical reflections on the ethical dimensions of storytelling and the fluidity of identity. The interplay between narrative voice and agency is particularly evident in the character of Briony Tallis, whose evolving perspective serves as both a lens for the reader and a mechanism for her own self-exploration.

As Briony grapples with her past misjudgments and the consequences of her actions, the linguistic constructs she employs reflect her shifting understanding of agency. This evolution underscores the notion that agency is not a static attribute but rather a dynamic interplay between personal intent and narrative representation. Moreover, McEwan's use of varied narrative forms—combining first-person and third-person perspectives—demonstrates the complexities of reliability and truth. By juxtaposing Briony's subjective recollections with the broader perspectives of other characters, McEwan challenges readers to navigate the ambiguities of memory and narrative authority. This multifaceted approach not only enriches the reader's experience but also emphasizes the ethical responsibilities inherent in the act of storytelling.

Ultimately, *Atonement* serves as a profound exploration of how linguistic choices shape our understanding of character and agency. McEwan's narrative intricacies compel

readers to reflect on the implications of their interpretations, encouraging a deeper engagement with the text's moral and philosophical questions. In this way, the novel stands as a testament to the power of language in constructing meaning and shaping human experience, revealing the delicate interconnections between narrative voice, agency, and the act of narration itself. Through this exploration, McEwan not only crafts a compelling story but also invites readers to grapple with the complexities of identity, memory, and the enduring quest for atonement.

## REFERENCES

- Altair, Z. (2016). *Storytelling for Pantsers*. Altair Publications.
- Bakhtin, M. (1981). *The dialogic imagination: Four essays*. University of Texas Press.
- Duranti, A. (2004). Agency in language. In A. Duranti (Ed.), *A companion to linguistic anthropology* (pp. 45–66). Blackwell Publishing Ltd.
- Fisher, W. R. (1984). Narration as a human communication paradigm. *Communication Monographs*, 51(1), 1–22.
- Genette, G. (1980). *Narrative discourse: An essay in method*. Cornell University Press.
- Gibson, W. (1966). *Tough, sweet & stuffy: An essay on modern American prose styles*. Indiana University Press.
- Herman, D. (2013). *Storytelling and the sciences of mind*. MIT Press.
- Kristeva, J. (1984). *Revolution in poetic language*. Columbia University Press.
- Lee, S. (2025). *Language and identity in linguistic variation*. Number Analytics.
- McEwan, I. (2005). *Atonement*. Vintage.
- Phelan, J. (2007). *Experiencing fiction: Judgments, progressions, and the rhetorical theory of narrative*. Ohio State University Press.
- Richardson, B. (2006). *Unnatural voices: Extreme narration in modern and contemporary fiction*. Ohio State University Press.
- Ricoeur, P. (1984). *Time and narrative*. University of Chicago Press.
- Rollyson, C. (2020). *Biography*. University of Virginia Press.
- Traugott, E. C., & Pratt, M. L. (2008). *Language, linguistics, and literary analysis*. Routledge.
- Wales, K. (2014). *A dictionary of stylistics* (2nd ed.). Routledge.
- Waugh, P. (1984). *Metafiction: The theory and practice of self-conscious fiction*. Routledge.
- Wood, J. (2008). *How fiction works*. Farrar, Straus and Giroux.

*CRediT Author Statement*

---

**Acknowledgements:** No.

**Funding:** This research did not receive any financial support.

**Conflicts of interest:** There is no conflict of interest.

**Ethical approval:** The work respected ethics during the research.

**Data and material availability:** The data and materials used in the work are not publicly available for access.

**Authors' contributions:** 15 % each author.

---

**Processing and editing: Editora Ibero-Americana de Educação**

Proofreading, formatting, normalization and translation

