

Theory and Practice in Language Studies

ISSN 1799-2591 (print); ISSN 2053-0692 (online)

Volume 16, Number 1, January 2026

Contents

REGULAR PAPERS

- Comprehension of Historical PhBW's and Contemporary PhCF's in Armenian: Linguistic Analysis, Generational Differences, and Pedagogical Implications 1
Mher S. Kumunts, Hasmik R. Khachatryan, Nektar M. Simonyan, Henrieta V. Sukiasyan, Manuk H. Falakyan, Leonid G. Telyan, Silva V. Papikyan, Armine A. Mkrtumyan, Gayane L. Khalatyan, Karine L. Arakelyan, and Vanuhi M. Baghranyan
- Enhancing EFL Learners' Writing Sub-Skills With AI-Mediated Tools: Take QuillBot as an Example 17
Manal Mohammed Elhamy Abd Al-Aziz, Shagufta Fatema, Beenish Naqvi, Imran Ahmad Khan, Taj Mohammad, and Soada Idris
- Are Children Colouring Books? The Psychology of Trauma and Colours in Khalid Hosseini's *The Kite Runner* 25
Aya Akkawi, Abdelkarim M. Allababneh, and Muneer Al Alawneh
- Semantic Correspondences of Vowel Sounds in the Kazakh Language: An Experimental Analysis of Sound Symbolism 32
Bolat Khassenov, Zhanel Bakhitova, Samal Aubakir, Uldar Issabekova, Aigul Assenova, Ainur Akkuzova, and Anar Ashirbekova
- Alienation vs. Societal Suppression: Exploring Gothic Romance Elements in Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter* and Ahmed Saadawi's *Frankenstein in Baghdad* 41
Ali Kareem Sameer, Hiba Hasan Suhail, Hiba Sulaiman Mejbel, and Loiy Hamidi Qutaish Alfawa'ra
- Language, Stigma, and Identity Transformation in *Joker* (2019): A Discourse-Pragmatic Analysis 47
Nizar Salim Fahim Abou-Alchaar
- A Cross-Cultural Study of Complaint Strategies by Native Speakers of American English and Vietnamese Learners of English 55
Nguyen Thi Tuyet Mai, Nguyen Thi Kim Luyen, and Pham Hien
- Comparative Analysis of High Lexicons in Balinese and Javanese Languages 68
Sry Satriya Tjatur Wisnu Sasangka, Sang Ayu Putu Eny Parwati, Nurweni Saptawuryandari, Hasina Fajrin R., Wati Kurniawati, Santy Yulianti, Ryen Maerina, Sarwo Ferdi Wibowo, Mu'awal Panji Handoko, and Ery Agus Kurnianto
- Reclaiming Identity: A Feminist Analysis of Trauma and Resistance in Toni Morrison's *Beloved* and *God Help the Child* 79
Srividyia Lakshmi K, Priyadarshini M.C, Sheik Hameed N, and Manimozhi R
- The Quest for Identity in Saud Alsanousi's *The Bamboo Stalk*: A Psychosocial Reading Through Erikson's Identity Development Theory 88
Rashed A. Daghamin, Bilal Zakarneh, and Claire Hamed
-

Emotion Metaphors We Live by: A Cognitive Study of Metaphors With Body Parts in Colloquial Jordanian Arabic <i>Mohammad Alboush, Raed Awad Al-Ramahi, Abdelhameed Al Awabdeh, and Abdelrazzaq Tahat</i>	98
Following the Trend and Focusing on Pastime—A Critical Review of the Poetry Translation by the Mandarin Duck and Butterfly School <i>Yaohan Guo and Rui Xiao</i>	106
Constructing Culinary Desires: Lexical and Discursive Patterns in Thai Food Advertising in Indonesia <i>Tassana Nualsomsri and I Wayan Numertayasa</i>	113
Structural Case Assignment in the Arabic Control Embedded Clause: The Role of Mood Beyond Agreement and Tense <i>Bashir M. Alnajadat</i>	123
Chess, Conspiracy and Crime: Unpacking the Intrigue in Ronan Bennet's <i>Zugzwang</i> <i>Subhapriya. S and Vinoth Kumar. M</i>	134
Mindfulness-Based Intervention and Its Effect on Working Memory in Gifted Students With Special Learning Needs in Language Education <i>Omar Ismail Alorani, Mays Yacoub Al Shebli, Luqman Mahmoud Rababah, Mahmoud Ali Ibrahim Rababah, Noor Talal Al-Bdour, Mona Ahmad Mostafa Atiyat, Somaya Abdel-Hameed Al-Ja'afreh, and Ziyad Mahmoud Miqdadi</i>	142
Culinary Metaphors as Cultural Symbols in Riau Malay Food Naming: A Pragmatic Analysis <i>Fatmahwati A., Achril Zalmansyah, Rosliani, Erli Yeti, Dyah Susilawati, Syamsurizal, Eka Suryatin, Rissari Yayuk, Jahdiah, Elfira Rosa Juningsih, Oldrie Chaterina Sorey, and Lefrand Rurut</i>	154
AI Translation in the Diplomatic Field: A Threat or a Tool for Human Translators? <i>Manal S. Habtoor, Soha M. Fallata, and Noha A. Alowed</i>	167
From Destabilisation to Reparative Connection: A Derridean Reading of Sally Rooney's <i>Normal People</i> <i>Blesslin Femi J, P.Revathi, Syed Wahaj Mohsin, A Anne Dorathy, and R. Ramya</i>	174
Transformative Maternities: Navigating Culture, Identity, and Motherhood in Amy Tan's <i>The Joy Luck Club</i> <i>Nancy H. Al-Doghmi, Rahmeh S. Izzaldeen, and Enas El. Abd El-Rahman</i>	183
Preserving Local Languages Through Communication Media: The Role of Acehnese Oral Literature in Eastern Coastal Aceh <i>Joko Hariadi, Nur Amelia, Indah Fajarini, Muhammad Arif Fadhillah, Muhammad Taufik Hidayat, Tanita Liasna, Widia Tamara, Mulkan Andika Situmorang, Ria Wuri Andary, and Adib Alfalah</i>	194
Does Translation Contribute to Facilitating Second Language Acquisition? <i>Abdulaziz M. Alsaawi</i>	204
Turkic Language Speakers' Perception of Toponyms as Cultural Heritage in the National Epos "Edige" <i>Katira M. Shakirova, Ainur Z. Kenbayeva, Zamzagul Ye. Suleimenova, Aigerim S. Myrzagaliyeva, Gulnara S. Obayeva, Aqkerbez Ye. Amangalieva, and Gulnaz Zh. Mambetova</i>	215
Language, Ideology, Power, and Persuasion: A Case in Arabic <i>Mohammad A. Al-kuran and Mahmoud Kanakri</i>	224
Memory Trauma and the Making of the New Human: Abai as Cultural Hero <i>Akmaral Smagulova, Baurzhan Yerdembekov, Nur Magazbekov, Gulnur Mursalim, and Zhandos Aubakir</i>	232

The Emergence of Agreement in Arabic as an L2: A Feature-Based Approach <i>Abdullah Ibrahim Alsubhi</i>	242
Resilience as Reparation: An Exploration of Traumatic Memories in Santanu Bhattacharya's <i>One Small Voice</i> <i>Yogalakshmi D and S.Vijayalakshmi</i>	252
Discursive Constructions of Authority: A Comparative Analysis of Tone and Context in King Abdullah II's Speeches Within a Translation Framework <i>Mohammad Faleh Al-Hanaqtah, Yasmeen A. Abu-Taleb, Tamadur Sulayman Al-Shamayleh, Manar Abu Darwish, Yasmin Mahmoud Mohammad Alarainat, and Mheel Malh Al-Smaihyeen</i>	258
Promotional Speech Acts in Digital Fashion Retail: An Empirical Study of Consumer Purchase Intentions in Indonesia <i>Sumarlam Sumarlam, Djatmika Djatmika, Yuli Widiyana, and Sri Budiyo</i>	268
I'm Online: Social Media and English as a Foreign Language (EFL) Learning <i>Maram M. Alluhaybi</i>	279
Fictionalizing the Self: Autofictional Fragments in Meena Kandasamy's <i>When I Hit You</i> <i>Reeba Princy P and Thomas Alwa Edison K</i>	286
Requirements for Employing Artificial Intelligence Applications in English Language Education at Universities: Perspectives of Faculty Members <i>Tahani F. Abu Jraiban, Yousef M. Sawalha, Ruba Ahmad Al-Shahwan, and Rawan A. Alkhabayba</i>	292
Blended Learning in EFL Contexts: Lecturers' Perceptions and Its Effect on Students' Performance in Indonesian Higher Education <i>Muhammad Darrin Zuhri, Rudi Hartono, Issy Yuliasri, and Yuliati</i>	304
The Use of CONTAINER and PATH Image Schema in the Chinese Government White Paper "Fighting COVID-19: China in Action" <i>Ruisi Zhang, Marlina Jamal, and Malini Ganapathy</i>	313
The Language of Colors: Symbolism of Hues in Kazakh Proverbs and Cross-Cultural Comparison <i>Gulnur Tlegenova, Gulim Shukenay, Aigul Shynybekova, Zhumashay Rakys, Balzhan Agabekova, Saule Berkimbayeva, and Saniya Kabdrgalinova</i>	324
From Stillness to Presence: A Comparative Study of Spatial Poetics in Vietnamese Zen Poetry and Japanese Haiku <i>Hang Thu Pham</i>	334

Comprehension of Historical PhBW's and Contemporary PhCF's in Armenian: Linguistic Analysis, Generational Differences, and Pedagogical Implications

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Abstract—This study examines loanwords/phrases (PhBW) in Armenian, focusing on Khachatur Abovyan’s works and pedagogical challenges in multilingual education. Etymological, corpus-based, and comparative analyses highlight historical/sociocultural borrowing dynamics from Persian, Turkic, and Russian. While enriching the lexicon, the complexity of PhBW poses understanding and teaching difficulties. Generational surveys (N=20) reveal significant disparities: younger generations (70%) show higher comprehension of PhBW and modern phrases with foreignisms (PhCFs) compared to older groups (20%). The study underscores the need for systematic teaching methodologies that incorporate cultural and historical contexts. Such approaches would enhance the accessibility of classical literature while preserving linguistic authenticity. Practical strategies like visual modeling, scenario-based tasks, and discussions are proposed. Findings emphasize balancing language modernization and heritage preservation, offering insights relevant to other multilingual educational systems.

Index Terms—loanwords, PhBW, multilingual education, Khachatur Abovyan, Armenian language pedagogy

I. INTRODUCTION

A. Problem Description and Relevance

In contemporary multilingual educational and intercultural environments, borrowings resulting from the interaction of different languages play a significant role in both discourse construction and communication (Wei, 2011). These linguistic elements—loanwords and phrases formed with them (*phrase with borrowed words-PhBW*) — on the one hand, enrich the vocabulary (Kumunts, 2003b), and on the other hand, can pose difficulties during study and teaching (ST) (Canning et al., 2024). Nevertheless, experience shows that they are important cultural components formed in multicultural settings through the convergence of historical and social conditions (Rohartati et al., 2024). Therefore, in the context of multilingual and multicultural education, it is necessary to develop teaching methods that help learners effectively master these types of linguistic phenomena without sacrificing cultural content (García & Wei, 2014).

This article distinguishes between two main types of structures containing non-native lexical items. The term *PhBW* (*phrase with borrowed words*) refers to historically integrated phrasal units containing loanwords from languages such as Persian, Arabic, and Turkic (Kumunts, 2003a, 2003c) and is frequently found in the works of 19th-century authors like Khachatur Abovyan. The term *PhCF* (*phrase containing foreignism*) denotes contemporary, often less assimilated, phrases incorporating recent foreign elements, primarily from English and Russian, which are prevalent in modern spoken Armenian and digital communication. *Nominal constructions (NCs)* (Bussmann, 1996, p. 443), especially those formed with the verb *anel* (‘to do/make’), represent a frequent structural type (Kumunts, 2003a; Kumunts et al., 2023) within the historical PhBW category examined in Abovyan’s works.

The work of Khachatur Abovyan (1809-1848)—an Armenian enlightener, prominent writer, translator, pedagogue, and the founder of Eastern Armenian Ashkharhabar (Modern Standard Eastern Armenian) literature—marks the beginning of a new stage in the development of Armenian literature, differing from the previous one in terms of themes, language, and choice of characters (Santrosyan, 1953; Bazyan, 1966). When teaching Kh. Abovyan’s works, educators encounter various difficulties directly related to the language of the author’s creations, particularly the layer of loanwords in the vocabulary. Experimental data indicate that the status of a word as a loanword significantly affects its difficulty for learners (Canning et al., 2024). This problem is also observed during the study and teaching of works by other Armenian classical writers (M. Nalbandyan, Raffi, H. Tumanyan, A. Bakunts, etc.). One reason is that these authors made extensive use of vernacular speech and dialects (Ezekyan, 1990).

In the 19th century, Armenian was still on the path to becoming a standardized literary language, while the old literary Armenian, Grabar (Classical Armenian), was already incomprehensible to the general populace (Margaryan, 1958). Developing appropriate methodological approaches remains a relevant challenge. To date, there is no known comprehensive methodological work offering means to make the language of Khachatur Abovyan and other popular classical authors more accessible and understandable. Furthermore, idiomatic expressions (particularly PhBW) and their peculiarities (Gevorgyan, 1969; Berberyan, 2023) pose obstacles for students, pupils, and even teachers and lecturers. This may contribute to the declining interest in reading the works of classical authors today.

B. Research Goal, Objectives and Structure

The purpose of this study is to identify the challenges posed by loanwords and the phrases formed with them (PhBW) in Armenian, using the works of Khachatur Abovyan as material for study and teaching. The goal is set to develop an effective methodology for teaching these structures in monolingual, multilingual (particularly for the Armenian diaspora), and intercultural educational environments. The article attempts to investigate the historical-cultural, etymological, and semantic layers of borrowings, emphasizing their role in language development and social communication. Particular attention is paid to generational differences in comprehension (based on empirical data), the influence of foreignisms (PhCFs) on contemporary linguistic reality, and the need to preserve traditional structures of the literary language. The research aims to propose pedagogical tools (visual models, scenario-based tasks, group discussions) that will facilitate learners’ mastery of the linguistic complexities of classical works without loss of cultural identity.

This objective is crucial within the strategy for the development of the Armenian language, ensuring a balance between the impact of globalization and the preservation of national linguistic and cognitive values.

To achieve these goals, the research focuses on the following main tasks: analyzing the difficulties of PhBW in teaching classical literature, developing methods based on historical-cultural and etymological analysis, bridging the generational comprehension gap, and reconciling language modernization with the preservation of tradition.

The article is organized as follows: After the Introduction (Section 1), the theoretical and historical context is presented (Section 2). Subsequently, the applied methodology is detailed (Section 3). The Results section (Section 4) presents data from linguistic analysis and empirical surveys. The Discussion section (Section 5) interprets the findings and their implications. The article concludes with a summary (Section 6).

II. THEORETICAL AND HISTORICAL CONTEXT

In the case of Armenian, a language with a long history of development and numerous linguistic contacts, the study and teaching of PhBW acquire particular significance. To understand the role of these structures and the difficulties associated with their acquisition, it is necessary to consider both the main stages of Armenian language development and its historical linguistic contacts.

The study and teaching (ST) of PhBW are inextricably linked because the teaching process itself implies the continuation of study, and conversely, the aim of study includes dissemination and discovery. Despite this interconnectedness, it is impossible to organize teaching and dissemination effectively—whether as examples or as research-methodological guidelines—without first observing and researching the material being studied and taught. The study and teaching of PhBW is a rather complex process, especially for a language that has undergone four major developmental periods starting from the 3rd millennium BC, had two literary standards in the past, and currently has two literary standards (see Table 1).

TABLE 1¹
MAIN STAGES IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF ARMENIAN (FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF THE LITERARY LANGUAGE)

#	Stage / Variant	Period	Main Description	Notable Examples / Figures / Works
1	<i>Proto-Armenian</i>	~3rd–2nd millennia BC – 4th c. AD ²	Pre-literary stage after separation from Proto-Indo-European. Period of substrate and adstrate influences (Uartian, Hurrian, Iranian, Semitic, etc.).	Reconstructed/analyzed through methods of historical-comparative linguistics.
2	<i>Classical Armenian (Grabar)</i>	5th–11th centuries AD	Classical literary language, formed in the 5th century (Golden Age). Language of the literary tradition.	Bible translation, Agatangeghos, Pavstos Buzand, Yeghishe, Movses Khorenatsi, Grigor Narekatsi.
3	<i>Middle Armenian</i>	12th–17th centuries AD	Transitional period between Classical and Modern Armenian. Includes Cilician literary Armenian. Gradual penetration of vernacular elements into the written language.	Nerses Shnorhali, Mkhitar Gosh, Vardan Aygektsi, Frik, Kostandin Yerznkatsi, Nahapet Kuchak.
4	<i>Modern Armenian</i>	17th century AD – present	Formation and development of the new literary language, with two main standardized branches.	
	<i>a) Eastern Armenian</i>	Mid-19th c. AD – present ³	Standardized literary language (used in Rep. of Armenia, Artsakh, Armenian communities of Iran, Georgia) based on the Araratian dialect.	Khachatur Abovyan, Hovhannes Tumanyan, Avetik Isahakyan, Vahan Teryan, Akse Bakunts, Hovhannes Shiraz, contemporary writers.
	<i>b) Western Armenian</i>	Early 19th c. AD – present ⁴	Standardized literary language (mainly in the Diaspora) based on the Constantinople (K. Polis) dialect.	Mekhitarists, Hakob Paronyan, Grigor Zohrap, Daniel Varuzhan, Siamanto, Zabel Yesayan, Shahan Shahnur.

Despite all this, Armenian, within its native territory, has had diverse interactions with dozens of other languages and language families (see Table 2).

¹ This table presents the main stages in the development of the literary language. The vernacular (colloquial language) and numerous dialects have existed parallel to all these stages, interacting with the literary language, and continue to exist.

² The period between the end of Proto-Armenian and the beginning of Classical Armenian (late centuries BC - 4th century AD) can also be considered the Early Armenian stage, from which no written monuments have survived.

³ The formation of the Eastern Armenian literary language began earlier (17th–18th cc.), but its standardization and widespread use pertain to the second half of the 19th century (starting with Kh. Abovyan).

⁴ The literary cultivation of Western Armenian also began in the 17th–18th centuries (Mekhitarists), but it emerged as a formed literary language from the beginning of the 19th century.

TABLE 2
HISTORICAL LINGUISTIC CONTACTS OF THE ARMENIAN LANGUAGE

<i>Period</i>	<i>Languages of communication</i>	<i>Language family(s)</i>	<i>Nature of communication</i>	<i>Spheres of influence, roles</i>
4th–3rd millennium BC	Indo-European language Proto-Armenian	Indo-European	Pre-cultural interactions	Foundational layer (Kumunts et al., 2025): grammar, core vocabulary
2nd–mid-1st millennium BC	Hittite Luwian Iranian languages Urartian (as a sub-/sub-stratum) Khurian Akkadian Assyrian Babylonian, etc.	Indo-European Semitic Hurro-Urartian	Political Cultural Commercial	Place names (Kumunts et al., 2024), vocabulary (esp. Urartian substrate), some phonetic changes
6th c. BC – 4th c. AD	Old Persian Greek Aramaic	Indo-European Semitic	Administrative, Political Cultural	Borrowed words, terminology, writing system signals
4th–7th centuries AD	Greek Middle Iranian languages (e.g., Parthian, Pahlavi) Syriac Latin	Indo-European Semitic	Christian Cultural Religious	Translated literature, religious vocabulary, influence on grammatical thought
7th–11th centuries AD	Arabic Persian Greek Georgian	Semitic Indo-European Kartvelian	Political Scientific Cultural	Scientific terminology, administrative words
11th–15th centuries AD	Turkic languages (Oghuz, Qipchaq, etc.) Persian Arabic Georgian Old French Latin (Cilicia)	Turkic Indo-European Semitic Kartvelian	Colloquial, everyday Political, military, commercial (Cilicia)	Arabic, Persian, Turkic loanwords (esp. in dialects), European loanwords from the Cilician period (titles, administrative/military terms)
16th–19th centuries AD	Ottoman Turkish New Persian Kurdish Russian Georgian	Indo-European Turkic Kartvelian	Colloquial, everyday Administrative Cultural Commercial	Administrative terminology, significant influence on everyday vocabulary (esp. in dialects)
20th century – present	Russian French English	Indo-European	USSR regime Diaspora Globalization	Modern technological, scientific, political, cultural, everyday vocabulary

In light of the facts presented (referring to the language stages in Table 1 and contacts in Table 2), developing an effective method for teaching PhBW's requires prior in-depth linguistic, historical-cultural, and etymological analysis.

It is precisely such in-depth study that allows for understanding which methods are most effective for specific linguistic material—in our case, phrases formed with borrowed words. International research confirms that explaining the origin of idioms, presenting them in context, and the conscious use of interlingual parallels (cognates, borrowings) significantly improve acquisition (Otwinska, 2015; Laufer & McLean, 2016). Pre-teaching vocabulary preparation, comparative analysis, and cross-cultural comparison directly stem from the necessity of such studies.

Research findings (e.g., Otwinowska-Kasztelanica, 2009; Otwinowska, 2015) affirm that raising learners' awareness of interlingual similarities (including cognates and borrowed components) not only increases the effectiveness of vocabulary learning but also serves as an additional source of motivation. This implies that teaching based on prior study can also have positive psychological effects.

Mere recognition of idioms is insufficient; the ability to use them is essential. Studies indicate that methods incorporating not only explanations but also practical exercises (dialogues, role-playing, creative tasks) contribute to the development of "idiomatic competence" (Liontas, 2017).

III. METHODOLOGY

A mixed-methods approach was employed for the study of patterns formed with borrowed words (PhBW's) to comprehensively investigate linguistic, cultural, and pedagogical issues (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Dörnyei, 2007). Fundamentally, the methodology for studying PhBW's is based on best practices in sociolinguistics and educational research (Myers-Scotton, 2006; García & Wei, 2014). It incorporates a combination of qualitative and quantitative approaches to analyze PhBW's and PhCF's in both synchronic and diachronic linguistic states. This approach aimed to ensure the triangulation of linguistic materials and contextual depth (Thomason & Kaufman, 1988, p. 69).

A. Materials

The linguistic material for the research included:

- Historical PhBW and NCs extracted from the literary works of Khachatur Abovyan (particularly the novel *Verk' Hayastani* [Wounds of Armenia]).
- Frequently used contemporary PhCFs selected through observation of spoken and online manifestations of modern Armenian. The list of selected PhCFs and their explanations are presented in Table 3.

TABLE 3
EXAMPLES OF PHCFs (PHRASES CONTAINING FOREIGNISMS) IN MODERN ARMENIAN

PhCF	Foreign Component	Explanation or Context in Armenian
Layk' anel	Like-	'To approve of/react positively to the picture' (on social networks); generally: 'to like'
Shar anel	Share-	'To post or share' (information)
Story dnel	Story-	'To post a story (excerpt/update)' on Instagram or Facebook
Messig ugharkel	Message-	'To send a message'
Skip' anel	Skip-	'To skip, pass over, continue'
Apdat' anel	Update-	'To update'
Delet anel	Delete-	'To delete'
Zum-ov mianal/anel	Zoom-	'To have a virtual meeting/session via the Zoom platform'
K'all anel	Call-	'To call (someone)'
Fidbak' tal	Feedback-	'To give feedback', 'to express an opinion'

- Specific loanwords (e.g., *"abur"* [uɔpɪnɪ]) for etymological and semantic analysis.

B. Participants

Two types of surveys involving different participant groups were conducted within the scope of this research.

- Surveys regarding the readership of classical literature (specifically Kh. Abovyan's novel *Verk' Hayastani*) were conducted among representatives of four generations (age groups: 17-25, 25-50, 50-75, over 75). Ten individuals participated from each generational group (total N=40 for this survey), selected from non-specialized professional fields from the Goris community in the Syunik Province of the Republic of Armenia (see Figure 2 Oral survey on reading). The surveys were conducted orally in an informal conversation setting on different days. Respondents were informed about the objectives of the study. The survey regarding the readership of Abovyan was conducted orally to determine who had read the specified novel.

- A survey assessing the comprehension of contemporary PhCFs was conducted among two age groups. Each group included 10 individuals (total N=20): 17-25 and 25-50 years old (see Table 4 Statistics: Understandability of PhCFs by Age Group; Figure 1 Understanding of PhCF Expressions by Age Group) (N=10 per group). Participants were selected on a voluntary basis from the city of Goris in the Syunik Province of the Republic of Armenia. Care was taken to ensure participants had varying educational levels, professions, or occupations. During the oral survey on PhCF comprehension, participants were asked if they knew the expressions presented in Table 3 (yes/no). [(Optional addition for clarity): Participants also self-rated their level of understanding for each expression (e.g., "heard it but don't know," "seems familiar," "think I've encountered it somewhere," etc.). However, these degrees of familiarity were not quantified in this article to avoid deviating from the main objective and overly burdening the paper.] The "Yes" response was further probed through oral conversation to determine if the participant could explain the meaning of the expression.

C. Linguistic Analysis

The analysis of historical PhBW/NCs and loanwords was conducted through the following steps:

- Identification and extraction of difficult-to-understand loanwords and NCs from the original texts of Abovyan (1948).
- Clarification of the original meaning and etymology of the borrowed component using dictionaries (Gasparyan, 1977; Kumunts, 2004) and digital corpora (e.g., Nayiri.com, Arevak, Dehkhoda).
- Detailed analysis of specific examples, such as the word *"abur"* (see Table 7: Etymology and Development of the Armenian Word "uɔpɪnɪ" [abur]).
- Assessment of the construction's meaning and degree of idiomaticity within its original textual context.

D. Data Analysis

Quantitative data from the survey on PhCF comprehension were analyzed using descriptive statistics (frequencies, percentages), summarized in Table 4 (Statistics: Understandability of PhCFs by Age Group). The statistical significance of differences between the two age groups was assessed using Fisher's exact test, with a significance level set at $p < 0.05$. Qualitative linguistic data were subjected to contextual, etymological, and comparative analysis.

IV. RESULTS

The findings from the linguistic analysis of PhBW and PhCFs, as well as the empirical data obtained from surveys regarding their comprehension, are presented below.

