



MORPHOSYNTACTIC ANALYSIS OF COLONIAL DISCOURSE IN FAÏZA GUÈNE'S *MEN DON'T CRY*

Aziz Ullah Khan

*Assistant Professor, Department of English and Modern Languages,
University of Science and Technology, Bannu, KP, Pakistan*

Nader Khan

*Visiting Lecturer, Department of English, University of Science and
Technology Bannu (USTB), Bannu, KP, Pakistan*

Abstract

This study investigates the representation of colonial discourse in selected passages from Men Don't Cry through a morphosyntactic lens. The study adopts a qualitative textual-analysis methodology and draws primarily on Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), complemented by insights from Hallidayan functional grammar and postcolonial approaches to language, identity, and othering. The analysis focuses on pronouns, noun phrases, verbs, tense and aspect, modality, negation, transitivity-related grammatical choices, active and passive constructions, imperatives, interrogatives, coordination, subordination, and the distribution of agency. The analysis demonstrates that grammatical structures do not merely describe the characters' experiences; they participate in constructing unequal relations of authority and identity. The study further demonstrates that colonial discourse operates not only through explicit references to ethnicity but also through assumptions concerning civilization. The study concludes that morphosyntax is an important site at which colonial and postcolonial ideologies are reproduced, contested, and renegotiated in Guène's novel.

Keywords: morphosyntax, colonial discourse, Critical Discourse Analysis, Faïza Guène, Men Don't Cry, postcolonial identity, assimilation, agency, othering, power

1. Introduction

Literary discourse is not simply a collection of words arranged for aesthetic purposes. Grammatical choices can represent social relations, construct identities, distribute agency, and normalize particular ideologies. From a Critical Discourse Analysis perspective, language is closely connected with social power because linguistic choices can represent some people as active and others as passive, some groups as normal and others as different, and some forms of behaviour as legitimate while portraying others as deviant (Fairclough, 1992, 2003). Morphosyntax is consequently significant because the organization of nouns, pronouns, verbs, clauses, modifiers, modality, tense, and sentence structures can reveal ideological assumptions embedded in discourse.

Faïza Guène's *Men Don't Cry* provides a particularly productive literary context for such an investigation. The novel explores an Algerian family living in France and examines the tensions between inherited cultural values and contemporary French social life. The English edition was translated by Sarah Ardizzone; bibliographic records identify a 2016 English edition, while the later Cassava Republic edition appeared in 2021. The story is narrated by Mourad Chennoun, while his sister Dounia is one of its most important figures. Dounia challenges the restrictions imposed by her family and eventually pursues a life associated with freedom, feminism, and political



participation. Contemporary descriptions of the novel similarly identify the conflict between Dounia and her family as central to the narrative.

For accuracy, therefore, Dounia should not be described as the sole protagonist or narrator: Mourad is the first-person narrator, while Dounia is a central character whose identity conflict and rebellion drive a substantial part of the narrative. This distinction is particularly relevant to a morphosyntactic study because the distribution of *I*, *we*, *you*, *they*, and third-person references contributes to the construction of perspectives and identities.

2. Background of the Study

2.1 Faïza Guène and *Men Don't Cry*

Faïza Guène is a French writer of Algerian background whose fiction repeatedly engages with questions of migration, belonging, identity, gender, and the experiences of Maghreb communities in France. Scholarship on Guène's fiction has emphasized the construction of identity and gender and her tendency to challenge stereotypical representations of Maghreb-French youth (Mach, 2018/2026). Mach's study argues that Guène's characters frequently negotiate identity in a social environment marked by prejudice and that her fiction examines the changing social position of young people of North African origin.

Men Don't Cry develops these concerns through the Chen noun family. The novel places Algerian cultural heritage and French social expectations in continuous interaction. Mourad and his sisters are born or raised in France, whereas their parents remain strongly connected to Algeria and to inherited cultural norms. Dounia becomes particularly resistant to the restrictions of the family and seeks independence. Publisher and critical descriptions of the novel identify this tension among family legacy, freedom, assimilation, feminism, and cultural belonging as a central concern. The novel is therefore particularly suitable for investigating colonial discourse because the colonial relationship between France and Algeria is not represented merely as historical background. It remains indirectly present in questions such as: Who is considered French? What does it mean to become French? Which cultural practices are regarded as modern? Who has the authority to define respectable behaviour? What happens when an individual attempts to move from one cultural identity toward another?

