

Article

Cognitive Dissonance in the Emotional Landscape of Caregiving in Jojo Moyes's Works

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Abstract: Cognitive Dissonance in Caregiver Literature This article describes cognitive dissonance as presented in a narrative telling the emotions involved in caregiving. Based on Leon Festinger's theory of cognitive dissonance, the article explores the mental tension of the narrator caused by the contradictory beliefs about moral responsibility, agency, and emotional attachment. Using methods of close textual analysis, the paper identifies specific mechanisms of dissonance reduction, such as rationalization, moral reframing, and verbal affirmation. The other two in the narrative show the internal doubt alongside an outward determination and complexity of decision making in the face of illness or any vulnerable position a person finds themselves in. The analysis proves that cognitive dissonance appears not just as a psycho-social mechanism, but rather an effective model of emotional conflict in literary texts.

Keywords: Cognitive Dissonance, Caregiving Psychology, Moral Conflict, Emotional Ambivalence, Narrative Analysis, Leon Festinger, Psychological Tension

1. Introduction

"Me Before You" by Jojo Moyes presents a psychologically complex narrative structured around ethical conflict, emotional attachment, and moral ambivalence. The relationship between Louisa Clark and Will Traynor is built upon incompatible value systems, which generate a persistent state of cognitive dissonance. When the novel is examined alongside its Uzbek translation, this psychological tension becomes particularly significant, since translation strategies either preserve, intensify, or soften the dissonant elements embedded in the source text.

Theoretical Framework: Cognitive Dissonance in Literary Discourse

Cognitive dissonance, a concept introduced by Leon Festinger, refers to the psychological discomfort experienced when an individual holds two or more conflicting beliefs, values, or attitudes. In literary analysis, cognitive dissonance functions as a narrative mechanism that drives character development and internal conflict. In "Me Before You", Louisa's inner struggle between respecting Will's autonomy and desiring to save him becomes the central dissonant axis of the novel.

"Every time I looked at Will I wondered if I had done the right thing. He had been cleared by his GP for travel only the night before. He ate little and spent much of every day asleep. He seemed not just weary from his illness, but exhausted with life, tired of our interference, our upbeat attempts at conversation, our relentless determination to try to make things better for him. He tolerated me, but I got the feeling that he often wanted to be left alone. He didn't know that this was the one thing I could not do.

“There’s the airline woman,” I said, as a uniformed girl with a bright smile and a clipboard walked briskly toward us.

“Well, she’s going to be a lot of use on transfer,” Nathan muttered. “She doesn’t look like she could lift a frozen prawn.”

“We’ll manage,” I said. “Between us, we will manage.”

The selected passage demonstrates this internal contradiction clearly. Louisa reflects:

“Every time I looked at Will I wondered if I had done the right thing.”

This sentence contains a subtle but intense dissonant structure. On one level, Louisa believes that organizing the trip is an act of care and responsibility. On another level, she doubts whether her intervention respects Will’s wishes. The lexical unit “wondered” signals epistemic uncertainty, while the phrase “the right thing” invokes a moral framework. The tension arises from the incompatibility between perceived moral duty and possible emotional manipulation.

In the Uzbek translation, this line appears as:

“Uillga har gal nazar tashlaganimda, bu ishni to‘g‘ri qilayotganligimga shubhalanib qolardim.”

The translator renders “wondered” as “shubhalanib qolardim,” which carries a stronger semantic weight. While “wondered” may imply reflective hesitation, “shubhalanmoq” denotes explicit doubt. This lexical intensification amplifies the dissonance in the Uzbek version. The translator thus shifts the psychological nuance from mild uncertainty to conscious suspicion of one’s own moral action.

Emotional Exhaustion and Existential Dissonance

The English text continues:

“He seemed not just weary from his illness, but exhausted with life, tired of our interference...”

Here, the dissonance expands from Louisa’s internal struggle to Will’s existential state. The syntactic parallelism “not just... but...” emphasizes layered exhaustion. Will is not only physically ill but psychologically fatigued by imposed optimism and external control. Louisa recognizes this, yet she continues her efforts. This awareness deepens her cognitive conflict.