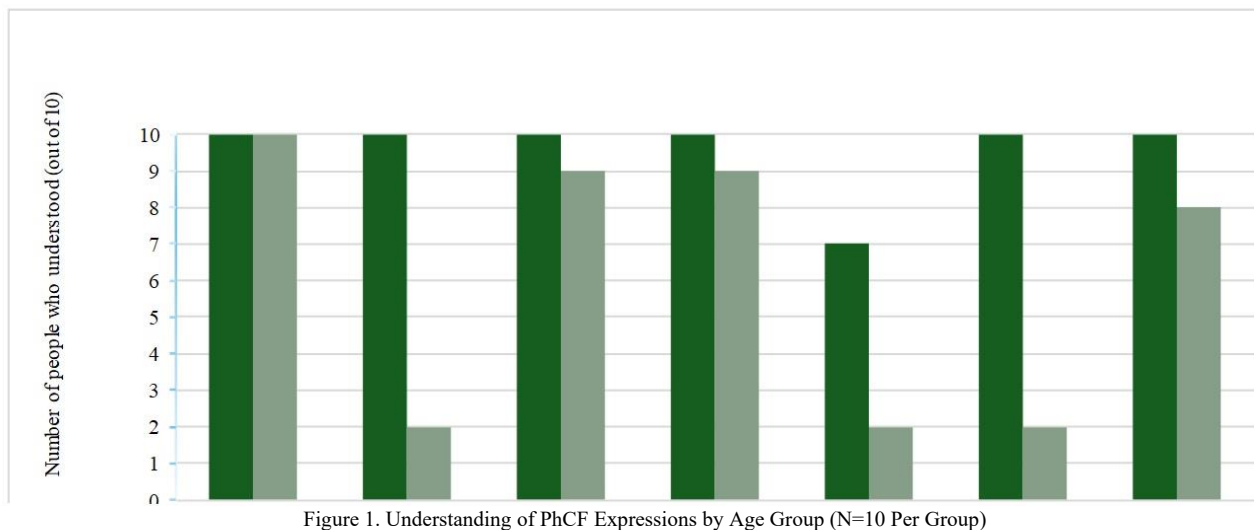
A. Comprehension of Contemporary PhCFs by Age Group

The survey conducted among two age groups (N=10 in each: 17–25 and 25–50 years old) regarding the understandability of contemporary PhCFs yielded the following results, which are summarized in Table 4.

TABLE 4
STATISTICS: UNDERSTANDABILITY OF PhCFs BY AGE GROUP⁵

Age Group	Category	Number of Participants (N)	Percentage (%)
17–25 years	Understands all PhCFs	7	70%
	Has questions / Does not understand PhCFs	3	30%
	Total (17–25)	10	100%
25–50 years	Understands all PhCFs	2	20%
	Has questions / Does not understand PhCFs	8	80%
	Total (25–50)	10	100%

Details on the comprehension of specific PhCF expressions by age group are presented in Figure 1.



B. Readership Frequency of Classical Literature (*Verk' Hayastani*) Across Four Generations

The survey conducted among four generations (N=10 in each: 17–25, 25–50, 50–75, 75+) regarding the readership of Khachatur Abovyan's novel *Verk' Hayastani* [Wounds of Armenia] revealed generational differences among readers, as depicted in Figure 2.

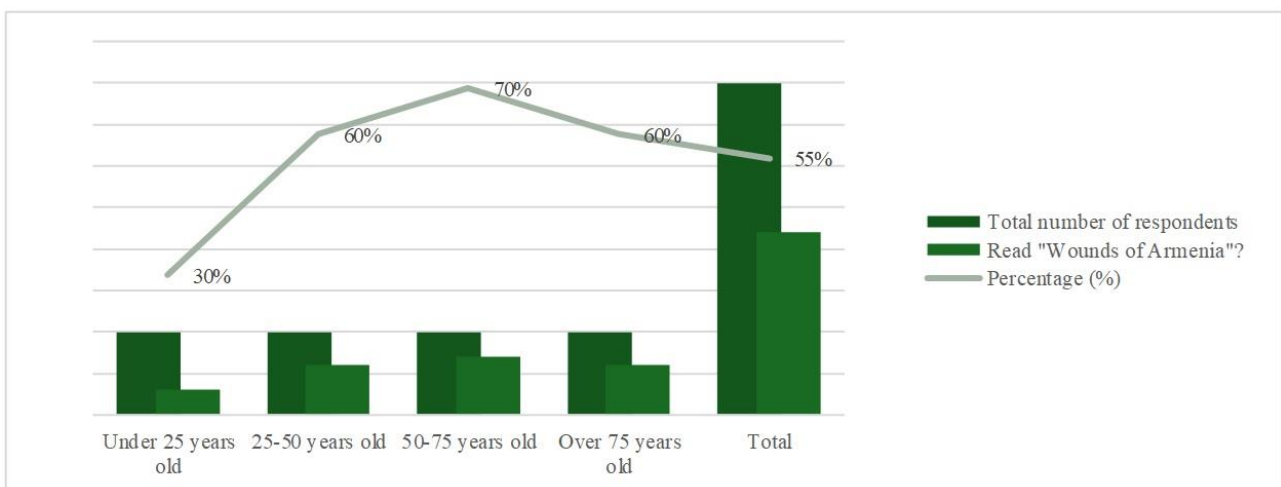


Figure 2. Oral Survey on Reading

C. Linguistic Analysis of Historical PhBW/NCs in Kh. Abovyan's Works

⁵ Due to the small sample size (N=10 in each group), the interpretation of statistical significance may be limited. However, based on preliminary calculations (e.g., using Fisher's exact test), the observed difference in understandability levels between the two groups is likely statistically significant ($p \approx 0.035$).

The analysis of PhBW's and NCs present in Kh. Abovyan's works revealed several categories based on their structure, semantic transparency, and relationship with literary Armenian equivalents.

(a). *Idiomatic Formations (Loss of Literal Meaning)*

Certain NCs, particularly those formed with the verb *anel* ('to do/make'), exhibit idiomatic meanings that differ from the literal meaning of the borrowed component (see Table 5).

TABLE 5
THE BORROWED WORD WITHIN THE NC: MEANING OUTSIDE THE NC, MEANING WITHIN THE NC, AND TEXTUAL EXAMPLE

Word Outside NC	Word within NC (Transliteration)	Meaning of the NC/Idiomatic Sense	Textual Example (from Abovyan)
<i>P'eshk'ash</i> (Փէշքաշ) '1. gift, offering, 2. free'	<i>P'eshk'ash anel</i> (փէշքաշ անէլ)	'1. to gift; Idiomatic meaning: 2. to hand over to someone's disposal/control, 3. let it be, 4. to concede'	"[...] hing parsik ir dzerovē berets 'u Ermalovin p'eshk'ash arets' [...]"
<i>Ghimish</i> (Դիմիշ) '1. to slide, slip, 2. to bow'	<i>Ghimish anel</i> (դիմիշ անէլ)	Idiomatic meaning: 'to spare (someone)'	"[...] vor srank' kotorvin, nrants 'barut' y hatni, vorn el irank' etevits 'ē spanen, t'e iran havakats'in ghimish ani u erēmish ch'ēli..."
<i>Ghnamish</i> (Դնամիշ) '1. to be sated, satisfied, 2. to believe'	<i>Ghnamish anel</i> (դնամիշ անէլ)	Idiomatic meaning: 'to reproach, blame'	"[...] Tsarek'n el mek koghmits 'en indz ghnamish anum, verjapes imanam [...]"
<i>Khat'ēr</i> (Խաթըր) 'respect, honor'	<i>Khat'ēr anel</i> (խաթըր անէլ)	Idiomatic meaning: '1. to spare, 2. to concede'	"Asenk', t'e khat'r em anum, lis ch'em ēnknum, hents petk' ē amen ban berand galis khosi's"

(b). *Transparent Formations (Meaning Preservation)*

The analysis showed that a number of NCs, despite the presence of a borrowed component, maintain a fairly high degree of semantic transparency, where the overall meaning of the construction is close to the literal meaning of the borrowed word. Such examples include:

dard anel (դարդ անէլ) 'to grieve'
yesir anel (եսիր անէլ) '1. to subjugate, 2. to enslave'
tnaz anel (տնազ անէլ) 'to mock'
yaralu anel (յարալու անէլ) 'to wound'
ghonagh anel (ղոնաղ անէլ) 'to host'
maslahat' anel (մասլահաթ անէլ) 'to consult'
hek'imut'yun anel (հեքիմություն անէլ) 'to heal'
fikr anel (ֆիքր անէլ) 'to ponder'.

(c). *Opaque Formations (Lack of Equivalents / Context Dependency)*

The analysis also identified several PhBW's that lack direct equivalents in modern literary Armenian or whose meaning is highly context-dependent. Such examples include:

varavurd anel '1. to watch, 2. to look with scrutinizing eyes'
injmish anel 'to vex, torment'
charaz anel 'to eat nuts/seeds' (metaphorically: 'to eat listlessly or slowly')
munnat' anel 'to reproachfully remind someone of a past favor'
baslamish anel 'to nurture' (metaphorically: 'to prepare/maintain for sale').

(d). *Evolution and Replacement*

Many dialectal PhBW's used by authors like Khachatur Abovyan were either replaced by literary equivalents (often through calques or semantic loans) or were pushed out by parallel native Armenian equivalents, such as:

halal anel (հալալ անէլ) 'to deem worthy' ('to bestow')
pay anel (փայ անէլ) 'to share out, apportion'
ch'ara anel (չարա անէլ) 'to find a way/means'
sabr anel (սաբր անէլ) 'to be patient'.

(e). *Comparison With Classical Armenian (Grabar)*

Some PhBW's in the colloquial language of Khachatur Abovyan's era occupied the semantic field of older Classical Armenian structures. The comparison reveals shifts in lexical preferences (see Table 6).

TABLE 6
COMPARATIVE TABLE (CLASSICAL ARMENIAN ⇒ KH. ABOVYAN’S LANGUAGE ⇒ MODERN LITERARY ARMENIAN)

Classical Armenian (Grabar)	Kh. Abovyan’s Language	Modern Literary Armenian
Patuēr dnel patuēr tal (պատուէր դնել պատուէր տալ) ‘to decree, establish, order’	T’ambah anel (թամբահ անել) ‘to give an order/commission’ (also: patvirel [պատվիրել]); from t’ambah (թամբահ) ‘order, assignment’	Patvirel, patver tal (պատվիրել, պատվեր տալ) ‘to order, commission’
Megh dnel (մեղ դնել) ‘to consider guilty, condemn’	Ghnamish anel (ղնամիշ անել) ‘to blame, accuse’	Meghadrel (մեղադրել) ‘to blame, accuse’
Ereweli arnel (երեւելի առնել) ‘to make known, reveal’	Malum anel [line] (մալում անել [-լինել]) ‘to become known’	Ereval gal, ereval (Երևան գալ, երևալ) ‘to appear, show up, become known/visible’
Dēt akn unel dēt akn i ver ambarṅal (դէտ ակն ունել դէտ ակն ի վեր ամբարձալ) ‘1. to gaze intently, 2. to expect/wait’	T’amash anel (թամաշ անել) ‘1. to look, 2. to watch intently, observe’	Nayel, ditel, mtik tal (նայել, դիտել, մտիկ տալ) ‘to look, watch, observe’ (the last is dialectal)
Zroyts’ tal (զրոյց տալ) ‘to converse, talk’	Naghl anel (նաղլ անել) ‘to converse, talk’	Hek’iat’ patmel, zruys’ anel (հեքիատ պատմել, զրույց անել) ‘to tell a tale, to converse’
Tegheak tegheaks arnel (տեղեակ տեղեակս առնել) ‘to inform, notify’; hambaw hanel (համբաւ հանել) ‘to spread news’	Khabar anel (խաբար անել) ‘to inform, spread news’	Lur tal, teghekats’nel, teghyak dardznel (լուր տալ, տեղեկացնել, տեղյակ դարձնել) ‘to inform, notify’

D. Etymological Analysis Example: The Word *abur* («աբւր») (Table 7)

TABLE 7
ETYMOLOGY AND DEVELOPMENT OF THE ARMENIAN WORD "ԱԲՐՈՒ" (ABUR)

Aspect	Description
Origin	The word entered Armenian from Old Persian. It derives from the word "ābrū", composed of "āb" ('water') + "rū" ('face, countenance').
Meaning in Source Language (Persian)	Literally: 'water of the face', implying 'radiance, freshness of the face'. Figuratively (common usage): 'honor, respect, reputation, good name.'
Phonetic Change in Armenian	Over time, the pronunciation shifted in Armenian from the original "abru" to "abur".
Semantic Development in Armenian	While retaining the core meaning of 'honor' and 'respect', the word "abur" in Armenian developed a stronger association with concepts like 'sense of shame', 'conscience', and 'modesty'. This nuance might be linked to the underlying idea similar to the Armenian concept of "երեսի ջուր" (>"eresi jur" - 'water of the face'), suggesting the importance of maintaining one's dignity or not 'losing face' (cf. the idiom eresi jur(ē) tap'el - 'to lose face, shame').
Modern Armenian Usage	The word "abur" is mainly used in dialects today, although it can also be found in literature. Common expressions include: aburov mard (աբրով մարդ) 'an honorable person, a person held in high regard'; abur-haya unenal (աբր-հայա ունենալ) or abur(ē) yeresin (աբրուր երեսին) 'to be shy, modest, bashful'; abur(ē) t'ap'el [ver atsel] (աբրուր թափել [վեր ածել]) 'to become shameless, to lose one's honor/reputation'; anabur and beabur (անաբրւն and բեաբրւն) 'shameless, dishonorable' (formed with the Armenian negative prefix an- or the Persian negative prefix be-).
Core Concept (Summary)	In essence, "abur" in its Armenian usage encapsulates one's good name, honor, and sense of shame, propriety – qualities associated with maintaining dignity and respectability within the community.

V. DISCUSSION

The findings of this study clearly demonstrated significant generational differences in the comprehension of contemporary PhCFs, while also highlighting the growing challenge posed by the semantic opacity of historical PhBW's found in Kh. Abovyan's works for modern audiences.

Comparisons indicate that the literary language of the late 19th and early 20th centuries was not significantly distant from the vernacular (and partly dialectal) language (Safaryan, 2022), and readers did not experience difficulties in understanding loanwords and PhBW's. Today, the literary language has become dominant; however, numerous words that entered Armenian through colloquial channels (from Arabic, Persian, Turkic) are no longer comprehensible to the new generation.

Beyond the changed contemporary perceptions of literature, Armenian classical authors still maintained a large readership until the 1980s. This was because the language of their works was understandable, and the literary language, the common vernacular language (and partly the dialects), *did not significantly diverge from each other* (Kumunts, 2004).

A. The Contemporary Linguistic Situation and the Dynamics of New Borrowings

The contemporary era of communication is characterized by a dual trend: on the one hand, the strengthening influence of standard literary Armenian on the vernacular language and dialects, and on the other hand, the active infiltration of concepts and structures (PhCFs) borrowed from foreign languages, especially English and Russian, within the multilingual environment. The results of the present study show the intensity of this second trend: as evident from Table 4 and Figure 1, contemporary PhCFs are widespread and understandable, particularly among the younger generation (17–25 years old), 70% of whom comprehend all the studied structures. This pattern is likely associated with this generation's broader proficiency in English and active engagement in digital communication.

Recent socio-political events also exert their influence on the linguistic situation. Specifically, the forced displacement of the Armenian population from Artsakh (Nagorno-Karabakh) in 2023 (Freedom House, 2024) has led to an increased usage in the Republic of Armenia of certain loanwords and expressions (especially Russian ones) that previously lacked wide circulation. The complexity of such multilayered interactions can be illustrated by the example of the word *t'eynik* (թեյնիկ – ‘teapot/kettle’), around which native, Eastern, Russian, and modern technological influences converge (see Table 8):

TABLE 8
TYPOLOGICAL SOURCES IN THE FORMATION OF THE ARMENIAN WORD “ԹԵՅՆԻԿ” (TEANIK – TEAPOT/KETTLE)

Type of Origin	Term / Concept	Explanation
Native Indo-European	Թուրմ (T'urm)	An indigenous Armenian word referring to a strong herbal infusion or extract.
Eastern Loanword	Չայ / Թեյ (Ch'ay / T'ey)	Loanwords from Iranian and Russian languages referring to tea (the drink).
Calque from Persian	Չայդան (Ch'aydan)	Tea kettle
Calque from Russian	Չայնիկ → Թեյնիկ (Ch'aydan → T'eynik)	A semantic calque of the Russian word чайник (ch'aynik) – a teapot/kettle.
Semantic Translation	Սամավար → Ինքնատե (Samavar → Ink'naer)	A semantic translation of самовар (samavar), literally “self-boiler.”
Modern Technological Term	Electric Teapot / Tefal	Modern household appliance; sometimes referred to by brand name (e.g., Tefal).
Cross-cultural Types	Tetsubin, Whistling kettle, Camping kettle	Cultural variants used in Japan, the West, or for outdoor use.

Against the backdrop of these dynamic processes, literary Armenian often fails to quickly process and systematize new concepts, foreignisms, and loanwords by adapting them to the internal patterns of the language. Consequently, the proliferation of non-standardized or inconsistent forms is observed (Margaryan, 2004; Hayrapetyan, 2011). This poses two main challenges:

(a). *Maintaining Connection With Classical Heritage*

As indicated by the survey results regarding the readership of classical literature (see Figure 2 Oral survey on reading), the language of classical authors, including historical PhBW, is becoming increasingly incomprehensible to younger generations. It is necessary to develop approaches that will help overcome this gap and ensure the connection of generations with the roots of national literature.

(b). *Preserving Linguistic Balance*

In a multilingual environment and under conditions of intensified translation activity, preserving linguistic balance becomes crucial. The introduction of new concepts and foreignisms should occur in a way that does not disrupt the structural and stylistic norms of the native language. Whenever possible, Armenian equivalents should be found or created, thereby maintaining the natural development trends of the national language and literature.

B. *Pedagogical Implications and Proposed Approaches*

The findings of the research, which identified comprehension difficulties with historical PhBW as well as the spread of contemporary PhCFs and generational differences in their understanding, underscore the urgent necessity of developing targeted pedagogical approaches. As shown (see Section 2: Theoretical and Historical Context), the effective teaching of PhBW requires in-depth preliminary study.

International research substantiates that explaining the origin of idioms, presenting them in context, and the conscious utilization of interlingual parallels (cognates, borrowings) significantly improve acquisition (Otwinowska, 2015; Laufer & McLean, 2016). Methodologies such as pre-teaching vocabulary, comparative analysis, and cross-cultural comparison directly derive from the need for such foundational studies.

Raising awareness: Findings from studies (e.g., Otwinowska-Kasztelanica, 2009; Otwinowska, 2015) confirm that increasing learners' awareness of interlingual similarities, including cognates and borrowed components, not only enhances the efficiency of vocabulary learning but also becomes an additional source of motivation. This signifies that instruction grounded in prior research can also yield positive psychological effects.

Promoting Application: Mere recognition of idioms is insufficient; the ability to apply them is necessary. Studies, as well as experimental data (including the findings of the present research) (see Table 5 The Borrowed Word within the NC; Table 6 Comparative Table; Table 7 Etymology and Development of the Armenian Word "աբուր" [abur]), indicate that methods incorporating not only explanations, but also practical exercises (dialogues, role-playing, creative assignments) contribute to the formation of "idiomatic competence" (Liontas, 2017).

Based on these principles and the results of the analysis of PhBW/NCs present in Kh. Abovyan's works (see Section 4.3. Linguistic Analysis of Historical PhBW/NCs in Kh. Abovyan's Works), we propose a multifaceted pedagogical approach that includes the following components:

(a). *Fostering Interdisciplinary Connections*

Instruction should integrate linguistic knowledge (terminology, etymology) with historical linguistics and cultural studies, ensuring the comprehension of the diachronic and sociocultural context of PhBW.

(b). *Developing Practical Skills*

It is necessary to develop learners' abilities to perform corpus analysis (using contemporary digital tools and corpora (e.g., Nayiri.com, Arevak, Dehkhoda), etc.), assess the degree of idiomaticity, and interpret visual data (e.g., diagrams, infographics).

(c). *Combining Didactic Approaches*

It is recommended to apply diverse didactic methods, including:

1. *Scenario Analysis and Situational Tasks*: For instance, analyzing and modeling dialogues or situations based on excerpts from the novel *Verk' Hayastani* to understand the functional significance of PhBW.

2. *Visual Modeling*: Creating infographics or diagrams to illustrate the structural differences between PhBW and NCs or their semantic development, as in the case of the word *abur* ("ս֊ւ֊ր֊ն֊") (see Table 7: Etymology and Development of the Armenian Word "ս֊ւ֊ր֊ն֊" [abur]).

3. *Group Discussions*: Organizing discussions around the sociolinguistic aspects of linguistic borrowing, linguistic balance, and cultural identity issues.

Such a comprehensive approach, which combines in-depth linguistic analysis with contemporary pedagogical strategies, can significantly enhance the accessibility of classical literature (particularly Kh. Abovyan's works) and foster the development of linguistic, as well as interdisciplinary and practical, competencies, thereby addressing the challenges raised in the Introduction. This will not only help overcome linguistic complexities but also promote appreciation for the national heritage while simultaneously developing critical thinking regarding contemporary linguistic processes.

C. *Linguistic and Sociocultural Dynamics of Historical PhBWs (Based on Kh. Abovyan's Works)*

Parallel to the discussion of the contemporary linguistic situation and pedagogical challenges, it is crucial to delve into the linguistic and sociocultural dynamics of historical borrowed structures, PhBW, to understand the peculiarities of their formation, development, and current perception. The language of Kh. Abovyan's works provides rich material in this regard.

(a). *The Process of Idiomatization*

The examples presented in the results (see Section 4.3.1. Idiomatic Formations (Loss of Literal Meaning); Table 5 The Borrowed Word within the NC) (such as *ghimish anel*, *ghnamish anel*) demonstrate that during the formation of PhBW, the literal meaning of the borrowed component can significantly change or be lost entirely, giving way to a new, idiomatic meaning. This process, where the overall meaning of the structure is no longer derivable from the sum of its components' meanings, is one of the main characteristics of PhBW and a reason for the difficulty in their comprehension. It is understood that the meaning of a PhBW first centers around the borrowed component and then encompasses the entire construction as a single lexical unit. In Kh. Abovyan's works, forms with the verb *anel* ('to do/make') are particularly prevalent among PhBW. The borrowed word can lose its original meaning within the NC, transforming the regular NC into an idiom.

(b). *The Spectrum of Semantic Transparency*

At the same time, not all PhBW are entirely opaque. The examples presented in the results (see Section 4.3.2. Transparent Formations [Meaning Preservation]) (such as *dard anel*, *yesir anel*, *fik'r anel*, etc.) show that in some structures, the borrowed word largely retains its core meaning, forming a relatively transparent unit with the Armenian verb. These structures essentially lie on a continuum between regular nominal constructions (NCs) and idioms, often having parallels in spoken language or dialects, which facilitates their comprehension. Such a typology of PhBW based on the degree of idiomaticity is important for differentiating teaching methods. The semantic transparency of such formations may be attributed to the frequent use of the borrowed component or its semantic simplicity.

(c). *Sociocultural Nuances*

The group of opaque PhBW presented in the results (see Section 4.3.3. Opaque Formations [Lack of Equivalents / Context Dependency]) is of particular interest. For example, *munnat' anel* is not merely a borrowing but represents a speech act implying reproach and resentment for a favor done. Similarly, *injmish anel* refers to psychological distress, as opposed to physical harm. The loss of these sociocultural and psychological nuances can significantly hinder the full comprehension of the text by modern readers and requires specific pedagogical approaches for their explanation.

(d). *Dynamics of PhBW Literarization and Standardization Processes*

The research findings (see Section 4.3.4. Evolution and Replacement) indicate that the fate of historical PhBW during the formation and development of Modern Literary Armenian was not uniform. Several main trends are observed: replacement, creation of new phrases by analogy, and reinstatement of native equivalents. Discussing these processes allows for an understanding of some driving forces behind linguistic standardization and literarization.

Instances of *replacement* (e.g., *k'yar anel* > *ogut k'aghel*, *halal anel* > *vayel hamarel*) often reflect conscious language planning or certain manifestations of purism, where the new literary language sought to create its own lexicon based on native roots or by making semantic calques to avoid elements considered foreign. This could have been driven both by the aspiration to strengthen national self-awareness in the context of the 19th-century national awakening and by the conscious efforts of certain intellectual circles to "purify" the literary language from the "foreign" influences of colloquial and dialectal speech. As a consequence of these replacements, although the language was formally "purified," certain expressive nuances or stylistic colorings characteristic of the spoken language might have sometimes been lost.

On the other hand, the creation of new PhBW by analogy (*ispat' anel*, *pay anel*, *ch'ara anel*) indicates that the NC (nominal construction) model, especially with the verb *anel* ('to do/make'), was an extremely productive word-formation device in the new literary language. The reason for this could be both the grammatical simplicity and flexibility of this structure, which easily allowed for the formation of verbal phrases with new (including borrowed) nominal components, as well as its rootedness in the spoken language'.

Authors, including Kh. Abovyan, used this pattern to express new concepts or to convey expressiveness characteristic of the colloquial language, even while using borrowed components. This demonstrates not merely the acceptance of borrowings, but their *creative integration* into the lexical and grammatical system of the language. It also testifies that the formation of the new literary language was not solely a top-down planned process but was also influenced by the bottom-up logic of the spoken language.

The *reinstatement of native equivalents* (e.g., the parallel existence of *sabr anel* and *hamberel*) can be interpreted as an attempt to mobilize linguistic resources to enrich the new literary language and, where possible, limit the use of borrowings. This phenomenon often leads to the emergence of synonymic series in the language, where native and borrowed forms may acquire different stylistic values or spheres of application. For instance, one form might be considered more literary, while the other is perceived as more colloquial. This, in turn, can complicate language teaching, as learners must acquire not only the forms themselves but also the contextual nuances of their usage.

Thus, the discussion of the literarization process of PhBW reveals that it is a complex phenomenon conditioned by both intralinguistic factors (word-formation productivity, semantic development) and extralinguistic factors (language policy, authorial initiative, social perception).

(e). *Linguistic Change and Substitution*

The comparison performed as part of this research (see Section 4.3.5. Comparison with Classical Armenian; Table 6 Comparative Table) between the PhBW used in Kh. Abovyan's language and their Classical Armenian (Grabar) equivalents vividly reflects the linguistic norm shift occurring in Armenian during the 19th century. The fact that Abovyan often gives preference to structures prevalent in the colloquial language of the time, frequently of Persian, Turkic, or Arabic origin (e.g., *t'ambah anel*, *malum anel*, *khabar anel*), instead of Classical Grabar forms (*patuēr tal*, *ereweli arnel*, *tegheaks arnel*), attests to his conscious choice in favor of Ashkharhabar as a means of communication accessible to the broader masses. This aligns with the author's well-known principle: "[...] I wanted people to understand what I wrote, and for that reason, I chose Ashkharhabar" (Abovyan, 1948, p. 228).

These substitutions were conditioned by several social and linguistic factors. On the one hand, Grabar was gradually losing its position, becoming primarily a religious and partly a scientific language, incomprehensible to the majority of the population (Margaryan, 1958). On the other hand, as a result of centuries of foreign domination and cultural contacts, numerous borrowings had become rooted in the vernacular and had turned into an integral part of everyday speech (Kumunts, 2002). Abovyan's language, therefore, reflects the linguistic reality of that period, where living speech prevailed over the archaizing literary norm (Kumunts, 2004). This diachronic analysis is important not only for understanding the peculiarities of Abovyan's language but also the complex processes involved in the formation of Modern Literary Armenian.