These questions are linguistic as well as social. If a character repeatedly describes another person as *Arab*, *woman*, *prostitute*, *sell-out*, or *modern*, the noun phrase does more than identify the person. It places that person inside a particular ideological classification.

2.2 Critical Perspectives on *Men Don't Cry*

Recent critical and review writing has emphasized the novel's treatment of immigrant life, cultural conflict, integration, and the contradictions of assimilation. A 2022 review in *The New Arab* characterizes the novel as an exploration of the qualities of French immigrant life and highlights Guène's use of satire to expose prejudice. Similarly, Cassava Republic's critical discussion describes the novel through the interconnected themes of assimilation, traditionalism, modernity, feminism, and Franco-Algerian family conflict.

These readings are important because they demonstrate that the novel's central conflict cannot be reduced to a simple opposition between a "traditional" Algerian



family and a "modern" French society. The novel instead exposes contradictions on both sides. Dounia experiences restrictions within the family, yet her desire for Frenchness and assimilation also exposes the pressures involved in adopting a dominant cultural identity.

This issue connects the novel to wider scholarship on Guène. Mach's work on Guène's novels identifies identity formation and gender construction as recurring concerns and emphasizes Guène's challenge to stereotypes concerning Maghrebi-French youth (Matu, 2018/2026). Ardenghi's study of Guène's later *La Discretion* similarly emphasizes postcolonial identity and subjectivity and demonstrates the continuing importance of inherited migration histories in Guène's fiction (Ardenghi, 2022).

Particularly relevant to the present study is Dalila Arezki's linguistic research on Guène's *Un homme ça ne pleure pas*, the French work corresponding to *Men Don't Cry*. Arezki (2022) investigates linguistic codes and identity and argues that Guène's writing engages with the complex identity of an Algerian French-speaking writer and with questions of migration, culture, otherness, and identity. This study is highly relevant because it establishes that language itself is central to identity construction in Guène's fiction.

However, the present study differs from these approaches by concentrating specifically on morphosyntactic patterns as mechanisms of colonial and postcolonial discourse. Instead of treating language merely as an indicator of identity, the study asks how grammatical organization itself constructs power relations.

3. Colonial Discourse and Language

Colonial discourse refers to systems of representation through which colonial relationships are maintained, justified, or remembered. Said (1978) demonstrates that Western representations of the East frequently constructed the "Orient" as fundamentally different from, inferior to, or in need of control by the West. Bhabha (1994), however, complicates this binary by emphasizing ambivalence, hybridity, mimicry, and the unstable nature of colonial identities.

In a postcolonial context, therefore, colonial discourse does not disappear automatically after formal colonial rule ends. Its categories can remain visible in social institutions, cultural assumptions, language, and identity practices. Fanon (1967) emphasizes the psychological effects of colonialism and the powerful relationship between language and social recognition. For the colonized subject, adopting the language and cultural norms of the colonizer may be associated with a desire for social legitimacy, while simultaneously producing alienation from one's own cultural identity.

This theoretical insight is particularly relevant to Dounia. Her desire for freedom and her attraction to French ways of life can be interpreted not simply as personal rebellion but also as part of a wider struggle over which cultural practices are legitimate. The question is not merely whether Dounia likes French culture. The deeper issue is why "French" becomes associated with *freedom*, *modernity*, and *independence*, while Algerian family culture becomes associated with *restriction*, *control*, and *tradition*.

4. Statement of the Problem

Existing discussions of *Men Don't Cry* have primarily focused on immigration, cultural conflict, identity, gender, feminism, integration, and the tensions between



Algerian heritage and French society. Scholarship on Guene has also demonstrated the importance of linguistic codes and identity construction in her fiction (Alvarez, 2022; Matu, 2018/2026).

Nevertheless, there remains a need for closer linguistic analysis of how colonial and postcolonial meanings are encoded at the grammatical level. In particular, insufficient attention has been paid to how pronouns, verb structures, modality, imperatives, interrogatives, noun phrases, negation, agency, and clause organization construct relationships between Algerian/French identities, parents/children, men/women, and dominant/marginalized subjects.

The problem addressed by this study is therefore the lack of a systematic morphosyntactic account of colonial discourse in selected passages from *Men Don't Cry*. The study investigates how grammatical structures contribute to the representation of cultural difference, assimilation, othering, authority, resistance, and identity.

7. Methodology

7.1 Research Design

The study employs a qualitative textual-analysis design. Qualitative discourse analysis is appropriate because the objective is not to calculate the frequency of grammatical structures alone but to interpret how linguistic choices acquire ideological meanings within social and cultural contexts.