In Uzbek:

“U nafaqat hastalikdan, shu bilan birga bizlarning aralashuvimiz... bilan to‘la hayotdan charchaganligi ko‘rinib turardi.”

The Uzbek structure preserves the contrastive intensifier “nafaqat... shu bilan birga,” maintaining the dual exhaustion. However, the addition of “to‘la hayot” introduces a semantic nuance absent in the original. The phrase suggests a life saturated or overloaded with interference. This metaphorical expansion enhances the psychological weight of Will’s exhaustion, thereby strengthening the reader’s perception of Louisa’s moral tension.

Cognitive dissonance here operates through empathy. Louisa understands Will’s desire for autonomy:

“He tolerated me, but I got the feeling that he often wanted to be left alone.”

Yet she immediately negates this understanding:

“He didn’t know that this was the one thing I could not do.”

The adversative conjunction “but” functions as a pivot of dissonance. Louisa acknowledges his wish for isolation yet asserts her inability to comply. The incompatibility between empathy and action generates psychological strain.

The Uzbek version reads:

“Uni o‘z holiga qo‘yishlarini xohlashini sezib turgan bo‘lsam-da... Uni o‘z holiga tashlab qo‘ya olmasligimni u bilmasdi.”

The connective “bo‘lsam-da” effectively renders the concessive structure. However, “tashlab qo‘ya olmaslik” intensifies the emotional dimension. While “could not do” is relatively neutral, “tashlab qo‘yish” implies abandonment. Thus, the Uzbek translation reframes Louisa’s refusal not merely as inability but as moral rejection of abandonment. This shift transforms cognitive dissonance into ethical self-justification.

Dialogic Irony and Surface-Level Dissonance

The dialogue involving Nathan introduces another layer of cognitive complexity:

“She doesn’t look like she could lift a frozen prawn.”

This ironic understatement reflects defensive humor. Nathan trivializes the airline employee’s physical capacity, masking anxiety about the logistics of assisting Will. Humor functions as a coping mechanism to reduce dissonance between vulnerability and social normality.

In Uzbek, this line becomes:

“U hatto muzqaymoqni ham ko‘tara olmasa kerak.”

The phrase “muzqaymoqni ko‘tara olmasa” shifts from “frozen prawn” to “ice cream.” This cultural substitution modifies the imagery. While “frozen prawn” implies small weight and British culinary familiarity, “muzqaymoq” is culturally accessible but semantically less ironic. The metaphor loses part of its subtle sarcasm, slightly reducing the comic dissonance embedded in the original.

Narrative Voice and Self-Persuasion

The concluding lines emphasize collective reassurance:

“We’ll manage... Between us, we will manage.”

Repetition functions rhetorically as self-persuasion. Louisa attempts to reduce internal anxiety by asserting control. The modal verb “will” expresses determination rather than probability. Cognitive dissonance theory suggests that individuals often reinforce one belief to counteract conflicting doubt. Louisa’s repetition serves precisely this function.

The Uzbek translation:

“Biz eplaymiz... Sen bilan buni eplay olamiz.”

The verb “eplaymiz” carries connotations of practical coping and resilience. The shift from inclusive “between us” to explicitly relational “sen bilan” personalizes the reassurance. The Uzbek version foregrounds partnership, potentially softening the existential tension and reframing it as cooperative determination.

This passage from *Me Before You* demonstrates the way in which cognitive dissonance is used as a core narrative device. The tension between her respect for their autonomy and her emotional attachment to them produces an internal conflict. Such holistic dissonance which is moral in its nature in the Uzbek translation often takes a higher scope due to lexical and structural modifications.) This complexity of subjectivity is stripped when it is replaced with a responsibility to act ethically, and the added burden that will presumably accompany that action.

So, with some superheroes the phenomenon of cognitive dissonance not only shapes their character psychology but become subject to being translational transformed itself. The comparative analysis shows that translation can re-alter the degree of painfulness focus and ethical framing of internal conflict. With this reading, cognitive dissonance works on two levels: the level of narrative consciousness of the character and the level of interpretive consciousness of the translator.

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