Thus, the analysis of historical PhBW shows that they are not merely structures formed with borrowed words but rather carry deep layers of linguistic change, idiomatization, and sociocultural context. Uncovering and recognizing these layers is an important prerequisite both for the effective teaching of classical literature and for a better understanding of contemporary linguistic processes (including the spread of PhCFs).

D. *Limitations of the Study*

Although this study provides valuable insights into the comprehension and teaching of PhBW and PhCFs in Armenian, it is important to acknowledge certain limitations that should be considered when interpreting and generalizing the findings.

(a). *Sample Size and Representativeness*

The sample sizes used in the quantitative part of the research (surveys on PhCF comprehension and classical literature readership) (see Table 4; Figure 1; Figure 2) (N=10 in each subgroup, total N=20 and N=40 respectively) are relatively small (Dörnyei, 2007, p. 163). This limits the statistical power of the obtained results and the possibility of generalizing them to the entire population of the Republic of Armenia or the Armenian diaspora. Furthermore, the selection of participants from a single geographical area (Goris community, Syunik Province, RA) may not reflect potential regional

variations in the linguistic situation. Although an attempt was made to include representatives from different educational and professional groups, the representativeness of the sample in this regard cannot be fully guaranteed.

(b). *Survey Methodology*

The collection of empirical data was primarily carried out through oral surveys and informal conversations. Although this approach allows for obtaining certain qualitative insights (Voelkel & Kretzschmar, 2021), it may be less standardized compared to written questionnaires or language tests. The assessment of PhCF comprehension ('yes/no' + oral explanation) might involve a degree of subjectivity from both the participant and the researcher.

(c). *Selection of Linguistic Material Studied*

The selection of contemporary PhCFs was based on observation, without quantitative verification of their frequency (e.g., through corpus analysis), which might introduce some subjectivity into the assessment of the selected material as being "most common." Similarly, the analysis of historical PhBW's focused mainly on the works of Abovyan (1948), and the applicability of the findings to other classical authors require further confirmation.

E. *Outlining Future Research Directions*

The findings of this study and the identified limitations provide a basis for future investigations in several important directions.

Sample Expansion and Diversification: It is necessary to replicate the quantitative surveys with larger and more geographically and socially representative samples to enhance the statistical reliability of the results and broaden their generalizability.

In-depth Statistical Analysis: Building on the current findings, future studies should incorporate more sophisticated statistical analyses. Investigating the potential *correlation* between individuals' comprehension of historical PhBW's and their grasp of modern PhCFs could reveal interesting patterns. Furthermore, quantitatively assessing the impact of variables such as *educational level* on comprehension levels (possibly, for example, through logistic regression analysis to calculate *Odds Ratios [OR]*) would allow for a more nuanced understanding of the factors at play.

Methodological Diversification: It is advisable to combine oral surveys with other methods, such as standardized language tests, corpus analyses (to determine the objective frequency of contemporary PhCFs), and large-scale written questionnaires.

Expanded Linguistic Analysis: The analysis of PhBW's can be broadened to include the works of other classical authors from the 19th and 20th centuries to obtain a more complete picture. It would also be beneficial to study more deeply the interrelations between dialectal PhBW's and the literary language (both Eastern and Western Armenian).

Testing Pedagogical Interventions: The effectiveness of the pedagogical approaches proposed in this article (visual modeling, scenario-based tasks, corpus-based exercises) needs empirical verification through controlled pedagogical experiments.

Longitudinal Research: Understanding the dynamics of PhCF acquisition and their integration into or rejection by the linguistic system requires long-term (longitudinal) studies.

Further work in these directions will allow for a deeper and more comprehensive understanding of the complex processes of functioning and perception of borrowed structures in Armenian and contribute to the development of more effective pedagogical strategies.

VI. CONCLUSION

This study has comprehensively analyzed the role, comprehension difficulties, and pedagogical challenges of phrases with borrowed words (PhBW's) and phrases containing foreignisms (PhCFs) in Armenian. The main findings confirm that the semantic opacity of historical PhBW's for contemporary audiences is conditioned by their idiomatization, as well as the loss of sociocultural and historical context. The analysis of structures present in the works of the great Armenian enlightener Khachatur Abovyan (e.g., *ghnamish anel*, *p'eshk'ash anel*) has shown that in numerous cases, the meaning of the borrowed components differs significantly from that of the idiomatic expressions, which hinders their intuitive comprehension.

Concurrently, significant generational differences were observed in the comprehension of contemporary PhCFs: the younger generation (17–25 years old) successfully understood them in 70% of cases, whereas the older group (25–50 years old) understood them in only 20% of cases (see Table 4, Figure 1). This difference is associated with the prevalence of English in digital communication and the linguistic flexibility of the youth.

The obtained results emphasize the dynamic nature of language: the obsolescence of historical forms and the infiltration of new (often non-standardized) ones reflect the impact of globalization. The active presence of Russian and English in contemporary Armenian, as well as sociopolitical changes, attest to the multifaceted nature of the linguistic situation.

The study has achieved its objectives by:

1. Identifying the obstacles posed by PhBW's in the teaching of classical literature.
2. Analyzing the historical-cultural, etymological, and semantic layers of borrowings.

3. Proposing pedagogical approaches (visual modeling, scenario-based tasks, group discussions) that promote the accessibility of classical texts while preserving linguistic identity.

The significance of this research lies in its novel contextualization of the diachronic and synchronic features of borrowed structures in Armenian, linking them to educational practice. The identified generational differences are important for both the formulation of language policy and the development of multilingual education strategies. The proposed methodology, based on interdisciplinary integration and the development of practical skills, can also be applied to other languages, contributing to the preservation of classical heritage in the context of globalization.

Ultimately, the development of the Armenian language requires a balance between language modernization and the preservation of the national literary heritage. This balance will enable new generations to access classical texts without losing cultural identity, while simultaneously ensuring the vitality of the language in the contemporary communication environment.

APPENDIX. ARMENIAN TRANSLITERATION TABLE

Uppercase	Lowercase	Uppercase	Lowercase	Uppercase	Lowercase	Uppercase	Lowercase
Ա- A	ա- a	Լ- L	լ- l	Շ- Sh	շ- sh	Ի- W	ի- w
Բ- B	բ- b	Խ- Kh	խ- kh	Ռ- O	ռ- o	Ու- U	ու- u
Գ- g	գ- g	Ծ- Ts	ծ- ts	Չ- Ch'	չ- ch'	Փ- P'	փ- p'
Դ- D	դ- d	Կ- K	կ- k	Պ- P	պ- p	Զ- K'	զ- k'
Ե- E	ե- e	Հ- H	հ- h	Ջ- J	ջ- j	Եւ- Ew	եւ- ew
Զ- Z	զ- z	Ջ- Dz	ձ- dz	Ռ- R	ր- r	Եվ- Ev	եվ- ev
Է- Ē	է- ē	Ղ- Gh	ղ- gh	Ս- S	ս- s	Օ- O	օ- o
Ը- Ē	ը- ē	Ճ- Ch	ճ- ch	Վ- V	վ- v	Ֆ- F	ֆ- f
Թ- T'	թ- t'	Մ- M	մ- m	Տ- T	տ- t	Մի- Ü	մի- ü
Ժ- Zh	ժ- zh	Յ- Y	յ- y	Ր- R	ր- r	Ա- Ä	ա- ä
Ի- I	ի- i	Ն- N	ն- n	Յ- Ts'	յ- ts'	Օ- Ö	օ- ö

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Enhancing EFL Learners' Writing Sub-Skills With AI-Mediated Tools: Take QuillBot as an Example

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Abstract—Writing has consistently been one of the most challenging skills for EFL learners. Various AI-powered technologies have contributed to enhancing writing proficiency in EFL settings. This study examines the effectiveness of QuillBot, an AI-driven tool designed to improve multiple writing aspects, including vocabulary, phrasal verbs, sentence structure, adjectives, adverbs, and prepositional phrases. The research involved 25 EFL students enrolled in a Reading and Writing course, where they utilized QuillBot as a learning aid. Researchers assessed students' writing performance before and after the experiment through pre- and post-tests. The results, analyzed using a dependent-sample t-test, revealed that QuillBot significantly improved students' writing skills, particularly in vocabulary, sentence sequencing, and grammatical structures. Further research on QuillBot could help address other challenges in EFL teaching and learning.

Index Terms—AI-powered tool, writing skills enhancement, QuillBot, EFL learning

I. INTRODUCTION

Writing poses a significant challenge for EFL students (Fitria, 2022; Hieu et al., 2022; Na & Mai, 2017). Educators have implemented various strategies to make the writing process more accessible for these learners. One such approach is the integration of technology into EFL writing classrooms, where AI-mediated applications like Prepostseo, Paraphrasing-Tool, and QuillBot are utilized to enhance writing skills (Mohammad et al., 2023). Among these tools, QuillBot is widely used for paraphrasing, a crucial skill in academic writing that requires proficiency in English language fundamentals and paragraph organization. Paraphrasing tools help users replace words while maintaining the original meaning, thereby reducing the risk of plagiarism (Wahyuni et al., 2025). Techniques such as synonym replacement, sentence restructuring, phrase reformation, and converting between active and passive voice contribute to improved writing proficiency. These AI-powered tools not only support students in avoiding plagiarism but also enhance their overall writing skills (Bin & Michael, 2019).

According to Fitria (2022), QuillBot is a time-efficient tool that enhances text clarity and helps users find appropriate synonyms. Its extensive vocabulary and user-friendly interface make it a widely used resource among students, writers, bloggers, and businesses worldwide.

AI-powered tools can generate alternative words and phrase structures in multiple languages, allowing students to express their ideas while adhering to grammatical rules. Additionally, these tools support vocabulary expansion, ultimately improving multilingual communication skills (Khalid & Anis, 2024).

Research indicates that AI tools are particularly beneficial for students struggling with fundamental writing challenges.

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Many learners identify grammar errors and language barriers as their primary obstacles. Tools like QuillBot and Grammarly help ease writing assignments by refining vocabulary and correcting grammatical mistakes. Furthermore, these technologies improve sentence structure and overall coherence, leading to more polished writing (Khalid & Anis, 2024).

Educators also recognize that AI writing tools can assist students in developing strong sentence structures, organizing their ideas effectively, making informed word choices, and expanding their vocabulary (Khalid & Anis, 2024). However, Hieu et al. (2022) note that students often struggle with paraphrasing due to limited vocabulary, grammatical range, and accuracy.

However, there is limited research on the use of AI-mediated tools in improving EFL learners' writing sub-skills, particularly in areas such as vocabulary, phrasal verbs, sentence sequencing, adjectives, adverbs, and prepositional phrases, specifically at PY Najran University. This study aims to support the development of these skills, which are often challenging due to complex language concepts like grammar and syntax. Integrating QuillBot with technological devices in the classroom can also assist teachers by exposing students to a diverse range of vocabulary and sentence structures. Therefore, this study focuses on achieving the following objectives and answer these research questions:

Objectives

- To identify the challenges EFL students face in EFL writing classroom
- To analyze the significant improvements in students' writing after using QuillBot, an AI-mediated tool
- To document students' experiences with QuillBot and its impact on their writing process

Research Questions

1. What major writing challenges do EFL students encounter?
2. Are there significant improvements in students' writing when using QuillBot?
3. What are students' experiences with using this AI-mediated tool?

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

The study is consistent with Connectivism, a theory emphasizing the role of technology in learning. It improves writing experiences, notably paraphrasing skills, by utilizing AI-mediated tools such as Quill Bot. This tailored learning environment benefits both teachers and students, resulting in enhanced excitement and insights (Corbett & Spinello, 2020). According to research, technology mediated classrooms improve student learning experiences. This study uses QuillBot, the AI driven tool, to develop paraphrasing skills of students. The incorporation of the AI tool has drastically influenced learners' experiences. QuillBot not only offers specialized learning prospects by extending its instructional support but also minimizes the chances of human error (as cited in Mohammad et al., 2023). Several studies have explored the role of QuillBot in academic writing. Fitria (2021) conducted a descriptive qualitative study evaluating QuillBot's effectiveness in rewriting and paraphrasing English texts. The findings highlighted that QuillBot employs various paraphrasing techniques, including synonym replacement, word form changes, shifts between active and passive voice, and phrase restructuring.

Building on this, Fitria (2022) conducted another qualitative study using observation to assess QuillBot's role in paraphrasing scientific writing to reduce plagiarism. The study confirmed that QuillBot aids students in improving their writing by offering multiple paraphrasing options.

Similarly, Rakhmanina and Serasi (2022) examined QuillBot's impact through observational research. Their study emphasized QuillBot's ability to restructure sentences and replace phrases automatically, making it a valuable tool for students struggling with manual paraphrasing. They concluded that QuillBot serves as an effective alternative for students who find traditional paraphrasing challenging.

Nurul and Siti (2021) conducted a quantitative study focusing on the difficulties mechanical engineering vocational students face in paraphrasing for academic writing. Their research examined various online paraphrasing tools, including QuillBot, Prepostseo, Spinbot, and Paraphrasing-Tool. The results indicated that these tools significantly helped students improve their English writing skills by modifying vocabulary, sentence structure, and parts of speech.

In another study, Kurniati and Fithriani (2022) explored QuillBot's effectiveness among 20 postgraduate students specializing in English language teaching. Using semi-structured interviews and questionnaires, their qualitative study revealed that students had a positive perception of QuillBot and believed it enhanced the quality of their writing.

Furthermore, Khabib (2022) investigated AI-based writing tools for assisting teachers in drafting scientific articles. Using pre- and post-surveys, the study demonstrated that AI-powered writing assistants improved accuracy, productivity, and error reduction. The study also found that these tools increased student engagement and motivation in academic writing.

Although existing research highlights QuillBot's role in overcoming paraphrasing challenges, there is limited experimental research—particularly at PY Najran University—on its potential to enhance EFL students' writing sub-skills, including vocabulary, phrasal verbs, sentence sequencing, adjectives, adverbs, and prepositions. This study aims to bridge the gap.

III. METHODOLOGY

A. Research Design

This study employed a **quasi-experimental design** using a **pretest and post-test** approach with a single-group setup to assess the effectiveness of QuillBot in enhancing EFL students' writing skills. A quasi-experimental method is useful for evaluating the impact of an intervention on a specific student group (Creswell, 2009).

The study followed these steps:

- **Pretest:** Administered to all participants to evaluate their initial writing proficiency.
- **Implementation of QuillBot:** Students used QuillBot as a writing aid during the study.
- **Post-test:** Conducted after students had used QuillBot to measure changes in their writing abilities.

The primary objective was to identify common writing difficulties among EFL students and observe improvements in their writing skills after using QuillBot.

B. Data Collection Tools

The study employed **two main data collection tools**:

- **A Writing Test:** The test was designed by the researchers based on previous literature and teaching experience. It covered six key areas:
 - Sentence sequencing
 - Phrasal verbs
 - Vocabulary
 - Prepositional phrases
 - Adjectives
 - Adverbs

The test had an average completion time of **45 minutes**.

- **Semi-Structured Interviews:** A set of interview questions was designed to gather qualitative insights into students' experiences with QuillBot. The interview covered how QuillBot influenced various aspects of writing, such as vocabulary, sentence sequencing, and the use of grammatical elements.

Interview Questions:

1. What vocabulary-related experiences have you had with QuillBot?
2. How has QuillBot affected your experience with phrasal verbs?
3. How has QuillBot impacted your sentence sequencing skills?
4. How has QuillBot influenced your use of prepositional phrases, adjectives, and adverbs?
5. How do you feel about QuillBot's general ease of use and effectiveness?

A volunteer instructor conducted the interviews immediately after the post-test. Each interview lasted **5 to 10 minutes**. The questions were based on previous studies and researchers' teaching experiences (Fitria, 2021, 2022; Maulidia, 2021).

C. Sampling

The study was conducted at **Najran University's Preparatory Year Program** using a **convenience sampling method**. A total of **25 Level 1 students** participated in the research.

D. Data Collection & Analysis

Assessment Checklist

A **rubric-based assessment checklist** was developed to evaluate students' writing skills. It included **six key categories**:

1. Vocabulary
2. Phrasal verbs
3. Sentence sequencing
4. Prepositional phrases
5. Adjectives
6. Adverbs

t-test: To highlight the significance of the contrast the variation between pre-test and post-test averages, the researchers employed paired-sample t-tests, as shown in Table 3. The means differ significantly from one another. The sample proportion (represented by π) is not equal to a certain value (represented by π_0) in a two-tailed hypothesis.

$$H1 : \pi \neq \pi_0$$

Validity

To ensure the validity of the assessment checklist, it was reviewed by **six experts** from **Najran University's English Department**. Their feedback was incorporated into the final version, ensuring that it effectively measured students' progress in the six key writing areas.

Reliability

To apply the evaluation criteria, researchers used a sample of fifteen students. A second, more experienced researcher assessed it as well. The Holste equation was used to determine the stability of the correctors (observers): the percentage ratio of agreement instances to disagreement instances. Table 1 displays the assessment checklist's reliability coefficients.

TABLE 1
THE RELIABILITY COEFFICIENTS OF THE ASSESSMENT CHECKLIST

No	Issues of Writing Domain	No. of agreements	No. of disagreements	Reliability coefficients
1	Vocabulary	13	2	0.87
2	Phrasal verbs	12	3	0.80
3	Sequencing sentences	13	2	0.87
4	Use of adjectives	11	4	0.73
5	Use of adverb	12	3	0.80
6	Prepositional Phrase	13	12	0.87
	Total	74	16	0.82

The assessment checklist's coefficient factor, as shown in Table 1, is 0.82. The assessment checklist's accuracy is indicated by its high percentage.

E. Instructional Program

For more than four years, writing instructors have been using the online paraphrasing tool, the QuillBot. It was utilized during the third semester, which ran from August 2024 to December 2024. A pre-test was administered before the program. The researcher developed an instructional program that comprised the following phases because of student's unsatisfactory pretest results:

1. Additionally, the following procedure was used to teach students how to use QuillBot, the AI-mediated tool, in the classroom.
 - i. QuillBot usage was demonstrated to the students. They were specifically instructed on how to compose a statement and use a unique function offered by the QuillBot to evaluate its grammar.
 - ii. The QuillBot's paraphrasing function aided students in learning the language.
 - iii. QuillBot's grammar checker function assisted students in recognizing errors in the usage of prepositional phrases, adjectives, adverbs, and phrasal verbs. The following tasks were carried out by teachers:
 2. Have students compose a few sentences utilizing adverbs, adjectives, and phrasal verbs.
 3. It was implied in the instructions that students must employ proper sentence structure.
 4. As they wrote phrases on QuillBot, students were also urged to apply the new language they had learned.
 5. By using QuillBot's grammar checker tool, which offered the proper usage of grammatical items and vocabulary, it was noticed that students learned the correct phrasal verbs, adjectives, and adverbs.
 6. Using the QuillBot as a guide, students were urged to compose sentences with the proper subject-verb agreement, sentence component sequencing, etc.
 7. Used QuillBot to provide feedback on EFL students' writing especially to correctly use adjectives, adverbs, vocabulary etc.
 8. Examined the articles that the EFL students had learned.
 9. Researchers performed a test (post-test) to ascertain the usefulness of the AI-mediated QuillBot tool. The posttest indicates that the students' writing abilities have significantly improved.

However, additional writing issues could not be addressed due to the limitations of this study.

F. Data Analysis Methods

The assessment checklist was used to the fifteen students who made up the study's exploratory samples. An additional veteran researcher also shared their thoughts. The Holste equation, calculated as the percentage of agreements over total agreements and disagreements, was applied to assess the stability of the correctors, as shown in Table 1. Researchers used paired t-tests to show how important the difference between the pre-test and post-test means was, as seen in Table 3.

In the end, the interview data was content analysed using the methodology for qualitative data analysis proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006). When assessing qualitative data, the following procedures were used:

The gathered data was carefully studied, themes were developed from it, themes were checked to make sure they accurately reflected their experiences using the online AI tool for paraphrasing, themes were defined and given names, and exemplars were found.

IV. RESULTS

Results of Research Question 1: What major writing challenges do EFL students encounter?

The researchers' checklist for evaluating EFL students' writing challenges is exhibited in Table 2. They concentrated on prepositional phrases, adjectives, adverbs, phrasal verbs, and sentence sequencing. Teachers can identify students' writing issues by looking at written samples.

For each category—vocabulary, phrasal verbs, sequencing sentences, adjectives, adverbs, and prepositional phrases—it shows three distinct samples (poor, good, and best). The samples demonstrate how poor students' English is. They are

unable to recognize and distinguish between various lexical and grammatical components. However, as demonstrated by the samples, students' performance improved following the use of QuillBot, the AI-mediated tool.

TABLE 2
STUDENTS' WRITING SAMPLES

Student performance Domain	POOR	GOOD	BEST
Vocabulary			
Phrasal Verbs			
Sequencing the Sentences			
Use of Adjectives/Adverbs			
Prepositional Phrases			

Results of Research Question 2: Are there any significant improvements in students' writing after using QuillBot?

Table 3 exemplifies that the researchers applied a paired-sample t-test to verify the significance of mean differences between the pre- and post-tests. Table 3 shows that the researchers used a paired-sample t-test to determine the significance of mean differences between the pre- and post-tests.

TABLE 3
DETAILS OF THE PAIRED-SAMPLE T-TEST USED TO CALCULATE THE SIGNIFICANCE OF MEAN DIFFERENCES BETWEEN PRE- AND POST-TEST SCORES

Domain		Mean	Std. Deviation	T	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Effect size	Level
Vocabulary	Pretest	1.67	1.3	-15.500-	24	.000	3.1	Large
	Posttest	4.00	1.119					
Phrasal verbs	Pretest	1.64	1.035	-10.023	24	.000	1.98	Large
	Posttest	3.92	1.351					
Sequencing Sentence	Pretest	.80	.956	-3.588-	24	.001	0.71	Large
	Posttest	1.75	1.331					
Use of Adjective	Pretest	3.32	1.375	-5.598-	24	.000	1.12	Large
	Posttest	4.84	.473					
Use of Adverb	Pretest	1.84	1.179	-8.088-	24	.000	1.62	Large
	Posttest	4.43	.821					
Prepositional Phrases	Pretest	1.16	.898	-11.338-	24	.000	2.27	Large
	Posttest	4.48	1.193					
Total	Pretest	10.45	2.646	-16.782-	24	.000	3.36	Large
	Posttest	23.44	3.177					

The pre-test and post-test mean differences are statistically significant, as Table 3 demonstrates. The post-test with a large effect size is supported by the 95% confidence interval and the significance level ($\alpha = 0.05$).

Results of Research Question 3: How do students feel about utilizing the AI-mediated tool?

The aim of the study was to conduct in-person interviews with students to document their first-hand experiences using QuillBot to hone their paraphrasing abilities. In terms of vocabulary, phrasal verbs, sequencing sentences, adjectives, adverbs, and prepositional phrases, as well as their general QuillBot experiences, including its ease of use, simplicity, and versatility, the data was categorized into five primary groups.

The contents were thoroughly reviewed and organized into distinct themes. Major themes were then found by underlining them. Students responded highly to QuillBot's improvements in vocabulary, phrasal verbs, sentence sequencing, adjectives, adverbs, and prepositional phrases. The following extracts represent the participants' perspectives:

- (S1) "It enhanced vocabulary." When it comes to paraphrase, vocabulary is crucial. QuillBot helps me write better.
 (S3) "I improved my vocabulary by learning words and phrases from QuillBot."
 (S5) "I gained new vocabulary that will help me become a better writer in English."
 (S6) "It gave me instructions on how to construct sentences."
 (S8) "It teaches me how to use proper grammar and verbs."
 (S7) "It helped with the written communication of self-expression."
 (S9) "It aids in my comprehension of the grammatical units and their transformation from adjective to adverb, and adverb to adjective."
 (S10) "Writing words, phrases, clauses, etc."
 (S12) "It improved my understanding."
 (S13) "QuillBot assisted with comprehension of various words, sentences, and paragraphs."
 (S15) "It is very simple and easy to use."
 (S14) "Practicing with QuillBot did not present many difficulties."
 (S11) "user-friendly".
 (S3) "Having difficulty with grammar and spelling".
 (S7) "Occasional beep of messages on WhatsApp".
 (S9) "Could not understand everything in English".

V. DISCUSSION

The results showed that students' writing subskills were considerably enhanced by the QuillBot-based instructional program. These results can be due to QuillBot's present use in educational institutions as part of their IT integration. Another aspect is that almost all students own a tablet or smartphone, which makes it simple for them to use paraphrasing tools.

The findings corroborate Fitria's (2022) claim that QuillBot is a time-saving tool that can increase text intelligibility and assist in selecting acceptable synonyms. The findings confirm Miranda's (2021) study, which discovered that students can utilize the paraphrase tool to improve the overall quality of their writing, learn new vocabulary, and better understand the context of a text.

The results also support a different study by Maulidia (2021) that suggests students may utilize online tools to get beyond obstacles in academic writing related to topic, structure, language use, and paraphrasing strategies. According to Kurniati and Fithriani's (2022) additional study, the paraphrasing tool QuillBot enhances academic writing by changing the original sentences.

The study deviates with Chen et al. (2015), who discovered that, maybe because of varying learning levels, both undergraduates and postgraduates have difficulty generating appropriate texts since they lack expertise and online paraphrasing tools. Lack of practice owing to a lack of resources, such as computers, laptops, and the internet, could be the cause of the discrepancies. The devices are out of reach for some students. Furthermore, it should be kept in mind that the tool may not always satisfy the criteria of every course. The curriculum needs to be flexible enough to accommodate the AI tool's features.

The semi-structured interview results regarding the experiences of using QuillBot to improve EFL writing sub-skills among students in their preparatory year are consistent with a different study conducted by Ariyanti and Fitriana (2017), which found that students were struggling to deal with spelling and grammar mistakes when paraphrasing. Additionally, students acknowledged in the interview that they were also disturbed by the sporadic beep of messages on WhatsApp. Another problem that learners encountered was the language barrier, as some of them were unable to comprehend the target language that QuillBot was using. Since there was a pre-made remedy for every issue, students believed QuillBot had inhibited their ability to be creative. Furthermore, some pupils became confused because of having too much information. If students routinely practice using the tool, these problems may be fixed. Teachers can offer ideas on how students might use the technology more creatively so as not to stifle their creativity.

VI. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The study concluded that QuillBot effectively enhanced various writing sub-skills of EFL students, including vocabulary, phrasal verbs, sentence sequencing, and the use of adjectives, adverbs, and prepositional phrases. The tool also exposed students to a broader range of words, leading to improvements in their vocabulary and more appropriate word choices in their writing. Based on these findings, the study recommends incorporating QuillBot into classroom instruction to serve it as a valuable aid in developing students' writing skills. Teachers should integrate it into their teaching strategies to provide access to premium features to maximize the tool's potential, providing students with access to QuillBot's premium features that could enhance their learning experiences. The teachers and other stake holders should

design syllabuses to support technological integration to include digital tools like QuillBot, ensuring that technology is incorporated in a way that supports students' writing development.