The primary data consist of the passages supplied from *Men Don't Cry*. The quotations are treated as selected textual units rather than as a statistically representative corpus. The analysis is therefore interpretive and exploratory.

7.2 Data Selection

Purposive sampling is employed in this study to select passages from *Men Don't Cry* that are particularly relevant to the investigation of colonial discourse from a morphosyntactic perspective. The selected passages were chosen because they contain explicit or implicit representations of cultural difference, Arab/French identity, family authority, gender expectations, assimilation, discrimination, religious identity, freedom, resistance, othering, and intergenerational conflict.

These passages provide linguistically rich data through which the study examines how grammatical structures such as pronouns, noun phrases, verb forms, modality, interrogatives, imperatives, conditional clauses, and relative clauses contribute to the construction of identity, power, and ideology. The page references used throughout the analysis correspond to the page numbers provided in the textual data supplied for this study.

7.3 Analytical Procedure

The analysis proceeds in three stages. First, morphosyntactic features are identified. Second, these features are interpreted according to their immediate textual function. Third, they are connected to broader ideological structures through CDA.

Fairclough's (1992, 2003) approach is particularly useful because it connects textual analysis with discourse practice and sociocultural practice. At the textual level, the study examines grammar and clause structure; at the discourse level, it considers how characters represent themselves and others; and at the sociocultural level, it relates these representations to colonial history, migration, assimilation, gender, and cultural power.



8. Theoretical Framework

The study combines Critical Discourse Analysis, functional approaches to grammar, and postcolonial theory.

Fairclough (1992, 2003) argues that language is a form of social practice in which ideology and power can be reproduced or contested. His model allows linguistic choices to be connected to wider social relations.

Halliday and Matthiessen's (2014) functional approach is also relevant because grammar represents experience, interpersonal relationships, and textual organization. Processes, participants, modality, mood, and transitivity help reveal who acts, who is affected, who gives orders, who receives them, and how certainty or obligation is expressed.

Postcolonial theory further assists the interpretation. Said (1978) provides the concept of representational othering; Bhabha (1994) provides hybridity and ambivalence; and Fanon (1967) provides insight into the relationship between language, cultural recognition, and colonial identity.

9. Analysis and Interpretation

This section presents a morphosyntactic analysis and interpretation of selected passages from Faïza Guène's *Men Don't Cry* (2016) to examine how grammatical structures contribute to the construction of colonial, cultural, gendered, and familial discourses. The analysis focuses particularly on pronouns, noun phrases, articles, verb forms, modality, interrogatives, imperatives, conditional clauses, relative clauses, participial constructions, and subject-object relations. These grammatical features are not treated merely as formal elements of language; rather, they are examined as resources through which characters construct identities, exercise authority, express cultural anxiety, and negotiate resistance.

Following Fairclough's (1992) view of language as a form of social practice and Halliday and Matthiessen's (2014) functional approach to grammar, the analysis considers how morphosyntactic choices represent agency, power, exclusion, cultural difference, and ideological positioning. Particular attention is given to the conflicting representations of Europe and Algeria, modernity and tradition, family authority and individual freedom, and cultural belonging and assimilation.

The analysis also draws on Bhabha's (1994) concept of hybridity and ambivalence and Said's (1978) understanding of cultural othering to interpret how grammatical choices participate in the construction of postcolonial identity. Rather than treating the selected linguistic features separately, the discussion brings them together to demonstrate how morphosyntax becomes a significant site where colonial legacies, patriarchal authority, cultural expectations, and Dounia's emerging agency intersect and compete.

9.1 Pronouns, Cultural Identity, and the Construction of "We" and "They"

One of the most significant morphosyntactic features in the selected passages is the use of personal and possessive pronouns to construct cultural and familial identities. In the statement, "We watched a fat man with a moustache reading out the football results" (Guène, 2016, p. 2), the first-person plural pronoun "we" constructs the family as a collective subject. The verb "watched" assigns the family the role of an active participant experiencing a new cultural medium. The collective pronoun is reinforced by the possessive determiner in "our eyes" in the following sentence:



“Dozens and dozens of channels paraded before our eyes: Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Egypt, Dubai, Yemen, Jordan, Qatar” (Guène, 2016, p. 2). Thus, *we* and *our* construct a shared cultural experience and establish the family as a collective community.

The geographical list following the colon is particularly significant because the family is physically located in France while symbolically connected to Arab and Muslim countries. The grammatical movement from “we” to the sequence of geographical names represents a displaced cultural identity. The family watches the Arab world from a French environment, creating a tension between physical location and cultural belonging. This reflects Bhabha's (1994) concept of cultural hybridity, according to which migrant identities frequently develop in an intermediate space between cultures rather than belonging exclusively to one national or cultural category.

Pronouns also construct divisions within the family. In “If you hadn’t brought me here, and we had raised them in Algeria instead” (Guène, 2016, p. 6), the pronouns “you,” “me,” “we,” and “them” establish different positions of power. The parents are represented through “we” as decision-makers, while the children are represented through “them” as the recipients of parental decisions. Dounia is therefore grammatically positioned not merely as an individual but as someone whose cultural identity has been shaped by decisions made by others. Similarly, “We’re better off without you” (Guène, 2016, p. 9) creates a sharp opposition between “we” and “you.” The first-person plural pronoun constructs a unified family group, while *you* excludes Dounia from that collective identity. The comparative expression “better off” further suggests that the family's condition improves through her exclusion.

The movement from collective “we” to individual “I” later becomes central to Dounia's resistance. Her declaration, “I’m going to own my life and be free!” (Guène, 2016, p. 10), replaces collective identity with individual agency. The morphosyntactic movement from *we* to *I* therefore corresponds to Dounia's movement from family-controlled identity toward self-determined identity. Pronouns consequently function as important resources for representing belonging, exclusion, cultural conflict, and individual autonomy.

9.2 Conditional Clauses and the Europe–Algeria Cultural Binary

The contrast between Europe and Algeria is strongly constructed through conditional and temporal structures. The statement “It’s the kind of disease you can only catch in Europe!” (Guène, 2016, p. 6) represents European influence through the metaphor of illness. The noun phrase “the kind of disease” categorizes cultural change as a pathological condition, while the verb “catch”, normally associated with infection, metaphorically represents European cultural influence as something contagious.

The following conditional construction makes the ideological relationship more explicit:

“If you hadn’t brought me here, and we had raised them in Algeria instead, Dounia would never have caught it!” (Guène, 2016, p. 6).

The past-perfect forms “hadn’t brought” and “had raised” establish an unreal or hypothetical past, while “would never have caught” expresses the imagined consequence. The grammar creates two alternative cultural possibilities: remaining in Algeria would supposedly have protected Dounia from cultural change, whereas living in Europe has caused it. Europe is consequently constructed as the causal environment of Dounia's transformation.



However, the novel complicates this binary because Dounia herself associates French society with freedom and modernity. She states, “Julie’s mum’s modern. She works in an office and she drives a car” (Guène, 2016, p. 5). The copular construction “Julie’s mum’s modern” assigns *modern* directly to the French woman, while the following material clauses provide evidence for that judgment. Thus, working in an office and driving a car are represented as signs of modernity.

The contrasting evaluations create two competing ideological constructions:

Father's discourse: Europe → cultural disease → loss of identity

Dounia's discourse: Europe → modernity → freedom

This contradiction illustrates the ambivalence of postcolonial identity described by Bhabha (1994). Europe is simultaneously a threatening cultural influence and an attractive source of alternative possibilities. The morphosyntactic structures therefore reveal that the conflict is not simply geographical; it concerns competing definitions of cultural authenticity, modernity, and belonging.

9.3 Noun Phrases, Articles, and the Construction of the Cultural “Other”

Noun phrases and determiners play an important role in constructing social categories in the selected data. A particularly direct example is:

“Nah, but you’re Arab innit?” (Guène, 2016, p. 93).

The clause “you’re Arab” is a simple copular construction in which *Arab* functions as the subject complement. Grammatically, a complex individual is reduced to one ethnic category. The sentence does not recognize the addressee's multiple identities; instead, ethnicity becomes the apparently obvious explanation of his identity and behaviour.

The colloquial tag “innit?” strengthens this effect because it presents the statement as common knowledge rather than as a debatable ideological assumption. The grammatical simplicity of the construction consequently contributes to its ideological force. As Fairclough (1992) argues, ideology can become powerful when particular representations are naturalized and presented as ordinary common sense.

A similar process occurs in “a waitress was a prostitute with a tray in her hand and an apron round her waist” (Guène, 2016, p. 7). The copular structure can be represented as:

a waitress → was → a prostitute

The indefinite article “a” before both nouns produces a generic classification. Rather than referring to one particular waitress, the statement appears to generalize about women in the occupation. The grammatical structure therefore transforms an individual social category into a moral stereotype.