The study's scope was limited to a small segment of Najran University's PY students, and the results may vary if the study were conducted with a larger or different student population. Future research should explore the effectiveness of other features of QuillBot, such as its summary tool, essay writing, plagiarism detection, citation generator, and translation capabilities, to gain a more comprehensive understanding of its impact on academic writing.

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Are Children Colouring Books? The Psychology of Trauma and Colours in Khalid Hosseini's *The Kite Runner*

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Abstract—This paper seeks to demystify the purpose of Amir's journey of self-discovery after betraying his illegitimate half-brother, Hassan, in Khalid Hosseini's *The Kite Runner*. It attempts to reveal how the representation of colours, as a narrative element, shapes Amir's psychological development and his liberation from guilt. Through employing a textual analysis of Hosseini's novel, this paper explores Hosseini's strategic use of colours associated with certain memories Amir cannot escape. The paper utilises intrusive trauma memories and colour psychology as a theoretical framework to examine and understand Amir's internal conflict and healing process. The paper contends that Amir's trauma has been triggered by intrusive memories linked to colours prevalent during certain incidents, which compel him to confront his past. The paper concludes that these colours act as a mechanism, aiding Amir to reconcile with his haunting past. His deliberate confrontation and reconciliation with his past lead to his liberation from the psychological burden, trauma, and guilt with which he is plagued.

Index Terms—Khaled Hosseini, *The Kite Runner*, trauma and memory, colour psychology

I. INTRODUCTION

For a debut novel, Khaled Hosseini's *The Kite Runner* (2003) has been the aim of a staggering amount of research over the years. Many scholars have attempted to encapsulate its purpose from different angles and have confined themselves – most probably – to the narrative's basic values and themes, such as the novel's universality (Aubry, 2009; Qureshi, 2006), being good (Jefferess, 2009) and/or a journey of self-actualisation (Du, 2017). All of these angles share a common theme: they all refer to intrinsic values that have become universalised through the human experience, regardless of ethnicity or race. They are quite significant regardless of the reader's background.

Although the novel's diverse themes and styles have prompted a wide range of scholarly interpretations, other researchers, regardless of their theoretical frameworks, have explored or touched upon the depiction of physical and emotional trauma and the characters' ensuing struggles for survival. Mahardhika et al. (2023), for example, study the hardships through which Amir goes as a manifestation of disappointment. They argue that life is laden with unpleasantness, interwoven into the experiences that any person can encounter, and thus, when expectations are left unmet, a coping mechanism needs to be in place. In Amir's case, it is developed through dealing with "bereavement" (Mahardhika et al., 2023, p. 4). To Mahardhika et al. (2023), then, Amir is a psychological being in the way he decides to deal with the hurdles that life throws in his way. This suggestion, the paper at hand finds, is increasingly vital in understanding the instances where *The Kite Runner* focuses on the psychology of trauma to be able to convey its messages.

The traumatic representation of Amir's journey has also won the interest of scholars. Chun (2014) state that "individual trauma generally arises from personal experience" (p. 964), indicating that it is haphazard and does not rely on certain factors when (or if) triggered. Amir's trauma is "complicated through depicting him as both a victim and a sinner" (Chun, 2014, p. 964). Amir, then, appears to have a venomous duality of character: on one hand, he is a victim of hopelessness against Assef, the one who rapes Hassan. On the other hand, he is a sinner¹ since he has stood there in the alley without interference. O'Brien (2018) sees that Amir's journey through political and personal turmoil and him being "a witness to trauma" is Hosseini's way of "[translating] the trauma of ongoing conflict for a Western audience" (p. 1). She notes that Hosseini intentionally compartmentalises the Afghani turmoil at the time in a single incident because it is easier to convey

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¹ While the term "coward" could have probably seemed to be more appropriate in describing Amir, the term "sinner" remains more vital in the grand scheme of this paper, especially when it delves into the aspects of Colour Psychology.

a theme of such magnitude to the West instead of focusing on internal conflict. Hence, the narrative conveys the desolated nature of Afghanistan from the perspective of children to increase the intensity of the trauma as well as the relatability factor, and thus, one event, according to O'Brien, is adequate to achieve that. O'Brien (2018), moreover, indicates that to get rid of torment, Amir needs to learn confrontation; that is why his journey back to Afghanistan, when it is Taliban-ruled, is of the utmost essentiality towards atonement for Amir's past sins; in other words, Amir's traumas must be tackled so that they subside.

However, Amir not only physically strips himself of the effects of trauma, but also does so through verbal atonement, as pointed out by Aruta et al. (2022). To them, this is heavily emphasised as Amir's last act of saying goodbye to the gruelling past through which he has been, as he confesses everything to Soraya. Amir's confession, then, seems to be closing a chapter of misery that has, at one point, endangered his marriage; in fact, it has chased Amir throughout his entire life, and by that, he is finally able to overcome the ever-haunting past. Amir's journey of redemption ends right then and there (Aruta et al., 2022). Field (2023) perceives Amir's ethical responsibility as a bystander witnessing the rape of Hassan. He contends that Amir, as a bystander, acts as an agent for social transformation in the context of the traumatic violence of the War in Afghanistan. Therefore, it is rather conspicuous that the investigated concept of trauma, which originates from Hassan's rape and Amir's witness to such a heinous act, could affirm *The Kite Runner's* status as a formative text in literary trauma studies.

Even though such Trauma has been encapsulated on numerous occasions within *The Kite Runner* – evident through the rich literature available on those said matters – what has been largely under-researched within this context is the representation of colours and their association with individuals' experiences of trauma. A few scholars, such as Khan (2011), note the use of colour symbolism in *The Kite Runner*. Khan (2021) delves into the various shades of blue in the film adaptation, explaining how they “provide insight into the characters and the dynamics between them” (p. 111). However, Khan does not explore the connection between this colour choice and the pervasive theme of trauma in the narrative.

As a result, the study posits a distinct method through which Amir – unintentionally – rids himself of his betrayal of Hassan and childhood traumas by employing both intrusive trauma theory and colour psychology simultaneously. At first, the study focuses on intrusive trauma memory due to its deep relatedness with Amir's experience to understand the triggering causality that has haunted him after the traumatising event of rape. Constituting the second threshold of the study, furthermore, is the study of colours by subjecting them to a theme-based analysis to display the mechanism unintentionally plotted by Amir to escape his nightmare.

II. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Applying intrusive trauma memory and colour psychology to *The Kite Runner* is fruitful due to their closeness in theme and roots. However, doing so also bears multiple difficulties since the paper not only tends to bridge the gap between Amir's journey of redemption with a memory-based mechanism, but it also attempts to connect the elusive concept with an actual, scientific framework to understand how such memories have never left his mind from the beginning. Hence, the work of Krans et al. (2009) seems to be the most fitting of the mould into which Amir puts himself in such a case. Before that, however, it is of utmost importance to revise the key concepts in their research to solidify the claim.

INTRUSIVE TRAUMA MEMORY

Krans et al. (2009) define intrusive trauma memories as “rich multi-modal mental images of highly detailed sensory impressions of the traumatic event including sights, sounds, feelings and bodily sensations” (p. 1077). This means that when a person goes through a traumatising event, he or she connects the experience itself with his or her surroundings. At that moment of horror, images start to materialise in the person's psyche; they could be natural (landscapes), emotional (horror), or even observable (colours). Such materialisation and connection do not occur at the conscious level since the person is not actively aware of what he or she is doing while the natural, emotional, or observable data are being stored; it all happens subconsciously. Krans et al. (2009) illustrate that “in contrast to when a trauma survivor thinks back to the event deliberately, intrusive trauma memories come into consciousness unbidden” (p. 1077). Therefore, hearkening back to those moments happens at a deep psychological level, affecting the individual in innumerable ways. Yet, there is a variation in degree as to how and why people are affected.

Largely, the case in point here is that the impact is reciprocal with the event itself. For instance, all catastrophes are tragic, natural or man-caused. However, some seem to be more impactful than others on the individual. Krans et al. (2009), for instance, suggest that the traumas that induce PTSD (Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder) are rape and physical abuse. Moreover, Akkawi and Al-Alawneh (2022) elucidate that “severe trauma during childhood may compel some people to create and produce a lack of connection in their person's thoughts, memories, feelings, actions, or sense of identity. These psychological ramifications can be characterised by multidimensionality and tend to drive those people to forget their real essence in the process” (p. 653). Thus, the theoretical framework criss-crosses with *The Kite Runner*, specifically when Amir undergoes the traumatising event of Hassan's rape. The entire incident revolves around the blue kite that Hassan has run for Amir, so much so that Assef admits it to him after he refuses to give away the kite as he promises, “I'll let you keep the kite, Hazara. I'll let you keep it, so it will always be a reminder of what I'm about to do,” (Hosseini, 2003, p. 65). Ironically, it is not Hassan whom readers see struggling with the mental image throughout the narrative; it is Amir.

That night in the alley is the intrusive trauma memory of which Amir will keep on fighting until he achieves redemption towards the end; it is also worsened due to its man-caused nature. Krans et al. (2009) cement this, professing that:

Intentional harm seems to be more likely to produce post-traumatic stress symptoms. This finding may provide a clue as to the function of intrusive trauma memories. For example, events involving human violence may be perceived as more under our control (and thus that we have lost control) than, for example an earthquake. (p. 1078)

Accordingly, Amir is psychologically at the receiving end of a vile deed inflicted by another human, which is why he feels helpless and “paralysed” (Hosseini, 2003, pp. 63-64). He thinks that he should be able to do something, but ends up doing absolutely nothing. Consequently, the event is not only traumatising, but also haunting and harrowing for Amir; it is not a natural disaster from which Hassan suffers, but from a rape that could have possibly been prevented by a shriek or a shout as Amir confesses, “I opened my mouth, almost said something. Almost. The rest of my life might have turned out differently if I had” (Hosseini, 2003, p. 64). Hence, Amir feels that he is responsible for Hassan’s suffering, and thus carries the burden on his shoulders for the remainder of his life. Amir, then, takes advantage of colour psychology to reach redemption.

Within this theme, Krans et al. (2009) assert that intrusive trauma memories develop warning signs over time once they have been engraved into the survivor’s psyche, meaning that they can become progressive, i.e. adaptive. Afterwards, they may accompany certain sights or images, such as blood at any sign of threat faced by the survivor. It is not only that, but it also attaches itself to anything remotely similar to the said menace (Krans et al., 2009). Here, Krans et al. (2009) point out that intrusive trauma memories shapeshift in the sense that they do not take one form to materialise before the survivor’s eyes. They could morph into flashes of on-loop images. In *The Kite Runner*, for example, this happens with the pomegranate as a replacement for blood over the hill on which Amir and Hassan climb the tree, meaning that colour psychology assigns the pomegranate’s colour to the rape, implicitly.

Moreover, Krans et al. (2009) comment on the implicitness, proposing that intrusive trauma memories might develop into an emotional processing mechanism, whereby they provide a substantial amount of information regarding the trauma itself, especially when the roots are the main concern for research. In *The Kite Runner*, this is true when certain images of the rape incident deepen the fractured nature of Amir in the sense that he starts connecting the colours he has evoked that night with his surroundings. At this point, then, intrusive trauma memory subsides to focus the spotlight on colour psychology and its role in demystifying the recurring colours, which Amir keeps witnessing throughout the narrative. Due to the scope and depth of colour psychology, however, there is no particular study as the basis for the next part of the analysis, meaning that a thematic perusal is provided.

COLOUR PSYCHOLOGY

Colour psychology is a modern concept which has seen a rise in popularity recently due to its deep-rootedness in both the world of art and within the medium of psychology. It is, therefore, a hybrid field of study. In this vein, Fu et al. (2021) attest that colour psychology “began in the early 20th century” (p. 61). They affirm that it is relatively recent in terms of ever-evolving, resulting in its utilisation across various industries, namely the media. However, it began as an experimental project when physicians, like Kurt Goldstein, investigated the effect of colour on neurological and psychiatric conditions. Goldstein (1942) notes that “life is a condition alternating between excitation, destruction, and unbalance, and reorganisation, equilibrium, and rest. In the course of life, colours play their role. Each colour has a special importance and all colours together help to guarantee normal life” (p. 149). Colour psychology, then, paves the way for a wider audience and chances, crystallising the methods through which narrative is conveyed, thereby making it more expressive, impressive, and appealing (Fu et al., 2021). Since Birren (2016) opines that “the study of colour is essentially a psychological one” (p. 180), colour psychology is oftentimes the gateway to understanding how it personally affects people, at which level, and how often it lingers for a prolonged time until the associations attributed to it become inseparable from one’s existence and psyche.

O’Connor (2011) suggests that colours play a key role in defining colour psychology, stating that it “tends to refer to a range of affective, cognitive, and behavioural responses and associations linked to specific colours” (p. 230). She points out a crucial viewpoint when she elaborates on which kind of responses humans give when colours have become associated with certain experiences that vary in intensity and affectation. As a result, it becomes safe to assume that humans do not create those connections, but are subjugated to do so. In other words, if someone has an experience of love while the colour red is present, the mind would most certainly link warmth to the meaning of the colour in someone’s mind. On the other hand, if someone is to experience rape, the sight of blood-red, the same colour, would become a symbol of fear and vulnerability. Within this, O’Connor (2011) affirms:

Symbolic colour associations and colour meanings are often mentioned in conjunction with a range of psychological responses to colour including affect, preference, and cognitive judgements; and these in turn are often comingled with biological and behavioural responses to colour. (p. 231)

O’Connor (2011) represents the issue as one being referential. It focuses on how people’s psychology reacts and refers to the experiences associated with such colours, whether willingly or otherwise. It could, therefore, be by choice where people assert meaning to colour, or most probably, it could be an instinctual reaction towards the process itself. Either way, meaning is created within this association, regardless of choice or preference. It is similar to what artists experience while painting, depending on their mood.

Subsequently, then, it is discernible that artists employ colours to either evoke emotion or convey it, irrespective of its nature. To further explore this notion, Hussein (2021) illustrates that artists' choice of colour in any piece of art relies heavily on their mental state at that given time, affecting the viewer in the aftermath of its production. Similarly, colour psychology has a significant role in becoming therapeutic. Hussain (2021) professes: "[...] colour psychology comprises a sub-section of 'Art Therapy', a general term which encapsulates a constellation of associated arts approaches to therapeutic ends" (p. 303). This proves the understanding that art is mood-dependent. This also applies to novels just as it does to paintings or drawings, to the same effect, ends, and means, whereby authors assert and give more prominence to certain colours, with much emphasis on the mood that they emit.

In terms of *The Kite Runner*, however, certain colours are more apparent than others within such a context. The colours in question are: red, brown, blue, yellow and white. Each colour has become integrated within Amir's psyche to the extent that he can no longer see past them after the night in the alley with Assef and Hassan. To varying degrees, their enunciation is palpable since Amir himself feels trapped within his memory, haunted by those colours as intrusive trauma memory has previously suggested. Showing the connection, the paper considers the unconscious employability of the theory and its implications on Amir's psychologically colourful personality. In other terms, the paper sheds light on the author-colour interaction, discussing its vitality in constructing meaning and construing it.

III. DISCUSSION

As stated earlier, there are certain colours to which Hosseini gives more prominence than the rest in *The Kite Runner*. They range from warm colours (red) to pale ones (white), covering almost every bit of emotion along Amir's way to ensure that his colour associations do not occur haphazardly. Those colours are deeply associated with his trauma that keeps resurfacing. Horowitz (1969) discusses the implications of such an underlying issue, stating that "it has long been argued that the underlying mechanisms that are involved in the development of intrusive trauma memories are similar for both psychiatric levels and sub-threshold levels of posttraumatic stress" (qtd. in Krans et al., 2009, p. 1077). This works in tandem with the assumption that Amir himself does indeed suffer from post-traumatic stress, meaning that he does unwillingly construct melancholic, intrusive, and traumatic memories without his realisation.

In some excerpts in *The Kite Runner*, Hosseini (2003) focuses on colours even before Amir displays any symptoms of trauma as if to pave the way to what is yet to come in the narrative in the form of a flashback. At the beginning of the novel, Amir admits that the alley still haunts him, "looking back now, I realise I have been peeking into that deserted alley for the last twenty-six years," (Hosseini, 2003, p. 1), proving that he still belongs there, to that place. Elaborating on this realm of possibility, Trigg (2009) illustrates it in two stages in his article entitled "The Place of Trauma." At first, he suggests that there is a spatial void, a dichotomy; then, he connects it with the traumatising event after it adopts an attachment. This attachment evolves into existing autonomously beyond its "spatio-temporal borders" (Trigg, 2009, p. 95). In other words, Trigg (2009) argues that places exist in two dimensions: their original physical presence and the mental image engraved within people's psyches regarding those places. This explains Amir's recollection afterwards when he is depicted to be having a walk in Golden Gate Park after he ends the call with Rahim Khan, where he says, "then, I glanced up and saw a pair of kites, red with long blue tails, soaring the sky [...] like a pair of eyes looking down on San Francisco" (Hosseini, 2003, p. 1). The place here, San Francisco, is of little significance since Amir does not relate to it physically, but to the mental image of the alley after twenty-six years as he earlier states. The act of remembrance due to the kites' colours is where the emphasis should be focused. Krans et al. (2009) comment on the phenomenon of recollection in the sense that traumas do not subside; in fact, their trigger remains in effect, meaning that the memories are event-bound, which is how they resurface. The resurfacing is cued in once Amir sees the kites and their colours. Concerning this, Lloyed-Jones and Nakabayashi (2009) elaborate on that, noting:

It appears that two distinct mechanisms may mediate shape-colour binding in online object identification and object memory, respectively: (a) Effects of colour on object identification are mediated by an input representation that combines object shape and associated colour, and (b) effects of colour on object memory are mediated by a form of new-association priming. (p. 311)

To reinstate, they refer to the possibility that colours are object-dependent when it comes to their identification, and therefore, they aptly require an identifiable object with which they can be represented. As a result, Amir sees the objects (the kites), and thus his memory (the priming mechanism) bridges their image with the traumatising event that has haunted him up to that point. As for the meaning of the colours themselves, it is attainable, from context – red is associated with the droplets of blood in the aftermath of Hassan's rape, whereas blue is associated with hope or lofty dreams. Cementing this claim are the burdensome memories, which Amir carries around with him. While analysing both colours, Hasan et al. (2011) argue that red is associated with "anger, love, and passion" (p. 209) and that blue has a connotative meaning, for it is sky-bound. It is also believed to be divine since it is linked with God's presence (Hasan et al., 2011, p. 209). Călin and Bîrsănescu (2017) agree on the conceptualisation of blue as they profess that "blue is the colour of conventional, of duty and serenity. It generates inner peace, a constant need for truth" (p. 152). This is accurate since Amir is searching for a method to regain himself after he has lost it in the alley. That is why he sees the blue kite as "my key to Baba's heart" (Hosseini, 2003, p. 62). To him, it is dutiful to win his father's love and emerge triumphant. As for red, it is the "colour of power, health, passion and energy, it stimulates orientation" (Călin & Bîrsănescu, 2017, p. 152). Red, then, reminds Amir of the power Assef has had over him and Hassan. It is also a reminder of Amir's weakness before the inevitable.

Hosseini, henceforth, assigns a new characteristic of the colour red in his novel to include severe guilt, of which Amir is reminded every other second.

Additionally, the second incident that proves the essentiality of colour psychology in Hosseini's novel is when both Amir and Hassan run up the hill of the pomegranate tree after Hassan's rape. Amir narrates, "We trekked up the hill, our boots squishing in the muddy snow. Neither one of us said anything. We sat under our pomegranate tree and I knew I'd made a mistake" (Hosseini, 2003, p. 76). It is rather deliberate of Hosseini to approximate the imagery of the muddy snow and the pomegranate tree. Readers end up having two new colours: white (snow) and brown (muddy snow); each of them has distinctive symbolic features. According to Hasan et al. (2011), white is "clear, clean and pure" (p. 209), and what makes this association more fitting to the novel is that it is linked with Amir's and Hassan's innocence at the time, even after the fateful night. As for brown, Hasan et al. (2011) do not give it that much importance in their analysis. Perhaps that is due to its secondary type in everyday lives. Călin and Bîrsănescu (2017), however, claim that brown is a "colour of security, comfort, intimacy" (p. 153). While this might be practically true, it is not the case in *The Kite Runner*. There, Hosseini almost conclusively links it with sin and impurity. It is, one could say, the counterpart of white in this sense; it is not black anymore.

There is a clear running motif of the colour brown and its negative association with sinful acts, also relating to the night in the alley. While narrating, Amir expresses how fixated he is on Hassan's brown corduroy trousers. He details:

There were two things amid the garbage that I couldn't stop looking at: One was the blue kite resting against the wall, close to the cast-iron stove; the other was Hassan's brown corduroy pants thrown on a heap of eroded bricks. (Hosseini, 2003, p. 66)

The corduroy pants, therefore, resemble the act of rape, the most heinous act that has befallen Hassan. This colour would always connect itself to sin when Amir recollects the incident in vivid detail for years to come, haunted by his unconscious as he relives the moment on repeat. Ohtsuki (2000) proposes that the predominant cultural understanding of the colour brown is either that of religion or a taboo-like behaviour, meaning that something is menacing about the colour despite its being of a warm wavelength; it does not induce comfort, rather it accentuates disgust and labour.

Continuing the analysis of the colour brown, there is an excerpt that focuses on how brown is associated with sinful acts. Amir notices how "people bought their scotch as 'medicine' in brown paper bags from selected 'pharmacies.' They would leave with the bag tucked out of sight" (Hosseini, 2003, p. 14). The fact that the scotch is wrapped in "brown paper bags" is very telling of Hosseini's perception and innate understanding of the colour itself, emphasising the deep-rootedness of literature and the psychology of colours. In his survey, Skard (1946) concludes:

Experimental psychology has shown how colour preference is determined not only by the constitution of the individual but quite as much by environment and social status. In literature, one of the strongest of these environmental factors is the characteristics and traditions, means and methods of literature itself. (p. 174)

Hence, there is a well-established connection between the environment and individuals. In the excerpt above, for instance, people would feel the need to hide their 'medicine' out of shame because they belong to an environment that does not take kindly to sinners, whereby Hosseini accentuates the actuality of the sinfulness through the colour brown, which the paper at-hand has already proven that Hosseini utilises to highlight the contamination of the pure. Hence, brown is the colour of sin.

After red, blue, and brown, yellow is probably the last colour of prominence in Hosseini's *The Kite Runner*. Like the other colours discussed thus far, yellow has a fair representation of traumatic memories and psychology. When Amir describes Hassan's optimism while lifting the kite to fly, it is apparent that yellow is a colour of energy and hope. Amir describes, "Hassan's face brightened ... He lifted our kite, red with yellow borders" (Hosseini, 2003, p. 55). Hettiarachchi and De Silva (2012) declare that yellow is believed to be a colour of joy and happiness, energising the nervous system. Therefore, it is noteworthy here that Hosseini symbolically registers the colour yellow as a fighting spirit that makes its observer full of life. Proving this is another incident when Amir describes the people in the park, saying: "[...] and sunlight glittered on its looking glass-clear surface. On Fridays, the lake was bustling with families out for a day in the sun" (Hosseini, 2003, p. 12). The novel depicts the same feeling of yellow in the excerpt before it, whereby the narrator attests that the colour is energetic, full of life, and vibrant. Accordingly, people seek refuge in the sun to recapture their inner peace and the feeling of belonging to nature. Hosseini, nonetheless, does not exclusively assign yellow such a positive meaning.

In the following incident, nevertheless, Hosseini permits yellow to be that of sickness when Amir rides the car with his father and relatives in the car after the kite tournament. One of Amir's relatives says, "Pull over, Kaka! His face is yellow! I don't want him throwing up on my new dress!" (Hosseini, 2003, p. 73). Hosseini presents the readers with another side of yellow, a completely off-putting image materialises for the colour as it becomes negative rather than relative. Within this vein, Hasan et al. (2011) agree with such a drawn conclusion, affirming that authors depict yellow as a sign of death or the unpleasantness experienced by people. Subsequently, yellow is dual functional; it does not follow all that is hopeful, but indeed has a negative association employed by Hosseini, that of sickness. In other words, it is not only a warmth-emanating symbol just like the sun, but also its opposite: joy and sickness.

Moreover, Amir's physical colour—yellow, like which he looks before throwing up, swiftly changes afterwards to brown—the colour of sin—which brings to attention Hassan's old corduroy trousers. Amir confesses, "Little shapes formed behind my eyelids ... formed a single image: Hassan's corduroy pants" (Hosseini, 2003, p. 74). Hence, it is

conspicuous that Amir adheres to that night irrespective of where he goes or what he does according to the intrusive trauma theory. Krans et al. (2009) attest that some survivors process traumatic information abstractly, rather than concretely. Since Amir talks of “figures” and “little shapes” (Hosseini, 2003, p. 74), it is by definition an abstract notion through which he unconsciously initiates the remembrance process.

Hosseini, therefore, utilises this processing in a colour-associated pattern. Doing so allows him to utilise such a connection for two main functions, namely the recollection of trauma and colour psychology to pertain to the understanding that Amir does not go on a self-actualisation trip, but rather is forced to keep revisiting the events of the alley in his mind quite constantly. Consequently, he falls prey to his belonging to the physical place where the rape has occurred, meaning that he no longer controls his memory and imagination since each time he tries to escape his reality, he is haunted once more by the factuality of his betrayal of Hassan.

IV. CONCLUSION

Intrusive trauma memories and colour psychology in Hosseini's *The Kite Runner* have resulted in distinctive analyses and a modern threshold on the narrative. The paper has proven that when Hosseini employs colours, it is a need for necessitation rather than a need to create an appealing narrative. On the contrary, his utilisation of colour psychology increases the intensity of the story, especially when Amir is fixated on red, blue, brown, yellow and white to express his emotions, or when he even remotely remembers a past interaction he has had. With that in mind, Amir psychologically suffers from a traumatic, memory-based loop out of which he gets only through understanding the true horror of remembrance. The paper has divulged, in this sense, that each colour has a symbolic nature. Red, for instance, is reminiscent of Hassan's oozing blood after Assef rapes him. Blue, as presented in the kite, is Amir's key to his father's unattainable love, which he fails to get at the end despite sacrificing his half-brother for it. Brown is the colour of sin, which signifies Alcoholic drinks, Hassan's corduroy trousers as another reminder of rape, as well as the impurity of mud when combined with snow. Thus, it is negative all around: sin, rape, and Alcoholism. Last but not least, yellow is of a duality in purpose: warmth and life on one hand, whilst sickly and despicable on the other. Conclusively, therefore, it appears that children are colouring books, but they cannot choose which colours they want to remember, and which ones to neglect.