The same generalizing function can be observed in “a woman who buys her daughter cigarettes” (Guène, 2016, p. 5). The indefinite noun phrase *a woman* establishes a generalized category, while the relative clause identifies the behaviour supposedly defining that category. The grammatical pattern therefore converts individual actions into social and moral classifications.

From the perspective of Said's (1978) theory of Orientalism, such categorization is significant because the Other is often represented through simplified and generalized characteristics. The selected morphosyntactic structures demonstrate how ordinary noun phrases can contribute to the production of social difference.



9.4 Relative Clauses, Stereotyping, and Moral Judgment

Relative clauses are another important morphosyntactic resource through which characters are evaluated. In the statement:

“Why would I follow the example of a woman who buys her daughter cigarettes? A woman who’s killing her own child? And who borrows her trousers?” (Guène, 2016, p. 5),

the noun phrase “a woman who buys her daughter cigarettes” contains the relative clause “who buys her daughter cigarettes.” The relative pronoun *who* refers to *woman*, while *her daughter* functions as the recipient and *cigarettes* as the object of *buys*.

The relative clause does more than provide additional information. It defines the woman through a particular behaviour. The following fragment, “A woman who’s killing her own child?”, intensifies the judgment. The progressive form “is killing” represents the action as ongoing, while “her own child” emphasizes the maternal relationship through the possessive construction.

The third construction, “And who borrows her trousers?”, adds another accusation through coordination. The repeated “who” creates a cumulative structure in which each relative clause adds another allegedly unacceptable behaviour. The syntax therefore constructs identity through accumulated judgments.

This pattern demonstrates how morphosyntax can support ideological generalization. Instead of presenting Julie's mother as an individual with particular choices, the father constructs her as a social type: a woman whose behaviour violates his expectations of appropriate femininity and motherhood. The grammatical structure thus intersects with gender ideology, morality, and cultural difference.

9.5 Interrogatives, Imperatives, and the Grammar of Patriarchal Authority

Interrogative and imperative structures are particularly important in representing authority within the family. The father's questions to Dounia include:

“Where were you? Have you seen what time it is?” (Guène, 2016, p. 3).

Although these clauses are grammatically interrogative, they do not simply seek information. “Where were you?” demands an explanation, while “Have you seen what time it is?” functions primarily as a reprimand. The interrogative form therefore becomes an instrument of discipline.

This authority is intensified through imperatives such as “Eat!”, “Don’t pull that face!”, and “Go on, do it then, and clear off with your boyfriend” (Guène, 2016, pp. 52, 8, 9). Imperatives generally omit the grammatical subject because the addressee is understood. This absence contributes to their directness and force.

The negative imperative “Don’t pull that face!” combines the auxiliary *do* with negation to prohibit behaviour. Similarly, the coordinated imperatives “Go on,” “do it,” and “clear off” create an escalating sequence of commands. Coordination through and links separate acts of verbal control and intensifies the emotional force of the utterance.

The father's statement “I’ll teach you to show me respect” (Guène, 2016, p. 3) further establishes hierarchical authority. The verb *teach* normally belongs to education, but here it is associated with punishment and discipline. The structure constructs the father as the person possessing knowledge of appropriate behaviour and Dounia as the person who must be corrected.



Similarly, “Aren’t you ashamed of putting our parents through this?” (Guène, 2016, p. 9) uses a negative interrogative to impose moral responsibility. The question presupposes that Dounia ought to feel ashamed. The possessive “our” again creates a collective family identity, while “this” refers deictically to the situation produced by Dounia's rebellion.

These grammatical patterns demonstrate that authority is enacted through syntax. Interrogatives demand accountability, imperatives demand obedience, and negative interrogatives impose moral judgment. Fairclough (1992) emphasizes that discourse participates in the reproduction of social power, and the selected passages illustrate this process at the level of everyday family interaction.

9.6 Modality, Obligation, and the Struggle for Control

Modal and future-oriented constructions reveal competing claims to authority. In “You have to make everybody suffer with your lousy selfishness” (Guène, 2016, p. 9), the construction “have to” expresses strong obligation. Dounia's behaviour is presented not as an interpretation but as a responsibility that she must recognize.

The father's statement “I’ll teach you to show me respect” also uses the future form “I’ll” to project authority into the future. In context, the construction functions less as a neutral prediction than as a threat of disciplinary action. The father's future is therefore presented as an extension of his present authority.

Dounia reverses this relationship through her own future-oriented constructions:

“I’m going to own my life and be free! I won’t let you choose a husband for me or lock me up inside this house” (Guène, 2016, p. 10).

Here, “I’m going to” expresses intention, while “won’t” expresses refusal. The two constructions establish both positive and negative agency. Dounia announces what she intends to do and what she will prevent others from doing.

The construction “I won’t let you choose a husband for me” is particularly important. Dounia is the subject of *won't let*, while *you* is the potential actor of *choose*. The embedded infinitive “choose” therefore represents the family's attempted control over her future. The prepositional phrase “for me” emphasizes that the consequences of this decision concern Dounia herself.

The second infinitive, “lock me up inside this house,” extends the metaphor of control into the physical space of the home. The house becomes associated with confinement rather than security. Modality consequently becomes a linguistic site of ideological struggle: parental modal constructions impose obligations, while Dounia's modal constructions establish refusal and autonomy.

9.7 Agency, Subjecthood, and the Transformation of Dounia

A major pattern across the selected data is the relationship between grammatical subjecthood and agency. When other characters speak about Dounia, she is frequently represented as an affected participant or object of judgment. For example, “Dounia would never have caught it” positions her as the participant affected by the supposed European “disease.” Similarly, “You have to make everybody suffer” constructs her as responsible for the family's suffering.

By contrast, when Dounia speaks for herself, she becomes a grammatical subject:

“I’m going to own my life and be free!”

and

“I won’t let you choose a husband for me...” (Guène, 2016, p. 10).



The repeated subject “I” foregrounds Dounia's agency. The verbs “own,” “be,” and “let” position her as an active decision-maker. The contrast between these structures is central to understanding her character development.

The sentence “I made to help her, but my father restrained me” (Guène, 2016, p. 10) extends this struggle to the narrator. The conjunction “but” creates a contrast between intended agency and imposed restriction. The first-person narrator intends to act, but the father becomes the actor of “restrained,” while the narrator becomes its object.

Participial constructions also contribute to the representation of agency and backgrounded action. In “my father restrained me, putting his hand on my shoulder,” the finite verb *restrained* foregrounds the father's action, while “putting his hand” provides accompanying information. Similarly, “Big Baba circling Dounia like a crime squad investigator” (Guène, 2016, p. 3) uses the present participle *circling* to represent continuous surveillance.

The grammar therefore reveals a transition from externally imposed identity to self-asserted identity. As Halliday and Matthiessen (2014) explain, grammatical choices concerning participants and processes contribute to how experience and agency are represented. In the selected passages, Dounia's increasing grammatical subjecthood parallels her ideological movement toward independence.

9.8 Naming, Religion, and Cultural Categorization

Names and religious classifications provide another important dimension of cultural identity. The father's question, “Do you think your name is Christine?” (Guène, 2016, p. 3), uses the proper noun *Christine* as a symbolic representation of Frenchness. The interrogative is not simply concerned with Dounia's name; it challenges the cultural identity that the father perceives her to be adopting.

The narrator subsequently states:

“I suspect my sister often wished she was called Christine. Today, her name might as well be Christine” (Guène, 2016, p. 3).

The expression “I suspect” introduces epistemic distance. Unlike the father's direct accusation, the narrator signals uncertainty. The construction “might as well be” then establishes a hypothetical equivalence between Dounia and Christine. Her actual name remains unchanged, but she is represented symbolically as having crossed a cultural boundary.

Religion is represented differently in the statement:

“Well then, eat! Plus, it's halal! I sent Mario to the other side of Paris to find a Muslim butcher! Specially for you” (Guène, 2016, p. 52).

Here, “it's halal” uses the copular verb *is* to classify food according to Islamic dietary practice. The noun phrase “a Muslim butcher” combines occupation and religious identity. Unlike the hostile ethnic categorization in “you're Arab,” this construction can function positively by demonstrating accommodation and solidarity.

This contrast is analytically important. The novel does not represent all cultural or religious categorization as inherently oppressive. The ideological meaning depends upon context and interpersonal relationships. As Fairclough (1992) notes, discourse must be understood within its broader social relations. In this passage, the religious category facilitates inclusion rather than exclusion.



9.9 Gender, Domestic Space, and Resistance to Cultural Control

The selected passages demonstrate that cultural conflict is closely connected with gender and patriarchal authority. Dounia's resistance is not limited to cultural identity; it also concerns her right to control her body, relationships, marriage, and future.