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Semantic Correspondences of Vowel Sounds in the Kazakh Language: An Experimental Analysis of Sound Symbolism

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Abstract—This paper explores the semantic-symbolic correspondences of vowel sounds in the Kazakh language. The aim of the study is to identify manifestations of sound symbolism in Kazakh through experimental and statistical methods. Associations between the vowel sounds A, Ä, İ, O, and Ū and ten semantic oppositions (large–small, white–black, light–dark, male–female, strong–weak) were assessed. A total of 67 Kazakh-speaking participants took part in a survey conducted via Google Forms using the semantic differential method. The data were processed in Jamovi software, calculating mean, standard deviation, and median values. The results indicate that the correspondence between sounds and meanings is non-random. For instance, the sounds “O” and “Ū” are associated with concepts such as “large”, “strong”, and “male”, while “İ” and “Ä” are linked to “small”, “weak”, and “female”. The sound “A” was rated highly for opposing meanings, revealing its universal nature. These findings demonstrate that sound symbolism in Kazakh is grounded in phonetic, cognitive, and cultural dimensions. The results offer deeper insight into the phonosemantic system of the Kazakh language and provide new empirical data illustrating the natural connection between language and thought.

Index Terms—sound symbolism, Kazakh language, vowel sounds, semantic correspondence, experiment

I. INTRODUCTION

In the 21st century, linguistic science has been enriched with new paradigms, expanding beyond traditional approaches to include anthropocentric, cognitive, and psycholinguistic perspectives. At the intersection of these approaches, the concept of sound symbolism has gained increasing scholarly attention. Sound symbolism refers to the study of natural, iconic connections between sounds and meanings. It investigates how phonetic signs contribute to meaning-making, focusing on their non-verbal, associative perception.

Although attempts to explain the nature of sound symbolism date back centuries, it remains a topic of debate across multiple disciplines. Khusainov (1988) links sound symbolism to the origins of language and cognition, while Ngai et al. (2024) note that it became a subject of scientific inquiry in the early 20th century. Shinohara et al. (2016) describe it as a form of cross-modal iconicity. In traditional linguistics, the connection between sounds and meanings was considered arbitrary, as posited by Ferdinand de Saussure and upheld by structuralism. However, sound symbolism challenges this view by providing empirical evidence of semantic functions of sounds.

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The theoretical foundations of sound symbolism emerged early in European linguistics. Pioneers such as Sapir (1929) and Whorf explored the semantic effects of phonetic forms. One of the first experimental studies in this area is Köhler's renowned "maluma-takete" experiment, which demonstrated the association of soft, rounded shapes with the sound "maluma" and sharp, angular shapes with "takete".

Many scholars agree that universal sensory correspondences underlie sound symbolism. Styles and Gawne (2017) suggest that shared perceptual mechanisms drive this phenomenon. According to Rovnaya (2018), Ramachandran and Hubbard (2001) replicated the "bouba-kiki" experiment across languages, confirming the iconic connection between sound and shape. Sidorov-Dorso (2013) proposed a model of synesthesia distinguishing between lower-level (acoustic, visual, olfactory) and higher-level (semantic) associations, reaffirming that the bouba-kiki effect yields consistent results across linguistic environments.

Today, sound symbolism is a multidisciplinary field, closely linked with psycholinguistics, cognitive linguistics, phonetics, semiotics, neurolinguistics, cultural linguistics, and synesthesia studies. Research shows that sounds are not only physical units but also carriers of symbolic and emotional-associative meaning. The interdependence of phonetic form and semantic content reveals a new layer of linguistic motivation.

Over the past decade, foundational studies on sound symbolism have expanded. Scholars such as Kawahara (2020), Svantesson (2017), and Shinohara and Kawahara (2010) have explored connections between sound and universal concepts like size, emotion, gender, shape, and color. Works by Feist (2013) and Winter and Perlman (2021) focused on English, while Imai and Kita (2008) demonstrated that sound iconicity supports verb learning in children. Johansson et al. (2020) proposed a semantic-phonetic typology of sound symbolism. Wichmann et al. (2010) sought traces of sound symbolism in basic vocabulary. Kawahara (2021) emphasized its phonetic foundations, Elsen (2017) classified natural and conventional links between sounds and objects, and Sidhu and Pexman (2019) investigated its role in the psychosemantics of personal names.

Cuskley et al. (2017) analyzed the phonological and visual dimensions of the "bouba/kiki" effect. Barton and Halberstadt (2018) studied social perceptions of sound symbolism. Auracher (2017) investigated associations between artificial words and animal shapes, while Imai et al. (2025) explained iconic resemblance between sound and meaning through articulatory motion. De Varda and Marelli (2025) explored auditory iconicity in spoken English, and Knoeferle et al. (2017) described the symbolic load of acoustic signals linked to size and shape.

Despite global attention, sound symbolism remains understudied in Turkic languages. Khassenov (2021) notes that only early efforts by Kornilov (1978) in Chuvash and Khusainov (1988) in Kazakh addressed this topic.

These works underscored the relevance of sound symbolism as a universal, interdisciplinary, and empirical research domain. Nevertheless, in Turkic linguistics—particularly in Kazakh—sound symbolism has not yet received sufficient attention. One of the first scholars to address sound-meaning relationships in Kazakh was Khusainov (1988), who described the conceptual nuances of specific sounds. In recent years, this line of research has seen a revival. For example, Khassenov (2021) emphasized the archetypal nature of Kazakh phonemes and their link to historical and cultural memory. He argued that symbolic associations between sounds, concepts, and images are rooted in Turkic worldview.

In Kazakh folklore, the semantic coloring of sounds also emerges. Concepts like "white" and "black" convey not only color but also ethical, social, and symbolic meanings (Khassenov, 2021). Understanding how specific sounds relate to such concepts in linguistic consciousness is central to sound symbolism. It is not merely a linguistic fact but a cognitive and psychological phenomenon.

The binary principle in the Turkic worldview (e.g., father-mother) may also influence the phonological system. Sartkozhauly (2007) linked vowel harmony to this dualistic cosmology, associating back vowels with masculinity and front vowels with femininity. This perspective implies that sound symbolism should be studied not only within linguistic systems but also in cultural and spiritual contexts.

Based on the above theoretical and interdisciplinary foundations, this study aims to examine the manifestations of sound symbolism in the Kazakh language. Specifically, it investigates the symbolic associations of selected vowels (A, Ä, İ, O, Ü) with semantic oppositions (e.g., large-small, light-dark, white-black, male-female, strong-weak). Why these vowels? The selection was based on linguistic and cultural rationales. A and O are universal and common across Turkic languages, belonging to open vowels frequently used to convey emotion and imagery. In contrast, Ä, İ, and Ü are unique to Kazakh and reflect national phonetic features. These sounds are rare or absent in other Turkic languages and are therefore seen as symbolic codes embedded in Kazakh linguistic consciousness.

The scientific relevance of this study lies in:

Conducting the first experimental and statistical analysis of sound symbolism in Kazakh;

Assessing the semantic coloring potential of vowel sounds;

Identifying universal sound-meaning correspondences in the Kazakh context;

Empirically demonstrating the interconnection between Turkic worldview and linguistic consciousness;

Characterizing the phonosemantic features of Kazakh through the symbolic potential of vowel sounds.

The findings confirm that the iconic link between sound and meaning exists in Kazakh, highlighting the semantic-associative functions of phonemes. This reinforces the natural bond between language and cognition and offers insight into phonosemantic regularities unique to Kazakh.

Thus, viewing sound symbolism through the lens of Kazakh linguistic structure and cultural cognition not only enriches our understanding of the symbolic capacity of the language but also opens avenues for explaining national cognitive models. Moreover, such studies have practical relevance for language education, psycholinguistics, neuroscience, onomasiology, and translation studies.

II. METHODOLOGY

A. Participants

A total of 67 individuals aged between 18 and 25 participated in the study. All participants were healthy, with normal vision and hearing, and were fluent speakers of the Kazakh language. No specific restrictions were imposed regarding participants' gender, ethnicity, or social status. However, the following inclusion criteria were required for participation: (1) absence of visual impairments, (2) normal color perception (i.e., non-color-blind), and (3) the ability to comprehend and accurately interpret sounds and words in the Kazakh language. Participation was entirely voluntary, and all participants were provided with a detailed explanation of the research procedure beforehand.

B. Materials

Five vowel sounds of the Kazakh language were selected as the primary stimuli: A, Ä, Ī, O, and Ū. These vowels were chosen based on their phonetic properties, representing features such as openness vs. closeness, back vs. front, and rounded vs. unrounded articulation. The vowels were isolated from their phonemic environments and presented as independent acoustic units.

To assess the symbolic associations of these vowel sounds, ten pairs of antonymic semantic concepts were used:

Large
Small
White
Black
Light
Dark
Male
Female
Strong
Weak

These antonyms were selected as universal semantic categories to enable the identification of symbolic correspondences with the vowel sounds.

C. Procedure

The experimental study was conducted online via the Google Forms platform. Participants received comprehensive information about the research, along with instructions, and provided informed consent prior to beginning the study. The introductory instruction on the first page of the questionnaire read:

“This study aims to identify linguistic universals and correspondences between sounds and meanings. You are asked to evaluate the degree of correspondence between the presented vowel sounds and pairs of semantic concepts. Use a 5-point scale where 1 indicates a very weak match and 5 indicates a very strong match”.

Each participant was presented with the vowel sounds and semantic pairs in random order. Using the semantic differential method, participants rated the perceived correspondence between each sound and concept pair. This method allows for the measurement of both linguistic and nonverbal associations. Each pair was rated on a scale from 1 to 5.

For example:

Sound “A” – Large: 4
Sound “Ī” – Light: 2
Sound “O” – Black: 5

All responses were stored in the Google Forms database and later subjected to statistical analysis.

D. Data Analysis

The collected data were processed using the Jamovi statistical software. Initially, all responses were exported to a spreadsheet, and for each vowel–concept pair, the following statistical indicators were calculated: mean (M), median (Md), standard deviation (SD), and standard error (SE). These measures made it possible to quantitatively describe the degree of symbolic association between a specific vowel and a concept.

For instance, a high mean score (e.g., $M = 3.33$) for the sound “O” associated with the concept “large” suggests a strong symbolic match. Conversely, a lower mean score (e.g., $M = 2.27$) for the sound “Ī” with the same concept indicates a weaker association.

As part of the extended analysis, the symbolic significance of certain sounds was interpreted in relation to their articulatory features and phonosemantic properties. Additionally, the findings were compared with previous research

results (e.g., Sapir, 1929; Ramachandran & Hubbard, 2001; Kawahara, 2021) to contextualize and validate the interpretations.

III. RESULTS

The findings of the study clearly demonstrate that sound symbolism is manifested at the semantic level in the Kazakh language. Each vowel exhibited either consistent or unexpected correspondences with certain semantic oppositions. In this section, the collected data are analyzed using specific statistical measures and are followed by semantic interpretations. The results confirm that the symbolic associations between sounds and meanings are determined by articulatory, acoustic, and cultural-cognitive factors.

A. Association With the Concepts “Large” and “Small”

The vowel sound that demonstrated the strongest association with the concept “large” was “O” (Mean = 3.33) (Table 1). Phonetically, this is a back, open vowel with a rounded articulation, often linked to spatial largeness, roundness, and completeness. Acoustically, it is characterized by low frequency and broad resonance, which may contribute to its symbolic connection with largeness. This sound is commonly found in Kazakh words that relate to space or volume, such as *ortalyq* (central), *oıpat* (depression), and *domalaq* (round).

TABLE 1
LARGE

Question	N	Mean	Median	SD	SE
Which sounds are associated with the concept “Large”? [A]	66	3.09	3.50	1.67	0.206
...“Large”? [Ä]	66	2.29	2.00	1.30	0.160
...“Large”? [İ]	66	2.27	2.00	1.43	0.176
...“Large”? [O]	66	3.33	4.00	1.46	0.180
...“Large”? [Ü]	66	3.18	3.00	1.42	0.175

Following “O”, the sound “Ü” showed a relatively strong association (Mean = 3.18). This vowel is also a back and rounded vowel with a constricted articulation. It is associated with mass, weight, and extensiveness, as evidenced in words like *ūzyn* (long), *ūlgaitu* (to enlarge), and *ūlt* (nation).

In contrast, the vowel “İ” (Mean = 2.27) showed the weakest association with “large”. Being a front, high, and unrounded vowel, it is acoustically weaker, with short duration and narrow articulatory base. These features link it symbolically with smallness or diminutiveness. This is consistent with earlier findings by Sapir (1929) and Shinohara and Kawahara (2010), who observed similar associations in English phonemes.

The strongest association with the concept “small” was shown by the vowel “İ” (Mean = 3.50) (Table 2). Its articulatory features make it symbolic of delicateness, minuteness, and subtlety. This sound frequently occurs in Kazakh words such as *kishi* (small), *jinishke* (thin), *nəzik* (delicate), which are semantically linked to gentleness or weakness.

TABLE 2
SMALL

Question	N	Mean	Median	SD	SE
Which sounds are associated with the concept “Small”? [A]	66	2.08	2.00	1.27	0.156
...“Small”? [Ä]	66	2.85	3.00	1.57	0.193
...“Small”? [İ]	66	3.50	4.00	1.60	0.197
...“Small”? [O]	66	2.20	2.00	1.27	0.156
...“Small”? [Ü]	66	2.27	2.00	1.32	0.162

The vowel “Ä” (Mean = 2.85) also showed a relatively high correspondence with “small”, likely due to its soft, melodic phonation. In contrast, the sound “A” had the lowest score (Mean = 2.08), reinforcing its broad, open, and semantically expansive nature.

B. Association With the Concepts “White” and “Black”

The highest degree of association with the concept “white” was assigned to the vowel “A” (Mean = 3.58) (Table 3). As an open, back vowel, it conveys a positive emotional tone and is symbolically linked with brightness, purity, and truth. In Kazakh, this sound frequently occurs in positively connoted words such as *aqıqat* (truth), *aqjarqyn* (cheerful), *adal* (honest), and *aqköñil* (kind-hearted).

TABLE 3
WHITE

Question	N	Mean	Median	SD	SE
Which sounds are associated with the concept “White”? [A]	66	3.58	4.00	1.61	0.198
...“White”? [Ä]	66	2.58	2.00	1.30	0.160
...“White”? [İ]	66	2.50	2.00	1.34	0.165
...“White”? [O]	66	2.47	2.00	1.42	0.174
...“White”? [Ü]	66	2.50	2.00	1.46	0.180

Surprisingly, the sound “A” also received the highest score for the concept “black” (Mean = 3.41) (Table 4). This unexpected outcome demonstrates the symbolic flexibility of the vowel. It suggests that the meaning attributed to a sound may depend on contextual factors. Furthermore, the Kazakh word qara (black) itself contains the vowel “A”, which may have influenced participants’ intuitive associations.

TABLE 4
BLACK

Question	N	Mean	Median	SD	SE
Which sounds are associated with the concept “Black”? [A]	66	3.41	4.00	1.50	0.184
...“Black”? [Ä]	66	2.18	2.00	1.31	0.161
...“Black”? [I]	66	2.27	2.00	1.27	0.157
...“Black”? [O]	66	2.76	2.50	1.47	0.181
...“Black”? [Ü]	66	2.58	2.00	1.51	0.186

All other vowels—Ä, İ, O, Ü—showed only weak or moderate associations with both “white” and “black”.

C. Association With the Concepts “Light” and “Dark”

Again, the highest score for the concept “light” was given to “A” (Mean = 3.58) (Table 5). The vowel’s wide-open articulation and high intensity support its symbolic connection with brightness and radiance. It is frequently found in Kazakh words such as jariq (light), jaz (summer), jadyranqy (joyful), and ashyq (open).

TABLE 5
LIGHT

Question	N	Mean	Median	SD	SE
Which sounds are associated with the concept “Light”? [A]	66	3.58	4.00	1.45	0.178
...“Light”? [Ä]	66	2.64	2.50	1.44	0.178
...“Light”? [I]	66	2.41	2.00	1.37	0.169
...“Light”? [O]	66	2.83	3.00	1.44	0.178
...“Light”? [Ü]	66	2.67	3.00	1.41	0.173

Unexpectedly, the highest association with the concept “dark” was also given to the vowel “A” (Mean = 3.02). This paradox underscores the capacity of a single sound to be symbolically associated with contrasting meanings. It indicates that the vowel “A” may function as a polysemantic unit in poetic and expressive language, making it suitable for use in diverse symbolic contexts.

TABLE 6
DARK

Question	N	Mean	Median	SD	SE
Which sounds are associated with the concept “Dark”? [A]	66	3.02	3.00	1.53	0.189
...“Dark”? [Ä]	66	2.27	2.00	1.30	0.159
...“Dark”? [I]	66	2.23	2.00	1.24	0.152
...“Dark”? [O]	66	2.88	3.00	1.51	0.186
...“Dark”? [Ü]	66	2.85	3.00	1.55	0.191

D. Association With the Concepts “Male” and “Female”

The strongest association with the concept “male” was observed with the vowel “Ü” (Mean = 2.82) (Table 7). This is a back, close, and constricted vowel produced in the posterior part of the mouth. In the context of Turkic worldview, it is symbolically linked with masculinity, heroism, and strength. As noted by Sartkozhauly (2007), back vowels are often associated with paternal or masculine origins in traditional thought.

TABLE 7
MALE

Question	N	Mean	Median	SD	SE
Which sounds are associated with the concept “Male”? [A]	66	2.55	2.00	1.44	0.177
...“Male”? [Ä]	66	2.42	2.00	1.33	0.163
...“Male”? [I]	66	2.62	2.00	1.41	0.174
...“Male”? [O]	66	2.80	3.00	1.34	0.165
...“Male”? [Ü]	66	2.82	3.00	1.46	0.179

The vowel most strongly associated with the concept “female” was “Ä” (Mean = 3.44) (Table 8). Its soft, melodic, and front vowel qualities evoke a feminine emotional tone. In the Kazakh language, “Ä” appears in words such as ädemi (beautiful), äsem (graceful), äuezdi (melodic), and näzik (delicate), clearly reflecting its symbolic association with femininity.

TABLE 8
FEMALE

Question	N	Mean	Median	SD	SE
Which sounds are associated with the concept “Female”? [A]	66	2.67	2.00	1.41	0.173
...“Female”? [Ä]	66	3.44	4.00	1.57	0.193
...“Female”? [İ]	66	3.09	3.00	1.46	0.180
...“Female”? [O]	66	2.11	2.00	1.28	0.157
...“Female”? [Ü]	66	2.08	2.00	1.28	0.158

E. Association With the Concepts “Strong” and “Weak”

The vowels “O” and “Ü” received the highest and equal scores for the concept “strong” (Mean = 2.91) (Table 9). Both are back vowels with broad articulatory bases, acoustically heavy and resonant, often associated with power, force, and authority.

TABLE 9
STRONG

Question	N	Mean	Median	SD	SE
Which sounds are associated with the concept “Strong”? [A]	66	2.88	3.00	1.49	0.184
...“Strong”? [Ä]	66	2.48	2.00	1.38	0.170
...“Strong”? [İ]	66	2.77	2.50	1.54	0.189
...“Strong”? [O]	66	2.91	3.00	1.46	0.180
...“Strong”? [Ü]	66	2.91	3.00	1.46	0.180

Conversely, the vowels “Ä” (Mean = 3.47) and “İ” (Mean = 3.35) showed the strongest association with the concept “weak” (Table 10). Their phonosemantic profiles suggest softness, gentleness, and flexibility, confirming their connection with fragility or subtlety.

TABLE 10
WEAK

Question	N	Mean	Median	SD	SE
Which sounds are associated with the concept “Weak”? [A]	66	2.12	2.00	1.17	0.144
...“Weak”? [Ä]	66	3.47	4.00	1.44	0.177
...“Weak”? [İ]	66	3.35	4.00	1.54	0.190
...“Weak”? [O]	66	2.05	2.00	1.17	0.144
...“Weak”? [Ü]	66	2.09	2.00	1.29	0.158

IV. DISCUSSION

The results of this study demonstrate that sound symbolism functions as a significant linguistic and cognitive phenomenon in the Kazakh language. The consistent association of each vowel with specific semantic concepts confirms that vowels are not merely articulatory or acoustic units, but also symbolic signs capable of conveying meaning. This section interprets the findings in light of established linguistic theories and compares them with conclusions drawn by scholars in various fields.

While Ferdinand de Saussure emphasized the arbitrary and conventional nature of linguistic signs, sound symbolism has developed in a direction that challenges this view. Our study confirms that vowels in the Kazakh language can exhibit consistent associations with specific semantic domains. For example, the vowels “O” and “Ü” were closely linked with concepts like large, strong, and male, while “Ä” and “İ” corresponded to small, weak, and female.

Sapir (1929) famously demonstrated that the invented English words *mal* (broad-sounding) and *mil* (thin-sounding) were intuitively matched with the meanings large and small, respectively. Our results affirm the cross-linguistic and possibly universal nature of such associations, extending Sapir’s conclusions to Kazakh.

The semantic associations of sounds are often explained by their articulatory and acoustic characteristics. Kawahara (2021), connecting sound symbolism with phonetics, emphasized the relevance of parameters such as open/closed, back/front, and tongue position in sound–meaning relationships. Back vowels, which tend to have lower frequencies and broader resonance, are associated with meanings such as strength, largeness, and heaviness. This was confirmed in our study by the high ratings of “O” and “Ü”.

Conversely, front vowels have higher frequency, shorter duration, and weaker resonance. For instance, the vowel “İ” received high scores for the concepts small (Mean = 3.50) and weak (Mean = 3.35), confirming its symbolic linkage to delicateness. These results are consistent with Shinohara and Kawahara (2010), who also found that front vowels in Japanese and English were associated with smallness and weakness.

The associations between sounds and meanings are not purely phonetic; they are also rooted in cognition. Ramachandran and Hubbard (2001), through the boba–kiki effect, demonstrated the link between sounds and visual shapes and showed that such correspondences are processed at the neurological level. They distinguished between

lower-level (phonetic-visual) and higher-level (semantic-conceptual) sound–meaning connections.

Similar patterns emerged in our study: the vowel “O” was perceived as round, wide, and full—associations that linked it to largeness and weight. In contrast, “Ī” and “Ä” were associated with narrow, linear forms, evoking meanings such as fragility and smallness. These results suggest that participants’ responses were shaped by cognitive rather than purely linguistic associations.

Understanding sound symbolism in Kazakh also requires accounting for the Turkic worldview. Sartkozhauly (2007) linked the vowel harmony system to the dual principles of patriarchal and matriarchal origins in Turkic cosmology. In his interpretation, back vowels represent the masculine principle, while front vowels represent the feminine. Our findings support this: the concepts of male were associated with “Ū” and “O”, while female was strongly associated with “Ä”.

Additionally, Khasenov (2021) emphasized the archetypal meanings of vowels in Kazakh, relating them to cultural memory. The vowel “Ä”, for example, appears in words like *nāzik* (delicate), *sāni* (elegant), and *äuezdi* (melodic), reinforcing its symbolic association with femininity. These associations reflect not only linguistic patterns but also deeper layers of cultural consciousness.

Such culturally grounded symbolic meanings elevate sounds from merely phonological units to cognitive-cultural signs. For instance, while the vowel “Ä” may universally be associated with softness due to its acoustic qualities, in Kazakh it accumulates additional cultural and aesthetic significance through words like *sāni* (beauty), *nāzik* (delicacy), *ādemi* (graceful), and *äuen* (melody). In this way, universal phonetic effects are transformed into culturally specific semantic values.

This shift from phonetic to semantic representation highlights how sounds operate not only within linguistic systems, but also within broader cultural and cognitive frameworks.

The vowel “A” produced particularly intriguing results. It was associated with both white (Mean = 3.58) and light (Mean = 3.58), but also with black (Mean = 3.41) and dark (Mean = 3.02). This indicates that “A” functions as a universal and polysemous vowel, capable of conveying both positive and negative symbolic meanings.

This phenomenon aligns with Elsen’s (2017) typology of sound symbolism, which distinguishes between natural iconicity (based on perceptual features) and conventional iconicity (based on cultural agreement). The vowel “A” is open, emotionally expressive, and phonetically neutral enough to be associated with diverse and even opposing meanings.

The results of this study may have practical applications in language education, neurolinguistics, early language acquisition, branding, and advertising. For example, Imai et al. (2008) showed that sound symbolism facilitates children’s verb learning. This mechanism may also be significant for developing Kazakh-language learning methodologies. Furthermore, sound symbolism may enhance emotional and aesthetic impact in poetry, names, and literary texts.

This study focused on five vowels and ten semantic oppositions. While this provides initial insights, it does not cover the full phonological and semantic richness of the Kazakh language. Future studies could expand the scope to include both vowels and consonants and develop comprehensive phonosemantic fields. Comparative studies incorporating gender, age, regional variation, and social status may also reveal individual or group-based differences in sound-symbolic perception.

In conclusion, this research confirms that sound symbolism in Kazakh reflects distinct linguistic, cognitive, and cultural realities. Vowels are not only phonetic units but also meaning-generating symbolic signs. Their perception is shaped by phonetic, visual, and cultural experiences. Studies in this area promise to enrich our understanding of Kazakh’s semiotic and cognitive-linguistic potential.

V. CONCLUSION

This study investigated the phenomenon of sound symbolism in the Kazakh language from an experimental and statistical perspective, with the aim of identifying the semantic potential of vowel sounds. The results demonstrate that the associations between sounds and specific semantic concepts are not random but are grounded in natural, articulatory, and cognitive characteristics.

Throughout the study, the vowels “O” and “Ū” were predominantly associated with semantic fields such as large, strong, and male—suggesting heaviness and depth. In contrast, the vowels “Ī” and “Ä” were consistently matched with small, weak, and female, reflecting delicacy and lightness. The vowel “A” was particularly notable for its simultaneous association with opposing semantic concepts such as white–black and light–dark, underscoring its universal and polyfunctional character.

These findings confirm that sound symbolism in Kazakh is rooted in phonetic structure while also being interwoven with national worldview. The Turkic conceptual duality—associating back vowels with masculinity and front vowels with femininity—helps explain the cultural-symbolic roles of sounds. Moreover, the iconic link between sound and meaning appears to rely on the participants’ cognitive and associative processing, illustrating the interaction between phonetic form and mental representation.

This research constitutes a significant step toward understanding the phonosemantic potential of the Kazakh language. Demonstrating the symbolic function of sounds through experimental data contributes to the development of

anthropocentric linguistics and provides a solid foundation for further inquiry in fields such as linguistic cultural studies, psycholinguistics, and cognitive linguistics.

Future research that expands the scope of sound symbolism to include consonants, morphemes, speech registers, and literary texts will allow for the creation of a more complete map of phonosemantic devices in the Kazakh language.

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Alienation vs. Societal Suppression: Exploring Gothic Romance Elements in Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter* and Ahmed Saadawi's *Frankenstein in Baghdad*

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Abstract—Gothic romance is a genre of literature that adds a sense of unpredictability and highlights profound internal disruptions. This paper examines the use of Gothic elements in Ahmed Saadawi's novel *Frankenstein in Baghdad* and Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter*. Furthermore, it analyzes key excerpts of the two novels to explain that both novels are Gothic romances in which the two authors, Saadawi and Hawthorne, examine themes such as guilt, alienation, and social repression. The paper also argues that both novelists challenge the social norms and traditions to expose the darker dimensions of human beings. Hawthorne employs the characters of Hester Prynne and Arthur Dimmesdale to integrate pervasive Gothic elements within the narrative as a means to explore themes of societal alienation and hypocrisy. On the other hand, Saadawi utilizes the characters of Hadi and Whatsitsname to create an ominous atmosphere, reflecting themes of existential dread and moral ambiguity as the protagonist grapples with the consequences of his grotesque creation.

Index Terms—Frankenstein, Gothic romance, Hadi, Hester, Whatsitsname

I. INTRODUCTION

Gothic romance stands out from other genres due to several unique elements. It emerged during the Romantic Period as a reaction to Enlightenment ideals, incorporating supernatural, mysterious, and gloomy settings with elements like witches, ghosts, and curses (Khan, 2023). The Gothic genre originated in the 18th century, with pioneers including Horace Walpole, Ann Radcliffe, and Matthew Lewis. Gothic literature thrived amid periods of social and political turmoil, reflecting the anxieties of its era. Gothic romance is distinguished by its focus on mystery, suspense, and the paranormal, as well as its exploration of the weird, grotesque, and sublime.

This genre combines popular romance with Gothic themes, diverging from traditional Gothic plots, such as those found in *Jane Eyre*, to explore working-class and social traditions by employing specific images of the suffering of people at that time (Üstün Kaya, 2022). Additionally, Gothic literature often delves into the unexplainable and uncontrollable, blending horror and romanticism with elements of mystery, suspense, and the uncanny (Stankovic, 2022). Furthermore, Gothic elements can be seen in various forms, such as in the representation of pandemics, where Gothic science fiction traits like madness, monstrosity, and apocalyptic visions are utilized to create a moral drama of good versus evil (Stankovic, 2022).

Since its emergence during the 18th century, Gothic romance has been characterized by its emphasis on emotional intensity, psychological turmoil, and melodramatic plots. Moreover, during the twentieth century, Gothic romance evolved beyond the traditional Gothics of the 1960s and 1970s by focusing on specific issues that affect modern life (Hirst, 2020). Since no prior study has examined Western and Eastern works within this framework, this study investigates the use of Gothic elements in Ahmed Saadawi's *Frankenstein in Baghdad* and Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter*. This study aims to fill the gap and address contemporary themes of social injustice, loneliness, sin,

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hypocrisy, and guilt by using Gothic tropes to evoke dread and anxiety in readers. Although both writers belong to different eras, the paper attempts to bridge their works through Gothic romance. This study also demonstrates how Gothic romance functions as a lens through which both authors explore humanity's darker dimensions of existence and question prevailing social norms through comparative analysis.

Before analyzing the primary texts, this study reviews key scholarship to contextualize its approach and avoid redundancy.

Questions of the Study

This study aims to answer the following questions:

1. How did Hawthorne handle Gothic romance elements in his novel *The Scarlet Letter*?
2. How did Saadawi address cultural diversity in Iraq through Gothic romance?

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Gothic serves as a lens for authors to expose and address social issues with a legitimacy unattainable through conventional means. Since its emergence, it has become a favorite topic for many writers. To contextualize this study, some important previous studies are reviewed to avoid redundancy and build upon existing findings. Firstly, in *Gothic Elements in Selected Fictional Works by Nathaniel Hawthorne*, Francis (1985) analyzed Hawthorne's use of Gothic tropes. He explained that Hawthorne used Gothicism and ambiguity as a narrative tool.

Similarly, Sabeeh and Kiaee (2019) examined the monster motif in Gothic fiction, concluding that the monster character symbolizes Iraq's existential absurdity and reflects the societal distortions caused by war. Galhem (2022) further analyzed the monster's vengefulness through a Freudian lens, arguing that it embodies the psychological trauma experienced by Iraqis in the aftermath of the 2003 invasion.

In *A Critical Exploration of Fear and Loathing in Selected Romantic Fiction*, Khan (2023) argued that Romantic writers harnessed Gothic fear and loathing to critique social injustices. In a comparable vein, Teggart (2019) investigated in his study "*Frankenstein in Baghdad: A Novel Way of Understanding the Iraq War and Its Aftermath*" and examined Saadawi's *Frankenstein in Baghdad* as a Gothic allegory for war trauma. Teggart claimed that the use of gothic elements in this novel allowed Saadawi to depict "subjective justice, mutual complicity, and the cyclical nature of violence and gratuitous death" (Teggart, 2019, p. 27). However, in her study "Gothic Politics in Ahmed Saadawi's *Frankenstein in Baghdad*," Alkhayat (2022) linked Gothic imagery directly to Iraq's wartime horrors. She argued that this intertwining of Gothic motifs and the realities of war-torn Iraq deliberately exposes the unfathomable horrors of post-invasion Baghdad (Alkhayat, 2022).

Finally, Soo-Ping (1986) analyzed Gothic elements in *The Scarlet Letter*, demonstrating how Hawthorne's ambiguity conveys moral and existential themes. He explained that Hawthorne used Gothic elements to deliver a moral lesson to society at large and also to define human existence from his philosophical perspectives. Soo-Ping claimed that "Hawthorne audaciously proclaims a moral standard that not only settles the issue of conflict and division but also defines his conception of the meaning and purpose of human existence" (Soo-Ping, 1986, p. 240).

While these studies explore Gothic fiction, none offer a comparative analysis of Saadawi and Hawthorne's works. Thus, this study examines how both authors employ Gothic elements to critique societal immorality. To place this inquiry, the following section provides an overview of the historical evolution of Gothic literature, thereby contextualizing its application within these contemporary and classic texts.

III. GOTHIC ROMANCE: A HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Gothic romance was a dominant literary genre in the late 18th century and flourished during the 19th century. This literary form originated with Horace Walpole's novel *The Castle of Otranto* (1764). In this novel, Walpole incorporated elements of horror and the supernatural, establishing a template for future works by Ann Radcliffe, Matthew Gregory Lewis, and Charles R. Maturin, as well as Mary Shelley's classic, *Frankenstein* (Harris, 2017). Walpole's story features a diverse cast symbolising the complexities of human nature. From the tyrant Manfred to the noble Isabella and the tragic Matilda, the characters in *The Castle of Otranto* embody virtues and vices, creating moral and psychological depth. Furthermore, the work is steeped in symbolism: the giant helmet, Alfonso's image, and the bleeding statue symbolize both internal and external character conflicts. The use of setting in Gothic romance reflects the genre's emphasis on ambiance and mood. By setting the action in isolated or decaying environments, authors create a sense of estrangement and eeriness, intensifying the tension and mystery of the story. These locations generate a sense of foreboding and unease, setting the stage for ensuing drama and romance (Knopf, 2020).

Gothic romance peaked during the Romantic era (c. 1790–1820) when Romanticism stressed emotion, individualism, and the supernatural, providing fertile ground for the genre's growth. During this time, texts such as Ann Radcliffe's *The Mysteries of Udolpho* and Matthew Lewis' *The Monk* were instrumental in defining the genre (Ilott, 2019). Gothic romance remained popular in the 19th century, with authors such as Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* and Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* incorporating Gothic elements into their works (Mighall, 2003), and though Gothic themes extended into poetry and drama, the novel remained the primary medium for its expression.

Despite a decline in the late 19th century, Gothic romance's influence persists in modern literature, film, and popular culture (Mighall, 2003). Gothic romance frequently delves into themes of love, passion, and the occult set in eerie locales—castles, abbeys, and desolate landscapes. Damsels in distress, tyrannical villains, haunted or cursed places, and hereditary secrets are all staple tropes. These aspects generate a sense of suspense and excitement that captivates readers (Ilott, 2019). Though its peak passed, Gothic romance has seen revivals in the 20th and 21st centuries. Contemporary authors have continued to explore Gothic themes in several ways by blending romance, horror, and suspense for modern audiences (Riquelme, 2000). By placing female characters in danger, Gothic romance emphasizes women's vulnerable place in society while simultaneously exploring themes of agency and empowerment as heroines confront and overcome adversity.

Another key feature is the appearance of malevolent antagonists who threaten protagonists through deceit, manipulation, or cruelty. These adversaries frequently represent themes of corruption, obsession, and the supernatural. The use of supernatural elements in Gothic romance reflects humanity's long-standing fascination with the unknown and unexplainable. By blurring the lines between the natural and supernatural, Gothic romance authors create a sense of uncertainty and wonder, enhancing narrative complexity and reader engagement (Riquelme, 2000).

Lastly, despite its heyday throughout the 18th and 19th centuries, Gothic romance has periodically resurged. Contemporary authors have used Gothic themes in new ways, blending romance, horror, and suspense to create compelling narratives for modern readers (Tibbets, 2011). Thus, Gothic romance remains a vital literary tradition, merging romance, mystery, and the supernatural to enduring effect. Nathaniel Hawthorne and Ahmed Saadawi employ Gothic elements to examine societal issues such as sin, guilt, crime, and corruption, offering critiques of these themes. The next section thoroughly analyzes the use of Gothic elements in Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter*.

IV. UNVEILING THE GOTHIC UNDERCURRENTS IN NATHANIEL HAWTHORNE'S *THE SCARLET LETTER*

Nathaniel Hawthorne was born in Salem, Massachusetts, on July 4, 1804. Some of his ancestors played central roles in the Salem witch trials. He died on May 19, 1864, in Plymouth, New Hampshire, likely due to stomach cancer, which had weakened him for a prolonged period. His friend, former President Franklin Pierce, was with him when he passed away during a trip to the White Mountains (MacAndrew, 1979, p. 20). Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter* is a cornerstone of American literature, renowned for its exploration of sin, redemption, and human nature within the rigid confines of 17th-century Puritan Boston. While widely recognised for its moral and philosophical themes, the novel also employs Gothic elements to construct a sombre, enigmatic atmosphere (Adams, 1958). Drawing on the heritage of European Gothic fiction, Hawthorne infuses the narrative with motifs of mystery, ambiguity, and psychological unrest, which, as Soo-Ping (1986) notes, "immerse readers in darkness, mystery, and psychological turmoil" (Soo-Ping, 1986, p. 222).

This section examines Hawthorne's strategic use of Gothic devices, such as bleak settings, symbolic imagery, and morally ambiguous characters, to enrich the narrative's emotional depth and thematic resonance. Hawthorne's Gothic vision does not simply serve aesthetic ends; rather, it articulates the moral ambiguities and dualities in human nature. As Adams (1958) observes, the novel is "full of images that assert the complexity of moral experience" (Adams, 1958, p. 120). Hawthorne's depiction of the Puritan worldview underscores a stark moral dualism, contrasting innocence and purity with evil and sin. This worldview is reflected in the novel's oppressive setting, described by Martin (1957) as "severe religious observance" that casts a perpetual gloom over the narrative (Martin, 1957, p. 22). The bleak architecture and dark, decaying wooden buildings of Puritan Boston mirror the rigidity and joylessness of its moral code. The Gothic setting of the dark alleys and isolated areas serves as a backdrop for "clandestine acts," intensifying the novel's sense of repression and secrets (MacAndrew, 1979, p. 22).

Moreover, the novel's opening scene featuring Hester Prynne's public shaming on the scaffold encapsulates the Gothic tone. The prison and scaffold symbolize institutional judgment and societal condemnation. According to Kaftan (1969), these symbols exacerbate the town's authoritarian culture and put a pall over it (Kaftan, 1969, p. 66). In contrast, the forest, another Gothic space, functions as a liminal realm of moral ambiguity and personal freedom, far removed from the town's rigid codes. It becomes the ideal setting for Hester and Dimmesdale's secret meetings, embodying both danger and liberation. The scene describing the forest's darkness, combined with a vision of lightness and delicacy, evokes classic Gothic imagery:

In the dark shadow of the grove, on the margin of the brook, he beheld something glimmering brightly, and, bending his face towards the stream, he saw a little figure, with a white bosom, that seemed to image forth the shapes of human maidenhood, with wonderful lightness and delicacy. (Hawthorne, 1850, p. 47)

Even the scarlet letter "A" becomes a Gothic emblem, symbolizing both shame and defiance. Kaftan (1969) asserts that "it represents the cruelty and hypocrisy of the Puritan society where Hester lived" (Kaftan, 1969, p. 67). Its intricate design, described below, underscores its paradoxical nature:

On the breast of her gown, in fine red cloth, surrounded with an elaborate embroidery and fantastic flourishes of gold thread, appeared the letter A. It was...with so much fertility and gorgeous luxuriance of fancy, that it had all the effect of a last and fitting decoration to the apparel which she wore, and which was of a splendor in accordance with the taste of the age. (Hawthorne, 1850, p. 37)

This juxtaposition of punitive intent and aesthetic elegance highlights the hypocrisy of a society that punishes immorality while indulging in spectacle. As MacAndrew (1979) observes, the letter simultaneously embodies Hester's

ostracism and her strength. It becomes a symbol of her complex identity, both condemned and dignified (MacAndrew, 1979). Hester's refusal to flee Boston further demonstrates her agency and resilience. Instead, she chooses self-imposed exile in a secluded cottage at the town's edge. The location becomes a Gothic space of isolation, as described by Hawthorne:

On the outskirts of the town...there was a small thatched cottage...a mystic shadow of suspicion immediately attached itself to the spot...discerning the scarlet letter on her breast, [the children] would scamper off, with a strange, contagious fear. (Hawthorne, 1850, p. 65)

This scene encapsulates Hester's transformation of the Gothic setting into a space of survival and reflection. Despite societal cruelty, she carves out a space for moral redefinition and personal growth. As Davidson (1949) notes, this setting represents both exile and empowerment. Hawthorne's depiction of Hester's psychological torment is equally Gothic. The scarlet letter becomes a visible marker of sin, magnified in the public imagination. The author writes:

Thus, the young and pure would be taught to look at her, with the scarlet letter flaming on her breast...at her, the mother of a babe that would hereafter be a woman...at her, who had once been innocent...as the figure, the body, the reality of sin. And over her grave, the infamy that she must carry thither would be her only monument. (Hawthorne, 1850, p. 67)

This passage illustrates the emotional and existential burden placed upon Hester, reducing her to a societal construct of shame. Charney (1961) observes that the scarlet letter's glow at night, rumored to burn with "infernal fire," deepens the Gothic aura of the text. The author said, "They averred that the symbol was not mere scarlet cloth [...] but was red-hot with infernal fire and could be seen glowing all alight whenever Hester Prynne walked abroad in the night-time" (Hawthorne, 1850, p. 67).

In sum, Hawthorne's deployment of Gothic elements—the gloomy setting, supernatural overtones, and intense psychological conflicts—amplifies the novel's exploration of sin, identity, and social repression. Through these devices, he constructs a powerful critique of Puritanical rigidity and exposes the complexities of moral judgment. As Inbaraj and Jinnah (2022) affirm, Hawthorne's Gothic enriches the narrative, compelling readers to confront the inner lives of his tormented characters. The next section will examine how Gothic elements are employed in Ahmed Saadawi's *Frankenstein in Baghdad* to probe themes of violence, justice, and national trauma.

V. GOTHIC ELEMENTS IN *FRANKENSTEIN IN BAGHDAD* AS A VEHICLE FOR SOCIAL COMMENTARY

Ahmed Saadawi is an Iraqi writer who chronicles the grim realities of wartime Iraq. Born in Baghdad in 1973, Saadawi focuses on the aftermath of war in a nation plagued by continual conflict. His novel *Frankenstein in Baghdad* deploys Gothic elements against the backdrop of a war-torn Baghdad, crafting a haunting, resonant narrative that became the first Iraqi novel to win the International Prize for Arabic Fiction in 2014 (Jani, 2023, p. 45). It follows Hadi, a junk dealer who assembles a corpse from dismembered body parts of bombing victims (Elayyan, 2017). Intending to honor the dead, he stitches these parts into a single body. The corpse reanimates when possessed by the soul of Hasib, a policeman vaporized in a car bombing. This body "was named 'Whatsitsname' or 'Shisma,' as the Iraqi people used to call it" (Bahoora, 2015, p. 186). The creature vows revenge on those responsible for Baghdad's carnage. Hadi's creation blurs the boundaries between life and death, morality and immorality, echoing themes of hubris and existential torment found in classic Gothic romance. Saadawi uses Gothic elements to "investigate themes of deformity, identity, and the consequences of human foolishness in a war-torn society" (Khan, 2023, p. 74). While the novel is sometimes seen as an imitation of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, it diverges sharply by addressing sectarian violence in Iraq. In both novels, the monster views himself as a divine messenger. His first speech reveals a self-proclaimed mission of justice:

I don't have much time. I might come to an end, and my body might turn into liquid as I'm walking down the street one night, even before I accomplish the mission I've been assigned...They are all poor, and I'm the answer to the call of the poor. I'm a savior, the one they were waiting for and hoped for in some sense...I am the answer to their call for an end to injustice and for revenge on the guilty. (Saadawi, 2018, pp. 142-143)

Whatsitsname becomes a symbol of collective Iraqi trauma, embodying the dehumanizing effects of war. His endeavor to define his identity mirrors "the existential themes frequently found in Gothic literature" (Al-Leithy, 2023, pp. 12-13). Characters like Elishva, who mistakes the creature for her dead son, further highlight themes of loss and fragmentation. The novel offers surreal episodes, such as the disoriented soul of Hasib wandering through a graveyard:

"How did it disappear? You have to find it, or some other body, or else things will end badly for you...Why are you here? This is my grave. My body's lying underneath. In a few days I won't be able to get out like this."

"Maybe you haven't really died and you're dreaming. Or your soul has left your body to go for a stroll and will come back later," the boy said.

"I hope to God you're right...I'm still young, and I have a daughter, and . . ."

"Young! You're not as young as me!" (Saadawi, 2018, p. 31)

This motif of displacement and confusion is not a product of fantasy but reflects the actual chaos experienced daily in Iraq. Saadawi, much like T.S. Eliot and W. Auden, exhibits pessimism about the future of humanity, shaped here by "the devastating effect of modern imperialism" (Sabeeh & Kiaee, 2019, p. 87). The Iraqi societal fabric was ravaged by the American invasion, resulting in sectarian conflict characterized by frequent acts of violence that disrupted the fundamental principles of life and death. As Hamed (2020) notes, the streets became "covered with dismembered body

parts and blood” (Hamed, 2020, p. 24). Saadawi described this bleakness with a chilling image: “The city had become a haunted house full of ghosts, and every day it seemed to grow darker and darker as the shadows lengthened across its streets” (Saadawi, 2018, p. 33).

Through a Gothic setting, characters, and a monster, Saadawi ethically and emotionally conveys societal horror (Nasr, 2019). He challenges readers to confront the darker aspects of human nature and the enduring need for justice and meaning amid chaos. Thus, *Frankenstein in Baghdad* becomes a poignant study of human endurance, loss, and moral collapse. Whatitsname, as Alhashmi (2020) asserts, represents “the modern hero in terms of vengeance and vendetta” (Alhashmi, 2020, p. 99). As the creature evolves, its mission becomes corrupted. Once claiming to serve justice, he [it] begins killing indiscriminately:

With the help of God and of heaven, I will take revenge on all the criminals...and there will no longer be a need to wait in agony for justice to come, in heaven or after death...My list of people to seek revenge on grew longer as my old body parts fell off and my assistants added parts from my new victims, until one night I realized that under these circumstances, I would face an open-ended list of targets that would never end. (Saadawi, 2018, p. 153)

His pursuit of justice devolves into a desperate grasp for self-preservation. Hannah Arendt supports this concept, arguing that “violence causes violence, not more, no less” (Alhashmi, 2020, p. 100). She writes, “The practice of violence, like all action, changes the world, but the most probable change is a more violent world” (Arendt, 1970, p. 80). By the end, the monster embodies the very evil he once fought. Saadawi describes it [this] as such:

Because he was an exceptional killer who wouldn’t die by traditional means, he thought he should exploit this distinctive talent in the service of the innocent—in the service of truth and justice. Until he was sure of his next steps, he would concentrate on ensuring his own survival. (Saadawi, 2018, p. 201)

Ultimately, Saadawi suggests that imperialism and war have stripped Iraqi society of its humanity. Whatitsname succumbs to his [its] animal instincts, surviving by feeding on others’ suffering. While *Frankenstein in Baghdad* employs many Gothic elements—such as grotesque bodies, moral ambiguity, psychological horror, and a ruined setting—it also reimagines Gothic storytelling for a modern, war-torn context. The corpses littering Baghdad serve as a literal and symbolic device of Gothic horror: “Dead bodies littered the street like rubbish” (Saadawi, 2018, p. 153). In the end, Saadawi’s novel, through its Gothic and surreal lens, captures the tragedy and complexity of post-invasion Iraq, blending horror with social critique to expose the existential cost of violence.

VI. CONCLUSION

Ahmed Saadawi and Nathaniel Hawthorne use Gothic romance as a powerful lens to discuss and treat societal issues and themes like loneliness, sin, guilt, and crime. These themes are deeply related to the complicated human experience. Both authors construct haunting fictional worlds through atmospheric settings, complex characters, and compelling storytelling approaches. They encourage readers to confront personal and collective anxieties by delving into the shadowy recesses of the human psyche, thereby demonstrating the Gothic genre’s enduring power to illuminate the darkest corners of human nature.

The setting of the novel *The Scarlet Letter* is a strict Puritanical society governed by rigid religious rules that control its citizens. Hester Prynne is a woman who suffers both psychologically and physically because of bearing the scarlet letter as a symbol of her transgression. Hawthorne employs Gothic elements to expose and criticize the tyrannical and hypocritical nature of Puritan society and its oppressive moral code.

Similarly, the setting of *Frankenstein in Baghdad* is central to the use of Gothic elements in this novel. Saadawi portrays Baghdad realistically and unflinchingly, enabling readers to witness a city haunted by constant violence and destruction. An eerie dissonance typical of classic Gothic settings is produced by combining the turmoil of contemporary combat and the historical richness of the ancient city. In Saadawi’s narrative, the protagonist, Hadi, is tormented by remorse after accidentally creating a monster out of the collected body parts of bombing victims. As the “Whatitsname” embarks on a vengeful and morally ambiguous killing spree, Hadi faces the consequences of his creation, resulting in a profound existential crisis. Saadawi’s fragmented narrative structure enhances the disorientation and moral complexity of the story. Despite differences in time and place, both authors use Gothic techniques in different times and places to confuse readers about what is real and what is imaginary. These similar methods cause the reader to feel uncomfortable about existence and contemplate the boundaries of ethical responsibility. Many adaptations and retellings have appeared due to the cultural and literary influence of both novels.

Since the world is still marked by war, inequality, and strong ideological differences, the Gothic themes in these novels are still extremely relevant. They give readers a way to deal with emotions and ideas about fear, traumatic events, and social injustice. By telling dark stories, Hawthorne and Saadawi reveal that it is hard to fix problems in society unless you understand human contradictions and that such understanding often begins in the shadows.

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Language, Stigma, and Identity Transformation in *Joker* (2019): A Discourse-Pragmatic Analysis

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Abstract—This study examines how cinematic dialogue discursively constructs social alienation and identity transformation in *Joker* (2019). While previous analyses have emphasized the film's psychological or cinematic dimensions, this paper foregrounds the linguistic mechanisms through which Arthur Fleck's marginalization is enacted. Adopting a qualitative discourse-stylistic design, five high-stakes authority encounters between Arthur and institutional figures (his therapist, manager, Thomas Wayne, and Murray Franklin) were transcribed and analyzed through speech act theory, politeness/impoliteness frameworks, and stylistic markers such as rhetorical questioning and evaluative lexis. The findings reveal that Arthur is consistently subjected to delegitimizing speech acts, face-threatening evaluations, and ridicule, which reproduce stigma and institutional power asymmetries. Over time, his discourse shifts from tentative self-reflective questioning to accusatory rhetorical reframing and confrontational assertions, dramatizing his discursive reconstitution as the *Joker*. These results extend impoliteness theory by showing how hostile humor in mediated interactions operates as discursive violence, while contributing to film stylistics by demonstrating the central role of dialogue in representing mental health stigma and social exclusion.

Index Terms—discourse stylistics, pragmatics, impoliteness, *Joker* (2019), cinematic dialogue

I. INTRODUCTION

Film dialogue provides a powerful site for examining how language constructs identity, power, and psychological states. Within stylistics and discourse studies, research has demonstrated that speech acts, pragmatic strategies, and rhetorical forms shape not only character development but also audience perceptions of ideology and social relations (Leech & Short, 2007; Simpson, 2004; Bednarek, 2010). The cinematic exchange cannot ever be a mere transparent reflection of “real talk.” It is a discourse purposely constructed to encode cultural attitudes toward authority, inclusion, and mental health. Psychological thrillers prove themselves to be a very useful domain for conducting a discourse-stylistic study, considering that these genres give prominence to linguistic signs of alienation, instability, and conflict that dramatize both individual identity and social anxieties.

Todd Phillips's 2019 *Joker* presents a very apt example. This is a film about Arthur Fleck, a socially rejected man with mental illness who becomes the *Joker*. The portrayal of Arthur Fleck by this film has instigated a broad debate in fields of psychology, film, and media studies. Empirical literature shows that merely viewing the *Joker* film can induce prejudice in the audience toward people with mental illness (Scarf et al., 2020), with even follow-up studies showing how difficult it is to curtail such stigma effects (Poulgrain et al., 2022). Others propose that the *Joker* figure now stands as a discursive stereotype of madness in international media and popular culture alike (Preston, 2023; Grapă, 2022). At the same time, critics highlight cinema's potential role in moderating stigma, though many portrayals continue to reinforce exclusionary stereotypes (Harper, 2005; El Halabi, et al., 2024). Despite these debates, little attention has been paid to the *linguistic mechanisms* through which Arthur's alienation and transformation are enacted.

This study addresses that gap by investigating how dialogue in *Joker* constructs social exclusion and identity transformation. It focuses on five high-stakes interactions between Arthur and authority figures, his therapist, his manager, Thomas Wayne, and Murray Franklin, and analyzes how speech acts, politeness and impoliteness strategies, and rhetorical questioning discursively produce stigma and alienation.

The research addresses three questions:

1. How are institutional power asymmetries and social exclusion linguistically constructed in Arthur Fleck's interactions with authority figures?
2. What pragmatic and stylistic patterns characterize the discursive shift from vulnerability to nihilism?
3. How do rhetorical questions and impoliteness strategies reinforce themes of stigma, alienation, and identity collapse?

By situating *Joker* within the intersection of stylistics, pragmatics, and stigma studies, this paper contributes to discourse-stylistics and film linguistics while also engaging broader cultural debates. It argues that cinematic dialogue should be analyzed as cultural discourse, one that not only narrativizes identity but also shapes societal understandings of mental illness and exclusion.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

A. Film Discourse and Stylistics

Stylistics investigates how linguistic form encodes meaning, character, and ideology in artistic texts. Classic accounts emphasize how lexis, grammar, transitivity, and point of view jointly construct narrative effects and align viewers with characters (Leech & Short, 2007; Simpson, 2004). In contemporary work, film dialogue is treated not as transparent “real talk” but as crafted discourse indexing identity, power, and psychology (Bednarek, 2010). Studies in narrative linguistics further demonstrate that address terms, modality, and turn-management shape perceptions of credibility and authority (Toolan, 2001). This scholarship motivates a stylistic reading of *Joker* that foregrounds patterned linguistic choices in dialogue rather than focusing solely on plot or cinematography.