The statement "I won't let you choose a husband for me or lock me up inside this house" is especially significant. The grammatical structure "you choose a husband for me" positions the family as the actor and Dounia as the beneficiary or affected person. Her use of "I won't let" reverses this relationship by placing herself in the controlling subject position.

The phrase "inside this house" transforms domestic space into a metaphor for confinement. The infinitive "lock me up" evokes imprisonment and therefore represents patriarchal control in spatial terms. The house is no longer merely a place of family belonging; it becomes a site of restricted female agency.

This gendered dimension is also visible in the father's description of Julie's mother and in the statement "a waitress was a prostitute." Female employment, dress, sexuality, and morality are connected through restrictive classifications. The father evaluates women according to patriarchal expectations concerning respectable behaviour.

Dounia's declaration "I'm going to own my life and be free" consequently represents more than personal rebellion. The possessive construction "my life" establishes self-ownership, while the infinitive "be free" expresses a desired state of autonomy. The coordinated predicates "own my life" and "be free" link personal possession with liberation.

The analysis therefore suggests that colonial and patriarchal discourses intersect in the novel. Dounia's cultural struggle cannot be separated from the gendered restrictions imposed upon her. Her movement toward French society is partly attractive because it appears to offer an alternative model of female autonomy. At the same time, the novel does not present this movement as uncomplicated assimilation; rather, it reveals the tensions and contradictions involved in negotiating cultural identity.

9.10 Emotional Burden, Surveillance, and Morphosyntax as Ideological Struggle

The final group of patterns concerns bodily representation, emotional suffering, surveillance, and the broader ideological function of morphosyntax. The description "There were tears in Dounia's eyes as she walked away" (Guène, 2016, p. 10) uses an existential construction rather than the simple clause *Dounia cried*. The grammatical structure foregrounds "tears" as an observable phenomenon and indirectly represents emotional suffering.

The following description, "her emaciated body dragging a suitcase that appeared to weigh a tonne," combines an adjective, a participial clause, and a relative clause. The adjective "emaciated" emphasizes physical weakness, while "dragging" depicts continuous physical effort. The relative clause "that appeared to weigh a tonne" modifies *suitcase*, and the verb "appeared" introduces perception rather than objective fact. The suitcase can consequently be read metaphorically as representing Dounia's emotional and cultural burden.

Surveillance is similarly constructed through the simile "Big Baba circling Dounia like a crime squad investigator in full interrogation mode" (Guène, 2016, p. 3). The participle "circling" represents continuous movement around Dounia, while the noun



phrase “crime squad investigator” transfers the language of institutional policing into the domestic environment. The subsequent interrogatives, “Where were you?” and “Have you seen what time it is?”, reinforce this atmosphere of investigation. Dounia is grammatically positioned as a person who must account for her movements.

The phrase “a lousy sell-out” (Guène, 2016, p. 9) further demonstrates how compact noun phrases can encode ideological judgments. The indefinite article “a” categorizes Dounia, the adjective “lousy” intensifies the negative evaluation, and the compound noun “sell-out” constructs cultural assimilation as betrayal. The expression presupposes that Dounia has exchanged or abandoned an inherited identity for another cultural identity.

Taken together, these examples demonstrate that morphosyntax is not merely a formal dimension of the novel. Pronouns construct inclusion and exclusion; conditional clauses construct cultural causality; noun phrases produce social categories; relative clauses accumulate moral judgments; interrogatives and imperatives enact authority; modality expresses obligation and resistance; and subject–object relations reveal changing agency. The selected data therefore support the argument that grammatical choices participate in the construction and contestation of colonial, cultural, gendered, and familial ideologies.

Most importantly, the novel does not establish a simple opposition between France and Algeria, modernity and tradition, or oppression and freedom. Instead, its morphosyntactic patterns reveal ambivalence. The father's discourse constructs Europe as a cultural “disease,” whereas Dounia associates aspects of European life with modernity and freedom. The family attempts to preserve cultural continuity, while Dounia seeks greater individual autonomy. Her final movement from externally defined identity to first-person agency illustrates the complex process of negotiating identity in a postcolonial and diasporic context (Bhabha, 1994; Fanon, 1967).

Thus, the analysis demonstrates that morphosyntax functions as a site of ideological struggle in *Men Don't Cry*. The grammatical organization of subjects, objects, pronouns, noun phrases, clauses, modality, and verbal mood repeatedly determines who can act, who must obey, who is included, and who is excluded. Dounia's increasing use of first-person agency and future-oriented refusal represents a linguistic movement toward self-definition, while the controlling discourse of her family uses interrogatives, imperatives, obligation, categorization, and evaluative constructions to preserve authority. Morphosyntax therefore provides a productive linguistic lens through which the novel's representation of colonial legacy, cultural hybridity, gender, migration, and resistance can be understood (Fairclough, 1992).