B. Pragmatics: Speech Acts, Facework, and Impoliteness

Pragmatics provides tools for analyzing how characters do things with words. Austin’s and Searle’s models categorize utterances as assertives, directives, expressives, commissives, and declarations, often realized indirectly through implicature (Austin, 1962; Searle, 1969, 1975). Goffman’s (1967) concept of face and Brown and Levinson’s (1987) politeness theory explain how speakers negotiate approval and autonomy, while impoliteness studies expand this to adversarial contexts (Bousfield, 2008; Culpeper, 2011). Ridicule, disbelief, and hostile humor have been identified as key strategies for indexing power asymmetry (Locher & Watts, 2005). In *Joker*, therapeutic sessions, workplace talk, and the climactic interview sequence provide fertile sites for tracing such strategies, as they expose how linguistic forms enact exclusion and marginality.

C. Conversation, Turn-Taking, and Interactional Inequality

Conversation analysis shows that turn-taking, interruptions, and repair are never neutral but distribute rights and obligations (Sacks et al., 1974). In gatekept encounters, authority figures control topics, allocate turns, and reframe disclosures as ignorable or pathological, thereby naturalizing asymmetry. Such practices align with research on institutional talk, where authority is reinforced through linguistic control (Drew & Heritage, 1992; Thornborrow, 2002). Applying these insights to *Joker* allows for a fine-grained account of how managers, therapists, and media hosts repeatedly deny Arthur’s claims linguistic legitimacy.

D. Rhetorical Questions, Humor, and Stance

Rhetorical questions function as indirect speech acts that assert propositions, challenge interlocutors, or dramatize stance while restricting addressee options (Searle, 1975; Ilie, 1994). In adversarial contexts, they often serve as aggression masked as inquiry. Similarly, humor studies show that ridicule, sarcasm, and hostile joking can perform exclusion, licensing face-attacks while preserving deniability (Attardo, 1994; Culpeper, 2011). Media pragmatics research highlights how ridicule and public mockery in televised discourse operate as impoliteness strategies (Dynel, 2015). In *Joker*, Murray Franklin’s mocking clip exemplifies this pattern, framing Arthur as laughable while discursively reinforcing stigma.

E. Language, Stigma, and the Discourse of Alienation

Stigma is not only a psychological condition but a discursive process enacted through categorization, derogatory descriptors, and institutional talk (Goffman, 1963; Link & Phelan, 2001). In film discourse, these practices often position characters labeled as “crazy” or “unstable” as “other,” constraining audience empathy (Harper, 2005). Recent large-scale evidence confirms this trend: the Annenberg Inclusion Initiative (2022) found that across 200 popular films, portrayals of mental health conditions overwhelmingly relied on stereotypes of danger, instability, or incompetence, reinforcing exclusionary narratives.

These patterns are amplified in *Joker* (2019). Empirical studies show that viewing the film correlates with heightened prejudice toward people with mental illness (Scarf et al., 2020), while efforts to mitigate such effects through framing interventions remain limited (Poulgrain et al., 2022). Preston (2023) argues that the *Joker* has become a transmedia stereotype of madness, while Grapă (2022) documents its mobilization as a discursive stereotype in global media reporting. El Halabi et al. (2024) underscores that cinema has the potential to moderate stigma but cautions that many portrayals, including *Joker*, risk perpetuating exclusion. Together, this research highlights the need to examine not only cinematic narratives but also the linguistic mechanisms by which stigma and alienation are enacted in dialogue.

F. Prior Work on Cinematic Dialogue

While film studies often emphasize visual style and performance, a growing body of stylistics demonstrates that patterned linguistic choices, address terms, speech acts, turn-taking, and rhetorical questions, drive conflict, characterization, and ideology (Simpson, 2004; Bednarek, 2010; Burke, 2023). Yet despite mounting evidence that cinematic portrayals of mental illness carry measurable cultural consequences (Annenberg Inclusion Initiative, 2022; Scarf et al., 2020), scholarship directly linking speech act patterns, (im)politeness strategies, and interactional asymmetry to stigma construction in *Joker* remains limited. Addressing this gap, the present study applies a discourse-

stylistic approach to Arthur Fleck's authority-figure encounters, showing how delegitimizing speech acts, face threats, and ridicule linguistically structure his trajectory from vulnerability to nihilism.

G. Psychoanalytic Perspectives on Identity and Discourse

Psychoanalytic theory offers an additional lens for understanding how cinematic dialogue encodes alienation and identity transformation. Freud's (1957, 1961) models of the unconscious and the ego–id–superego dynamic underscore how repression, trauma, and social invalidation can destabilize identity. In the context of *Joker*, Arthur's oscillation between hesitant self-reflection and violent assertion can be interpreted as the surfacing of repressed aggression once ego defenses are eroded by repeated discursive delegitimization. Mitchell and Black (2016) highlight how stigma and exclusion can destabilize psychic structures, leading to reconstitution of selfhood through oppositional roles. Incorporating psychoanalytic insights therefore complements discourse-stylistic and pragmatic analyses by linking linguistic enactments of alienation to deeper psychological processes of disintegration and reconstitution.

III. METHODOLOGY

A. Research Design

This study adopts a qualitative discourse-stylistic design to examine how cinematic dialogue constructs alienation and psychological transformation in *Joker* (2019). Discourse stylistics is particularly suitable for film texts because it foregrounds how linguistic form, pragmatic strategies, and rhetorical choices encode meaning and identity in fictional interaction. The analysis is interpretivist in orientation, treating dialogue not merely as narrative progression but as discourse that indexes authority, exclusion, and stigma.

B. Data Selection

Five high-stakes encounters between Arthur Fleck and authority figures were purposively sampled: two therapy sessions, the firing scene with his manager, the confrontation with Thomas Wayne, and two mediated interactions with Murray Franklin (the recycled clip and the live interview). These scenes were selected because they foreground institutional asymmetry and discursive delegitimization, providing fertile ground for analyzing how stigma and exclusion are linguistically enacted.

C. Transcription and Data Preparation

Dialogues were transcribed verbatim from the official screenplay and repeated viewings, with attention to rhetorical form, lexical repetition, and interactional cues. Minimal transcription conventions adapted from Sacks et al. (1974) were employed to capture pauses, overlaps, and emphases while ensuring readability. Time stamps (e.g., [00:12:15–00:12:47]) were included for transparency. Transcripts were cross-checked against both script and audio to ensure accuracy.

D. Analytical Framework

The analysis combined pragmatic and stylistic approaches. Utterances were coded for speech act type following Austin (1962) and Searle (1969, 1975). Politeness and impoliteness strategies were identified drawing on Brown and Levinson (1987) and Culpeper (2011). Stylistic features such as rhetorical questioning, evaluative lexis, and pronoun shifts were examined with reference to Simpson (2004) and Leech and Short (2007).

E. Procedure and Validation

The analysis followed three stages: (1) extraction and transcription of the five target dialogues; (2) coding of utterances for pragmatic and stylistic features; and (3) interpretation of recurring patterns in relation to stigma and exclusion. A coding table was developed to ensure consistency. Coding decisions were reviewed by a second researcher to enhance intersubjective validity, and reflexive memoing was used to track analytic choices.

To ensure trustworthiness, credibility was supported through triangulation across frameworks; dependability by maintaining an audit trail of coding notes; confirmability by peer review of coding; and transferability through detailed contextual description of each scene.

F. Ethical Considerations

As the data consisted of a commercially available film, no human participants were involved and formal ethical approval was not required. Ethical conventions were nevertheless observed by representing dialogue faithfully and avoiding distortion of meaning.

G. Limitations

The study focuses on five purposively selected scenes, which may limit generalizability but allows for in-depth, theory-driven analysis of high-stakes interactions. Multimodal features such as gesture, intonation, and visual framing were not systematically analyzed, leaving scope for future research using multimodal or corpus-assisted approaches.

IV. RESULTS

A. *Therapeutic Dismissal and Bureaucratic Talk*

Arthur's encounters with his state-appointed therapist exemplify how institutional discourse can delegitimize patient voices.

Extract 1 [00:06:41–00:06:57]

Arthur: "Is it just me, or is it getting crazier out there?"

Therapist: "Same questions every week, Arthur. Do you have negative thoughts?"

The first words uttered by Arthur serve pragmatically as a passive assertion of social decline; however, the therapist reframes it as a bureaucratic checkbox. The repetition of "same questions every week" illustrates routinization instead of caring and constitutes an act of non-acknowledgment.

Extract 2 [00:45:30–00:45:42]

Therapist: "They don't give a shit about people like you, Arthur. They don't give a shit about people like me either."

An unmitigated declaration such as this will obliterate any therapeutic alliance and foreground systemic abandonment in a manner that affords attention to the latter. Without support, Arthur has been given that much in return—the confirmation of institutional neglect. Such talk amounts to alienation discourse, whereby bureaucratic language renders individual distress into administrative irrelevance.

B. *Managerial Discourse and Employment Exclusion*

Hoyt, Arthur's manager, embodies institutional indifference through disbelief and economic threat.

Extract 3 [00:25:14–00:25:29]

Arthur: "A bunch of kids stole my sign. They beat me up."

Hoyt: "Why would anyone do that? You better bring the sign back, or it comes out of your paycheck."

A rhetorical question posed by Hoyt erodes Arthur's credibility and situates him as an unreliable source. What follows is the injunction that frames Arthur's victimhood in a different light; that is, as a financial liability. This exemplifies how workplace discourse imbues exclusion, as employee suffering becomes secondary to the money-making concerns of the institution.

C. *Identity Disconfirmation in Confrontation With Thomas Wayne*

Arthur's attempt to establish paternal recognition is denied and stigmatized.

Extract 4 [01:20:11–01:20:33]

Arthur: "My mother always told me... Thomas Wayne is my father."

Thomas Wayne: "You're adopted. Your mother is delusional. Stay away from my family."

Wayne's response mixes denial of kinship with stigmatizing language. The label "delusional" associates Arthur with madness; the command "stay away" enforces exclusion. This interplay exemplifies identity disconfirmation; wherein socially disallowed discursive positioning takes place.

D. *Mockery, Ridicule, and Public Humiliation (Murray Franklin Clip)*

Before Arthur's live interview, Murray Franklin ridicules him on-air.

Extract 5 [00:53:10–00:53:25]

Murray: "Check out this joker! You see this guy? Hilarious, right?"

The vocative "joker" is used in an insulting manner to turn Arthur into a spectacle. Represented as entertainment, such ridicule owes its existence to discursive violence masquerading as humor; it stigmatizes the victim and urges the audience to participate.

E. *Face Attacks and Rhetorical Reframing (Murray Franklin Interview)*

The climactic interview sequence represents the culmination of Arthur's alienation and discursive transformation.

Extract 6 [01:44:02–01:44:24]

Murray: "Arthur, you've got to admit, you need some help. You've got a lot of problems."

Arthur: "You invited me on your show just to make fun of me. You don't care what I feel."

Murray's utterance pathologizes Arthur, reducing him to "problems." Arthur's counter-assertion spells out the framing of Murray's behavior as mockery, thus underlining a more explicit shift from internalized self-doubt into discursive resistance.

Extract 7 [01:47:11–01:47:21]

Arthur: "What do you get when you cross a mentally ill loner with a society that abandons him and treats him like trash?"

Grammatically a question, yet it fulfills the function of an accusation. Once Arthur's alienation is set as systemic betrayal, a rhetorical question becomes an indictment before the public.

Extract 8 [01:47:22–01:47:28]

Arthur: "You get what you f***ing deserve."

Here, language collapses into action. The repeated usage of “you” foregrounds adversarial identity construction, castigation being thrown squarely upon an authoritative figure.

Across all five encounters, Arthur is the subject of a recurring process of delegitimization through bureaucratic dismissal, managerial disbelief, paternal denial, and public ridicule. Such events expose pragmatic-systematic patterns that consist of:

- speech acts denying Arthur's credibility,
- politeness infraction against face needs of Arthur, and
- impoliteness acts to ridicule and exclude.

Arthur's responses evolve over time from tentative self-reflection to accusatory rhetorical reframing and confrontational assertions, charting his discursive transformation into the *Joker* persona and demonstrating the linguistic enactment and resistance of stigma and exclusion.

Synthesis of these findings is given in Table 1, which categorizes the various authority-figure encounters by dominant speech act patterns, impoliteness strategies, stigma functions, and identity outcomes. In tandem, Figure 1 illustrates the discursive trajectory of Arthur, wherein Arthur is linguistically constructed through a continuum-from tentative self-reflection to in-your-face antagonistic declarations. Together, these demonstrate the *Joker's* persona being constructed Arthur again and again through acts of delegitimization.

TABLE 1
SUMMARY OF KEY DIALOGUES, PRAGMATIC STRATEGIES, AND STIGMA OUTCOMES IN *JOKER* (2019)

Scene / Extract	Speech Act(s) (Austin/Searle)	Politeness / Impoliteness Strategy	Stigma Function	Identity Outcome
Therapist (Extracts 1–2)	Indirect assertion (Arthur); checklist directive (Therapist); bald-on-record attack	Failure of positive politeness; routinization; blunt declarative	Institutional neglect; denial of lived experience	Arthur positioned as voiceless patient, abandoned by system
Manager Hoyt (Extract 3)	Complaint (Arthur); rhetorical question + directive (Hoyt)	Skepticism; dismissal; economic threat	Workplace exclusion; credibility undermined	Arthur framed as untrustworthy employee
Thomas Wayne (Extract 4)	Declarative claim (Arthur); denial + exclusion directive (Wayne)	Unmitigated imposition; stigmatizing label (“delusional”)	Identity disconfirmation; pathologization	Arthur denied paternal legitimacy; aligned with “madness”
Murray Franklin clip (Extract 5)	Mock directive (“Check out this joker”)	Ridicule framed as humor; scorn	Public shaming; spectacle of madness	Arthur labeled “ <i>Joker</i> ”; identity redefined by ridicule
Murray Franklin interview (Extracts 6–8)	Evaluative assertion (Murray); counter-assertive (Arthur); accusatory rhetorical question; declaration	Face-threatening evaluation; metacommentary on mockery; accusatory stance; threat merged with action	Pathologization; systemic indictment; adversarial framing	Arthur's discursive shift from vulnerable loner confrontational <i>Joker</i> persona

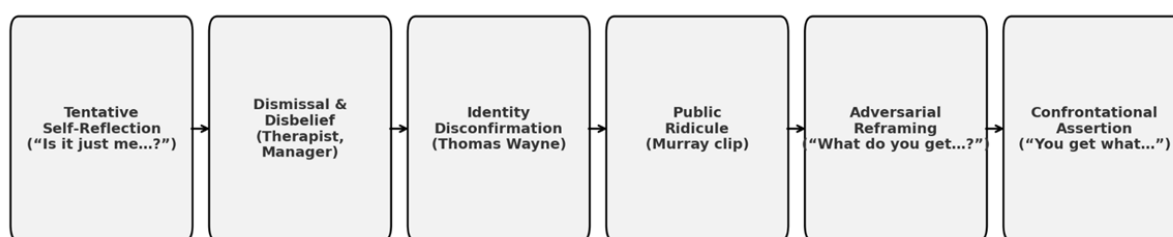


Figure 1. Arthur Fleck's Discursive Trajectory in *Joker* (2019)

V. DISCUSSION

According to the results obtained, Arthur Fleck's metamorphosis into the *Joker* is realized through repeated patterns of discursive exclusion, disdain, and denial in interaction with authority figures. These results extend research within the pragmatics, stylistics, and stigma studies by indicating alignments of cinematic dialogue as being located in discursive violence.

A. Authority and Institutional Discourse

The analysis of Arthur's therapy sessions and workplace encounter illustrates how institutional discourse enacts exclusion. Previous studies on bureaucratic talk emphasize that routinization and formulaic questioning undermine participants' lived experiences (Drew & Heritage, 1992). In line with this, Arthur's therapist relies on repetitive, checklist-style questioning that fails to acknowledge his disclosures, enacting what Brown and Levinson (1987) would term a failure of positive politeness. Similarly, Hoyt's managerial discourse reframes Arthur's suffering as financial liability, echoing Thornborrow's (2002) insights on how institutional talk foregrounds efficiency over empathy. These findings suggest that *Joker* linguistically dramatizes how institutions naturalize exclusion, reflecting broader societal discourses of neglect.

B. *Impoliteness, Ridicule, and Hostile Humor*

Arthur's mockery at the hands of Murray Franklin exemplifies impoliteness in mediated contexts. Culpeper (2011) and Bousfield (2008) identify ridicule as a core impoliteness strategy, while Attardo (1994) highlights how hostile humor legitimizes aggression by masking it as play. The label "joker" functions as a vocative insult, transforming Arthur into an object of public derision. By appropriating this insult as his chosen identity, Arthur performs what Goffman (1963) describes as stigma inversion. Beyond the fictional world, these patterns resonate with broader analyses of ridicule and shaming in televised discourse (Dynel, 2015), underscoring how humor normalizes exclusion in media ecologies.

C. *Rhetorical Questions and Identity Reconstruction*

Arthur's shift from tentative self-reflective questions to accusatory rhetorical reframing marks a significant stylistic transformation. Early in the film, his utterance "Is it just me, or is it getting crazier out there?" illustrates Ilie's (1994) notion of rhetorical questions as stance-laden self-reflection. By the climactic talk-show scene, however, his utterance "What do you get when you cross a mentally ill loner with a society that abandons him?" operates as a public indictment, aligning with Searle's (1975) account of indirect speech acts as accusatory tools. This discursive trajectory supports Simpson's (2004) claim that stylistic foregrounding of pronouns and question forms dramatizes identity transformation. In *Joker*, rhetorical questions serve as linguistic markers of Arthur's reconstitution from marginalized patient to confrontational antihero.

From a psychoanalytic perspective, Arthur's rhetorical trajectory can also be read like the language manifestation of an unconscious conflict and a breakdown in ego control. Freud's (1961) notion of ego defenses shows how the sustained social devaluation eventually places the ego in a weakened position, one in which it cannot impose its regulatory control, and where previously repressed hostility thus comes to be articulated in language. Therefore, the final on-the-spot accusatory question could be interpreted as a pragmatic shift, one that symbolizes the final collapse of internal restraints and thus a last resort of violent assertion. As stated by Mitchell and Black (2016), the destabilizing circumstance of stigma, whether social or psychological, frequently leads to the formation of identities that fulfill oppositional or destructive roles. Viewed from this perspective, the character transformation of Arthur into an altered *Joker* persona is one of discourse and an act of psychoanalytic transformation whereby alienation is translated into aggressive empowerment.

D. *Language and the Discourse of Stigma*

The results also connect directly to broader sociolinguistic research on stigma. Link and Phelan (2001) describe stigma as a process of labeling, stereotyping, and exclusion, all of which are evident in Arthur's encounters. His therapist categorizes him as hopeless, Hoyt undermines his credibility, Wayne labels his mother "delusional," and Murray pathologizes him on-air. These discursive practices exemplify what Scarf et al. (2020) empirically confirm: *Joker's* portrayal of mental illness intensifies audience prejudice. Poulgrain et al. (2022) further shows that attempts to mitigate such effects are only partially effective, suggesting the enduring cultural weight of these portrayals. Preston (2023) argues that the *Joker* has become a transmedia stereotype of madness, while Grapă (2022) demonstrates its mobilization as a discursive stereotype in international media. At a broader scale, the Annenberg Inclusion Initiative (2022) reports that across 200 popular films, depictions of mental illness overwhelmingly rely on tropes of violence and instability, situating *Joker* within a wider cinematic trend. Conversely, El Halabi et al. (2024) highlights the potential of the arts to moderate stigma, underscoring the importance of rethinking how dialogue constructs mental illness in popular culture.

E. *Contribution to Discourse-Stylistics and Film Linguistics*

This study makes three key contributions. First, it demonstrates that cinematic dialogue can be rigorously analyzed through pragmatic frameworks, showing how speech acts, politeness, and impoliteness strategies encode alienation and stigma. Second, it extends stigma research into film linguistics by illustrating how linguistic features, ridicule, rhetorical questioning, evaluative labeling, reproduce exclusionary discourses that resonate beyond the fictional world. Third, by connecting micro-level dialogue analysis with macro-level findings from media studies (Scarf et al., 2020; Annenberg, 2022), the paper bridges stylistics with cultural critique, revealing cinematic dialogue as a site where societal prejudices are both represented and reproduced.

VI. CONCLUSION

This study has demonstrated that *Joker* (2019) constructs social alienation and identity transformation not only through narrative and cinematography but crucially through dialogue as discursive practice. By analyzing five high-stakes interactions with authority figures, the findings reveal how Arthur Fleck is consistently delegitimized through dismissals, disbelief, denial, and ridicule. These encounters are linguistically structured by face-threatening acts, impoliteness strategies, and rhetorical reframing, which progressively erode his credibility and agency.

The study set out to address three research questions, all of which have been fully answered by the analysis. First, those results show that power does go asymmetrical with the arguing of therapeutic invalidation; denial of a managerial

point of view; paternal or parental denial; and public ridicule. Then enactments of social exclusion are cast by therapeutic dismissal, managerial disbelief, paternal denial, and public ridicule. Secondly, we see a clear stylistic evolution in Arthur's speech. It shifts from tentative self-reflections to accusatory rhetorical reframing and confrontational assertion. Third, the dialogues of rhetorical questions and face-threatening acts in the film work to accentuate alienation and psychological breakdown, culminating in discursive violence precipitated along with Arthur's degeneration into the *Joker*.

From a theoretical perspective, the research contributes to discourse-stylistics and pragmatics on three levels. First, it extends impoliteness research demonstrating that hostile humor and ridicule operating under mediated conditions constitute discursive violence. The second bridges film stylistics and sociolinguistic disgrace studies, revealing the manner in which cinematic dialogue endorses broader societal prejudices toward mental illness. Finally, by cross-linking micro-level linguistic and macro-level evidences arising from media studies (e.g., Scarf et al., 2020; Annenberg Inclusion Initiative, 2022), it lays out film dialogue as narrative mechanism and a cultural discourse that carries measurable social effects.

Methodologically speaking, this study shows the importance of implementing scene-based pragmatic analyses in the understanding of how authority and marginality lay down their enactments by way of dialogue. This approach therefore, offers rather fine-grained insight into exclusionary practices being encoded in speech, in an attempt to complement large-scale content analyses of manifestations of stigma in film.

Thus, further research could expand this plan in at least three directions: (1) corpus-assisted studies of film dialogue across genres in order to discover what stigma patterns are recurrent at a larger scale; (2) multimodal studies that integrate gesture, intonation, and cinematographic cues to accomplish the full semiotic construction of exclusion; and (3) comparative studies of the representation of mental illness across cultural contexts to examine how local discourses of stigma intersect with global stereotypes.

In sum, this study argues that Arthur's descent into the *Joker* is not only a psychological or cinematic transformation but a linguistic one, enacted through discursive delegitimization and adversarial reframing. By shedding light on how language constructs stigma and alienation, the analysis points to the broader argument that cinematic dialogue is a cultural instrument of social identity legitimation, denial, or reconfiguration.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The author wishes to thank Universiti Sains Malaysia for its support.

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A Cross-Cultural Study of Complaint Strategies by Native Speakers of American English and Vietnamese Learners of English

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Abstract—This study investigates cross-cultural differences in the realization of complaint strategies between native speakers of American English and Vietnamese learners of English (EFL). Adopting a pragmalinguistic and sociopragmatic framework, the research applies Trosborg's (1995) taxonomy of complaints and politeness theory (Brown & Levinson, 1987) to analyze 136 complaint responses from each group, collected via Discourse Completion Tasks (DCTs). Quantitative and qualitative analyses reveal that American participants favored indirect accusations (B3) and requests for repair (A5), often employing a broader range of downgraders and upgraders to navigate face-threatening acts. In contrast, Vietnamese learners preferred indirect complaints (B4) and blaming (A6), with more limited use of internal modifiers. Social distance significantly affected strategy choice in both groups, with higher levels prompting greater use of politeness devices. The findings underscore cultural influences on complaint behavior and suggest that learners' pragmatic performance is shaped by both linguistic proficiency and socio-cultural norms. Pedagogically, the study highlights the need for explicit EFL instruction in strategic politeness, including training on modifier use and contextual appropriateness. This research contributes to intercultural pragmatics by offering insights into how complaints are negotiated across languages, cultures, and social roles.

Index Terms—complaint strategies, cross-cultural pragmatics, politeness theory, Vietnamese EFL learners, downgraders and upgraders

I. INTRODUCTION

Complaints are a central type of expressive speech act used to communicate dissatisfaction, request redress, or signal disapproval. As inherently face-threatening acts (FTAs), they carry high potential for social disruption, particularly in intercultural interactions. While native English speakers may express complaints more directly—especially in symmetrical power relationships—learners of English as a foreign language (EFL) from high-context, collectivist cultures such as Vietnam often rely on indirect, deferential, and face-saving strategies to mitigate conflict.

Understanding how complaints are pragmatically realized across cultures is critical to the development of intercultural communicative competence, especially in contexts involving asymmetries of power or distance. Drawing on foundational theories of speech acts (Austin, 1962; Searle, 1969), politeness theory (Brown & Levinson, 1987), and facework (Arundale, 2006), this study explores how complaints function not only as expressions of personal emotion but also as strategic social actions shaped by cultural norms and relational dynamics.

Despite a growing body of research on complaint strategies across languages, there remains a notable lack of empirical comparisons between native speakers of American English and Vietnamese EFL learners, particularly studies that account for both social distance and the use of internal modifiers such as downgraders and upgraders. Addressing this gap, the present study adopts a cross-cultural pragmatic approach to examine how complaints are constructed and mitigated in English by these two groups.

By integrating Trosborg's (1995) taxonomy, modality analysis, and contrastive pragmatics, this study contributes to a more nuanced understanding of how cultural expectations and interpersonal variables shape pragmatic performance. The findings aim to inform both theoretical discussions in interlanguage pragmatics and pedagogical practices in EFL classrooms where pragmatic competence is a key objective.

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II. LITERATURE REVIEW

A. Theoretical Foundations of Speech Acts and Politeness

The study of complaint strategies is firmly grounded in Speech Act Theory, pioneered by Austin (1962) and further developed by Searle (1969, 1975), who emphasized the illocutionary and perlocutionary functions of utterances in communication. Complaints, as expressive illocutionary acts, often involve a negative evaluation of another's behavior and are typically classified as face-threatening acts (FTAs) due to their potential to damage interpersonal rapport.

In the realm of politeness theory, Brown and Levinson (1987) introduced the influential notions of *positive* and *negative face*, proposing a model for how speakers mitigate threats to face through redressive strategies. Their framework has served as a universal lens for understanding how communicative acts like complaints are modulated in interaction.