The following grammatical resources repeatedly perform ideological work:

Morphosyntactic feature	Discursive function
Pronouns	Construct in-groups and out-groups
Copular clauses	Assign identities/categories
Modal verbs	Express obligation, threat, possibility and refusal
Imperatives	Exercise authority
Interrogatives	Demand accountability
Negative interrogatives	Presuppose guilt or obligation



Morphosyntactic feature	Discursive function
Conditional clauses	Construct alternative cultural histories
Relative clauses	Define social types
Active constructions	Give characters agency
Object constructions	Represent characters as affected
Participial clauses	Background or compress actions
Possessives	Construct ownership and identity
Articles	Generalize or particularize identities
Prepositional phrases	Construct social/spatial relations
Coordination	Accumulate evaluations or actions
Negation	Resist imposed meanings

The central argument emerging from these patterns is that colonial discourse is reproduced not only by explicit words such as *Arab*, *French*, or *Europe*, but through the grammar that organizes relationships between people and actions.

10. Findings

The analysis reveals that morphosyntactic choices in the selected passages of *Men Don't Cry* play a significant role in constructing colonial and postcolonial meanings. First, pronouns such as *we*, *you*, *us*, *them*, and *I* establish shifting boundaries between family members, cultural groups, and competing identities.

The contrast between collective *we* and individual *I* is particularly important because it reflects Dounia's movement from externally controlled identity toward self-defined agency. Second, copular constructions such as "*you're Arab*" and "*a waitress was a prostitute*" transform social categories into apparently fixed identities and thereby contribute to processes of othering and stereotyping. Third, conditional structures, especially the construction linking Europe with Dounia's supposed "disease," represent cultural transformation as a consequence of European influence.

Fourth, imperatives and interrogatives function as grammatical resources of discipline, allowing parental authority to be enacted through language. Fifth, modality becomes a major site of ideological conflict: parental constructions such as "*I'll teach you*" encode authority, whereas Dounia's "*I won't let you*" encodes resistance. Sixth, noun phrases and articles contribute to generalization by turning individuals into social types such as "*a woman*," "*a waitress*," "*a prostitute*," and "*a sell-out*." Seventh, active and object-oriented constructions distribute agency unevenly, often representing Dounia as an object of family judgment before she reclaims subjecthood through first-person constructions.

Finally, the findings indicate that colonial discourse in the novel is deeply intertwined with gender, family authority, assimilation, and cultural identity. The text does not present a simple opposition between French modernity and Algerian tradition; instead, its grammatical structures reveal an ambivalent postcolonial space in which the dominant culture is simultaneously desired, feared, resisted, and internalized. This interpretation is consistent with scholarship emphasizing Guène's concern with identity, gender, migration, and linguistic codes.



11. Conclusion

This study has examined the representation of colonial discourse in selected passages from Faïza Guène's *Men Don't Cry* through a morphosyntactic perspective. Drawing on Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis, Hallidayan functional grammar, and postcolonial perspectives associated with Said, Bhabha, and Fanon, the study has demonstrated that grammatical choices are central to the construction of cultural identity and social power.

The analysis shows that pronouns establish boundaries between insiders and outsiders, noun phrases categorize individuals according to ethnicity, gender, occupation, and cultural loyalty, while copular constructions frequently turn socially constructed categories into apparently natural identities. Conditional clauses represent Europe as a causal force in cultural transformation, whereas imperatives and interrogatives reproduce familial authority and surveillance.

At the same time, Dounia's first-person constructions, future forms, negation, and infinitival complements provide a linguistic grammar of resistance. Her statement “*I'm going to own my life and be free*” is particularly significant because it transforms her from an object of other people's decisions into the grammatical and ideological subject of her own life. The study therefore concludes that colonial discourse in *Men Don't Cry* operates at both lexical and grammatical levels. It is reproduced through categories of Arabness, Frenchness, modernity, tradition, gender, and respectability, but it is also challenged through linguistic strategies of agency, refusal, and self-definition.

This finding extends existing scholarship on Guène, which has highlighted identity formation, gender construction, linguistic codes, migration, and postcolonial subjectivity, by showing more specifically how these concerns are encoded through morphosyntactic organization.

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