Subsequent scholars have nuanced this model. Arundale (2006) conceptualized face as a relational-interactional phenomenon, emphasizing co-construction over individual face-maintenance. Culpeper (2011) and Haugh (2015) expanded the discussion by examining *impoliteness* as a legitimate communicative strategy rather than simply the absence of politeness. Similarly, Kádár (2017) approached politeness through the lens of rituality and moral order, stressing the cultural embeddedness of pragmatic behavior. Collectively, these perspectives inform the current study's view of complaints as dynamic, socially contingent speech acts.

These theoretical perspectives provide a foundation for examining how speakers navigate complaints through culturally informed strategies, particularly across first and second languages.

B. Contrastive and Interlanguage Pragmatics in Complaint Studies

Building on the foundational theories above, contrastive pragmatics investigates how speech acts vary across cultures, while interlanguage pragmatics explores how second language (L2) learners acquire and adapt such acts. Researchers such as Baumgarten (2022), Verschueren (2022), and Preece (2016) argue that pragmatic norms are deeply shaped by sociocultural expectations and individual identity, resulting in cross-linguistic variability in both form and function.

Within the interlanguage domain, Trosborg (1995) and Taguchi (2017) highlight the gradual development of pragmatic competence in L2 learners, often mediated by L1 influence and varying levels of exposure to the target language's socio-pragmatic conventions.

In the Vietnamese context, Nguyen (2008) found that EFL learners often struggled with directness when performing criticism and complaints in English, tending to rely on L1-based politeness patterns. Similarly, Nguyen (2020) demonstrated that learners' choice of compliment responses depended heavily on perceived social status, underscoring the centrality of socio-pragmatic awareness in strategy selection.

These studies underscore the relevance of investigating how Vietnamese EFL learners navigate complaint speech acts in comparison to native English speakers, especially in relation to social distance and power.

C. Empirical Studies on Complaint Strategies Across Cultures

A substantial body of empirical research has examined how complaints are realized across cultural boundaries. Olshtain and Weinbach (1987) found notable differences in complaint behavior between native and non-native speakers of Hebrew, highlighting instances of pragmatic transfer and L2 deficiency. Similarly, Chen et al. (2011) showed that American English speakers tended to use more direct complaint strategies, while Chinese speakers favored indirectness and mitigation.

Comparative studies across languages have yielded consistent findings. For instance, Shabani and Zeinali (2015) and Eslamirasekh et al. (2012) reported that Persian speakers employed more elaborated strategies, including justification and explanation, than English speakers. Yang (2016) found similar divergences between Chinese and British university students, further affirming cultural variation in complaint realizations.

In Southeast Asia, Abdul Razzak and Jamil (2016), as well as Nguyen (2008), noted that Vietnamese EFL learners tend to use less face-threatening strategies, often avoiding direct blame. These tendencies are consistent with collectivist cultural values that prioritize harmony and hierarchical respect. Song (2014) drew relevant parallels through request strategies, showing how Korean and American speakers differed in the level of directness based on cultural expectations. Finally, Kowalski (1996) provided a socio-cognitive interpretation of complaints, arguing that their expression is linked not only to social norms but also to emotional and psychological processing.

Together, these studies build a compelling case for analyzing complaints not only as linguistic phenomena but also as culturally informed social acts.

D. Methodologies in Complaint Research

Across complaint research, the Discourse Completion Task (DCT) has emerged as a primary instrument for eliciting pragmatic behavior. As discussed by Félix-Brasdefer (2010), DCTs offer controlled yet flexible scenarios that allow researchers to examine how speakers respond to socially sensitive contexts. The method enables cross-group comparisons while maintaining standardization.

Lexical coding and categorization often follow Trosborg's (1995) taxonomy, supported by consistent definitional sources such as *Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English* (1995). Recent studies also emphasize the integration of intercultural communicative competence (ICC) in EFL contexts (Muhammad et al., 2025), suggesting that pragmatic

instruction should be grounded in authentic, culturally relevant interaction patterns.

This methodological grounding justifies the current study's use of DCTs and cross-cultural participant groups, facilitating both controlled elicitation and authentic comparison.

III. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

A. Complaints as Expressive and Relational Speech Acts

Complaints are categorized as expressive illocutionary acts (Austin, 1962; Searle, 1969) that convey the speaker's negative evaluation of a situation or behavior, often directed toward an interlocutor. Olshtain and Weinbach (1987) define complaints as "illocutionary acts in which the speaker expresses disapproval and a negative assessment toward the hearer for a perceived offense." In such contexts, complaints are intrinsically relational: they emerge not only from dissatisfaction but also from an intention to manage and negotiate interpersonal norms and expectations (Arundale, 2006).

Recent work in intercultural pragmatics has emphasized the need to examine complaints as culturally mediated actions (Taguchi, 2017; Chen et al., 2011), whose forms, frequency, and strategic deployment reflect both individual speaker goals and broader sociocultural values.

B. Complaints as Face-Threatening Acts (FTAs)

Complaints are among the most salient face-threatening acts (FTAs), as they challenge the social and psychological needs of the hearer, especially their positive face - the desire to be appreciated and approved by others (Brown & Levinson, 1987). As acts of disapproval or blame, complaints inherently risk damaging social harmony and may provoke interpersonal conflict. Therefore, speakers often resort to a range of strategies to mitigate the force of the FTA depending on the severity of the offense, the nature of the relationship, and the sociocultural context.

Brown and Levinson (1987) propose that when facing the need to perform an FTA, speakers have several options, as illustrated in Figure 1. These options form a hierarchical model based on levels of directness and politeness:

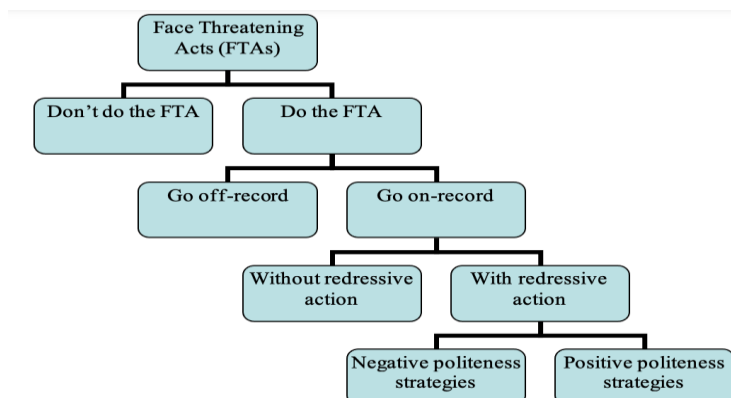


Figure 1. Strategies for Performing Face-Threatening Acts (FTAs)
(Adapted from Brown & Levinson, 1987, pp. 68-70)

Drawing upon politeness theory, speakers confronted with the need to express a face-threatening act (FTA) may adopt a range of strategies to minimize its potential social disruption. In some cases, the speaker may opt not to perform the FTA at all, thereby entirely circumventing any potential conflict. When the decision is made to carry out the FTA, it may be executed off record, utilizing indirectness, ambiguity, or allusion, which allows the speaker to retain deniability while transferring interpretive responsibility to the listener.

In contrast, an on-record performance of the FTA involves explicit articulation of the act and can be further categorized into two distinct approaches. The first involves non-mitigated realization, where the speaker conveys the message in a straightforward and unbuffered manner. While this strategy enhances communicative clarity and directness, it carries a greater risk of interpersonal tension. The second approach includes the application of redressive strategies, designed to soften the impact of the FTA. These fall into two major types:

(i) *Negative politeness*, which emphasizes the speaker's awareness of the imposition and appeals to the addressee's desire for autonomy, often through the use of hedges, indirect forms, or apologies.

(ii) *Positive politeness*, which seeks to reinforce social cohesion and shared identity, drawing on in-group markers, expressions of solidarity, or mutual values.

This theoretical framework highlights the nuanced and adaptive nature of communicative behavior, particularly in contexts involving sensitive or potentially adversarial interactions, such as lodging complaints or expressing dissatisfaction.

Within this paradigm, Trosborg's (1995) categorization of complaint strategies aligns closely with the levels of directness described by politeness theory. Indirect complaints, including hints or implications of consequences, typically reflect off-record or negatively polite orientations. In contrast, more assertive forms such as overt blame or accusations exemplify on-record strategies with reduced or absent mitigation.

Such a framework is especially valuable in the analysis of cross-cultural pragmatics, where variation in complaint behavior can reflect broader sociocultural norms. For example, speakers from high-context cultures such as Vietnam tend to prefer indirect or deferential forms of expression, consistent with social values emphasizing harmony and respect for hierarchy (Nguyen, 2008; Linh, 2020). Conversely, American English speakers, operating within more egalitarian and low-context communicative settings, are generally more inclined toward directness in their complaint strategies (Chen et al., 2011; Song, 2014).

By situating authentic complaint utterances within this theoretical schema, the present study seeks to uncover how underlying principles of face management influence the choice of strategy across cultural backgrounds and proficiency levels. This approach not only deepens our understanding of pragmatic competence in second language contexts but also contributes to broader insights into intercultural communication dynamics.

C. Facework and Politeness in Complaints

Complaints constitute a paradigmatic case of speech acts that are intrinsically face-threatening and socially consequential. According to Austin (1962), utterances do not merely convey information but perform actions in the world. Within this framework, complaints are illocutionary acts that express dissatisfaction and hold the hearer accountable, thereby influencing social relations.

Expanding on Austin's foundation, Searle (1969, 1975) introduced the concept of indirect speech acts, wherein the speaker's intended meaning diverges from the literal form. Complaints frequently occur in this indirect mode, requiring the hearer to infer the speaker's grievance implicitly. This indirectness not only complicates interpretation but also intensifies the potential for face-threatening acts (FTAs), particularly when realized through off-record strategies that eschew explicit confrontation while preserving plausible deniability.

The form and function of complaints, however, are far from uniform; they are dynamically shaped by contextual variables such as cultural norms, power asymmetries, and interactional dynamics. To account for this variability, Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness theory provides a foundational framework. Their model identifies strategies such as hedging, mitigation, and redressive action that allow speakers to perform FTAs in socially acceptable ways. These mechanisms enable the expression of criticism while maintaining face and relational equilibrium.

Recent scholarship has further enriched this perspective. Culpeper (2011) reframes impoliteness as a purposeful and contextually motivated strategy in conflictual interaction. Haugh (2015) argues that politeness should be understood not as a fixed system but as interactionally co-constructed, evolving in real time through negotiation between interlocutors. Kádár (2017) emphasizes the ritualized and culturally grounded dimensions of politeness, particularly salient in hierarchical or collectivist cultures. Nguyen (2008) illustrates how Vietnamese EFL learners handle complaints with heightened sensitivity to face, using indirectness and deference as key pragmatic resources. These complementary perspectives collectively reconceptualize complaints as performative acts—not merely expressions of dissatisfaction, but relational tools for managing moral positioning, power relations, and interpersonal alignment.

To provide a structured foundation for coding complaint behavior, the present study draws on Trosborg's (1995) taxonomy of complaint strategies. Her framework outlines a continuum of increasing directness, ranging from non-explicit hints and expressions of concern to explicit accusations and personal blame. This typology is employed as the primary analytical tool for categorizing complaint utterances in this study. Table 1 summarizes Trosborg's classification, serving as the operational framework for the pragmatic analysis.

TABLE 1
COMPLAINT STRATEGIES (ADAPTED FROM TROSBORG, 1995, PP. 311–313)

Complaint strategies (presented at levels of increasing directness)	Examples
Cat. I: No explicit reproach Str. 1. Hints	- My car was in perfect order when I last drove it - There was nothing wrong with my car yesterday.
Cat. II: Expression of disapproval Str. 2. Annoyance Str. 3. Ill consequences	- There's a horrible dent in my car. - Oh dear. I've just bought it. - How terrible! Now I won't be able to get to work tomorrow. - Oh, damn it. I'll lose my insurance bonus now.
Cat. III: Accusation Str. 4. Indirect Str. 5. Direct	- You borrowed my car last night, didn't you? - Did you happen to bump into my car?
Cat. IV: Blame Str. 6. Modified blame Str. 7. Explicit blame (behavior) Str. 8. Explicit blame (person)	- Honestly, couldn't you have been more careful. - You should take more care with other people's cars. - It's really too bad, you know, going round wrecking other people's cars. - How on earth did you manage to be so stupid? - Oh no, not again! You really are thoughtless. - Bloody fool! You've done it again.

The table indicates, indirect complaint strategies such as hints or mild expressions of disapproval allow speakers to

address a problem while minimizing face-threats, especially in contexts where maintaining harmony is essential. In contrast, blame-oriented strategies, especially those targeting personal character, signal higher emotional involvement and a reduced level of mitigation, often at the cost of interpersonal rapport.

By combining the conceptual depth of recent facework theories with Trosborg's empirically grounded taxonomy, the present study offers a robust framework for analyzing complaint strategies across cultural and linguistic contexts.

D. Modality Markers and Strategic Politeness

Modality markers, particularly downgraders (e.g., *perhaps, a bit, I think*) and upgraders (e.g., *definitely, absolutely, really*) play a pivotal role in shaping the pragmatic force of complaints. As Trosborg (1995) observes, such elements function as illocutionary modifiers, allowing speakers to calibrate the strength of their utterance and thereby engage in strategic politeness.

Building on this view, Terkourafi (2005) reconceptualizes modality not merely as a grammatical or semantic feature, but as a context-sensitive resource embedded in culturally informed practices of facework. In other words, modality serves as both a linguistic and sociopragmatic tool for negotiating interpersonal meaning.

In intercultural settings, the choice and frequency of modality markers are often aligned with sociocultural values. For example, Vietnamese EFL learners frequently employ downgraders to minimize imposition and uphold harmony, reflecting cultural preferences for indirectness and conflict avoidance (Nguyen, 2008). In contrast, American English speakers tend to favor more intensified expressions, especially in contexts involving moral evaluation, personal responsibility, or entitlement (Kowalski, 1996; Shabani & Zeinali, 2015). As such, modality functions not only as a politeness indicator but also as a cultural signal of pragmatic orientation.

E. Social Distance, Cultural Norms, and Strategic Variation

The realization of complaints is also mediated by social distance, defined as the perceived degree of familiarity or relational proximity between interlocutors. As Brown and Levinson (1987) argue, greater social distance typically prompts speakers to adopt more face-protective strategies, particularly in hierarchical or formal contexts.

Cultural norms further influence this dynamic. In high-context societies such as Vietnam, where communication is shaped by an emphasis on hierarchy, respect, and indirectness, speakers are more likely to adjust their complaint strategies based on the relative status and closeness of the hearer (Nguyen, 2008; Linh, 2020). In contrast, low-context cultures such as the U.S. may encourage more egalitarian and explicit expressions of discontent (Chen et al., 2011).

Although not all references are explicitly listed in this section, the discussion is anchored in foundational works cited elsewhere, which offer empirical evidence of how social distance and cultural schemas shape strategic variation in complaints.

F. Integrated Framework for the Present Study

This study adopts a theoretically grounded yet methodologically integrative framework to examine the complaint strategies of American native speakers and Vietnamese learners of English. The core analytical lens draws upon Trosborg's (1995) taxonomy, which categorizes complaint strategies along a continuum of directness and intensity. To interpret the interpersonal and cultural dynamics of these strategies, the study incorporates insights from politeness theory and facework (Brown & Levinson, 1987; Arundale, 2006), particularly in accounting for redressive acts and face-threatening intent.

Additionally, modality markers (e.g., hedging and intensifiers) are analyzed using Terkourafi's (2005) framework to capture internal modification strategies. Cultural variables such as social distance and power asymmetries are considered based on sociopragmatic literature (Nguyen, 2008; Chen et al., 2011). This combined approach aligns with Verschueren's (2022) conceptualization of contrastive pragmatics as a dynamic and context-sensitive methodology for cross-cultural inquiry.

Building on this theoretical foundation, the present study adopts an integrated framework that accounts for both speech act categorization and strategic politeness devices. By examining how complaints are realized across cultural and relational contexts, the study addresses a gap in comparative pragmatics and informs language pedagogy.

IV. METHODOLOGY

A. Research Questions

Given the gap in current research comparing complaint strategies between native American English speakers and Vietnamese EFL learners, particularly in relation to social distance and internal modifiers, this study aims to address the following research questions:

1. What types of complaint strategies are used by native American English speakers and Vietnamese learners of English across different social contexts?
2. How does social distance influence the selection and realization of complaint strategies in both groups?
3. How do modality markers (e.g., downgraders and upgraders) function to mitigate the force of complaints across groups?

These questions guide the investigation of both structural and socio-pragmatic dimensions of complaint realization,

with the aim of enhancing understanding of intercultural communicative competence.

B. Research Design

This study adopts a cross-sectional, comparative research design to explore the pragmatic realization of complaints across two cultural groups: native speakers of American English and Vietnamese learners of English. A mixed-methods approach was employed, integrating qualitative discourse analysis and quantitative frequency counts, in line with Félix-Brasdefer (2010) and Taguchi (2017). This design allows for both interpretive depth and broader generalizability in examining intercultural variation.

C. Participants

Sixty-eight participants were recruited: 34 native American English speakers and 34 Vietnamese EFL learners. Participants ranged from 20 to 72 years old and represented diverse genders, professional backgrounds, and education levels. Sampling was purposeful to reflect sociopragmatic variables (e.g., social distance, power relations, and role dynamics) embedded in the instrument, thus ensuring ecological validity.

D. Instruments and Data Collection Procedures

Data were gathered using a Discourse Completion Task (DCT) questionnaire adapted from Kasper (1993) and Félix-Brasdefer (2010). The DCT included four hypothetical scenarios varying in social distance and power relations:

- Situation 1 (S1): Complaint to a friend (equal power, low distance)
- Situation 2 (S2): Complaint to a stranger (equal power, high distance)
- Situation 3 (S3): Complaint to a boss (low power, low distance)
- Situation 4 (S4): Complaint to a professor (low power, high distance)

Participants were instructed to respond naturally to each situation. The DCTs were administered in person from March to May 2024. Responses were written, untimed, and anonymized prior to analysis.

E. Coding and Analytical Framework

An extended version of Trosborg's (1995) complaint taxonomy was used to code responses. While the original taxonomy includes eight strategy types, this study inductively refined it into twelve sub-strategies based on empirical patterns. These fall into two major categories: on-record and off-record complaint acts. The coding and analysis followed these steps:

- Manual classification of complaint utterances using the extended typology
- Frequency counts and percentage analysis of strategy types by group
- Identification of internal modification strategies (e.g., hedges, downtoners, conditionals)
- Comparative analysis of social distance and power dynamics in strategy selection

Table 2 below outlines the final coding scheme with functions and illustrative examples.

TABLE 2
THE CODING SCHEME OF COMPLAINT STRATEGIES (ADAPTED AND EXPANDED FROM TROSBORG, 1995, PP. 311–313)

Complaint strategy	Functions	Examples
A. On-record the speaker explicitly signals that he/she is performing a complaint.		
A1. Expressions of annoyance S expresses his/her annoyance, or disapproval in the presence of H	Explicitly asserting a deplorable state of affairs.	“Oh look, the jacket has been damaged”.
A2. Expressions of ill consequences S expresses the bad result of the offence	Explicitly asserting a deplorable state of affairs.	“How terrible! I won’t be able to wear it anymore”.
A3. Direct Accusations S directly accuses the H of having committed the offence.	Explicitly Accusing	“Did you happen to tear my jacket?”
A4. Direct complaint S accuses the H of the offence.	Accusing	“You did not take care of my property”.
A5. Request for repair S requests that the H makes up for the offence or stops the offence.	Compensating	“Could you please get it fixed or buy me a new jacket?”
A6. Blaming S passes a value judgment on the H in three levels: modified blame; explicit blame of behavior; and explicit blame of person.	Explicitly condemning	“You should take more care with other people’s stuff.”
B. Off-record S mentions the inconvenience that resulted from the offence, he/she does not explicitly mention either the socially unacceptable act or H.		
B1. Opting out S ignores the offence.	Avoiding conflict	(saying nothing)
B2. Hints S asserts neither the offence nor the H.	Giving general remarks without mentioning the offence	“Never mind.” “No harm done.” “There’s no real damage”.
B3. Indirect accusation S questions H about the offence	Interrogating	“Oh, What happened to the jacket?”
B4. Indirect complaint S asserts the offence, but avoids explicit mention of the hearer.	Giving general remarks with the offence	“It’s ok.” “Accidents happen.” “Don’t worry about it.” “It could happen to anybody.”
	Describing annoyance	“My jacket was ragged”.
B5. Expressions of worry		“I am worried what I should do now”.
B6. Use of irony		“Are there any mice in your house?”

Two trained raters in applied linguistics independently coded all complaint responses. Inter-rater agreement was measured using Cohen’s Kappa, yielding a score of $k = 0.84$, indicating high reliability. Any discrepancies were resolved through discussion and mutual agreement.

Quantitative analysis was conducted using Microsoft Excel 2021 to produce frequency and distribution tables. Additionally, internal modality markers (e.g., *maybe*, *really*, *I guess*) were coded separately to assess their communicative function and relationship to face mitigation across groups.

F. Ethical Considerations

All participants provided informed consent before participation. Confidentiality was maintained, and responses were anonymized for analysis. The study conformed to ethical standards in human subjects research, with procedures approved by the institutional review board.

V. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The following results address the study’s three guiding questions regarding strategy types, social distance, and internal modifiers. This section presents both quantitative and qualitative findings from the data analysis, structured around the overall use of complaint strategies, modality markers, and the impact of social distance. To contextualize these findings, comparisons are drawn with prior research, thereby grounding the analysis in established cross-cultural and interlanguage pragmatics.

A. Cross-Cultural Differences in Complaint Realization

Table 3 and Figure 2 provide a comparative overview of the twelve complaint strategies employed by native speakers of American English (AmC) and Vietnamese learners of English (VC), categorized into on-record (A1–A6) and off-record (B1–B6) strategies. The results reveal significant cross-cultural variation in strategic preferences.

TABLE 3
DISTRIBUTION OF STRATEGIES USED BY GROUPS

Complaint strategies	Native speakers of American		Vietnamese learners of English	
A. On-record				
A1	8	5.9%	2	1.5%
A2	4	2.9%	3	2.2%
A3	1	0.7%	1	0.7%
A4	4	2.9%	1	0.7%
A5	32	23.6%	33	24.1%
A6	7	5.2%	32	23%
B. Off-record				
B1	12	9.0%	11	8.8%
B2	5	3.7%	6	4.4%
B3	44	32%	19	14.0%
B4	1	0.7%	11	8.8%
B5	14	10%	14	10.3%
B6	4	2.9%	2	1.5%
Totals of on-record and off-record	136	100%	136	100%

Abbreviations: A1 - Expressions of annoyance, A2 - Expressions of ill consequence, A3 - Direct accusations, A4 - Direct complaint, A5 - Request for repair, A6 - Blaming, B1 - Opting out, B2 - Hints, B3 - Indirect accusation, B4 - Indirect complaint, B5 - Expressions of worry, B6 - Use of irony.

Figure 2 below visually represents the relative frequency of complaint strategies across groups, underscoring cross-cultural patterns.

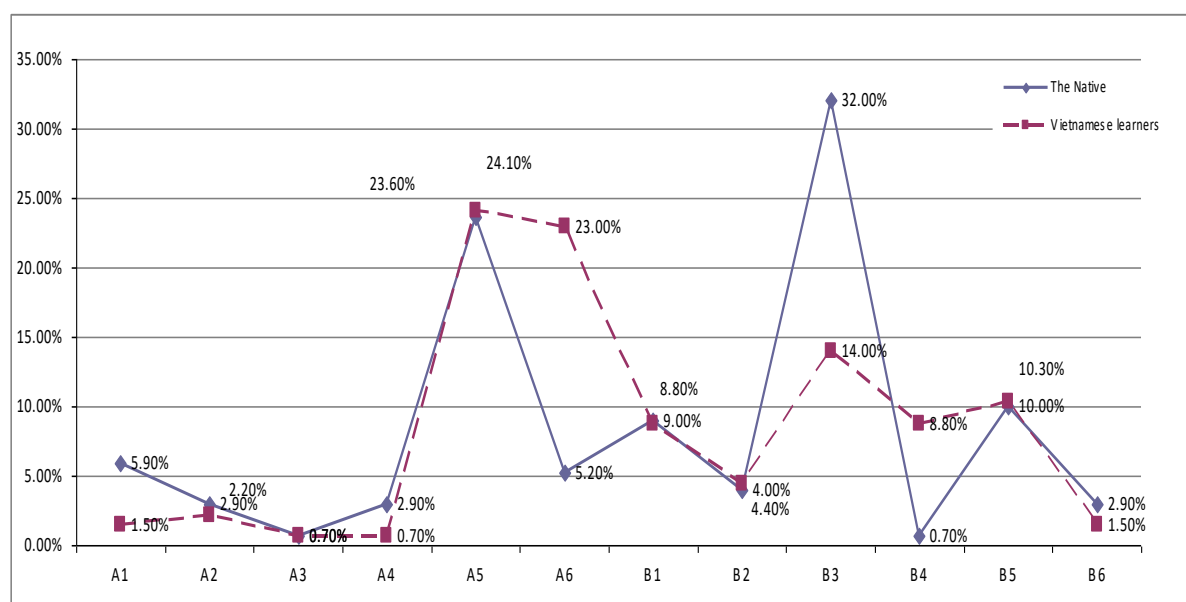


Figure 2. Distribution of Strategies Used by the Native Speakers of American English and Vietnamese Learners of English

Overall, American participants favored Indirect Accusation (B3) and Request for Repair (A5), whereas Vietnamese learners showed a marked preference for Blaming (A6) and Indirect Complaint (B4). The American tendency toward B3 reflects a preference for interrogative forms that enable veiled directness, consistent with their low-context cultural orientation and tolerance for assertiveness in equal-status settings. In contrast, the Vietnamese pattern suggests a dual orientation: while A6 signals a strong stance of responsibility attribution, its frequent co-occurrence with B4 indicates an attempt to preserve relational harmony through softened delivery.

These preferences strongly support Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness framework, particularly in terms of how speakers from different cultural backgrounds mitigate face-threatening acts (FTAs). American speakers' use of B3 aligns with off-record strategies, utilizing indirectness to maintain clarity while minimizing threat. This supports the notion of negative politeness strategies in contexts of equal power or greater social distance. Vietnamese learners' preference for A6, though seemingly direct, should be interpreted through the lens of pragmatic transfer: moral accountability is culturally encoded, and blame may function less as personal attack and more as social correction within a collectivist system.

Moreover, the findings extend Trosborg's (1995) taxonomy by illustrating how cultural norms influence the co-occurrence of strategies (e.g., B4 and A6 among Vietnamese learners). This dual strategy use demonstrates a hybrid politeness orientation that combines confrontation and relational maintenance. It refines the theory by suggesting that off-record and on-record strategies may be blended to serve nuanced social purposes.

The results also partially align with Olshtain and Weinbach's (1987) observations that non-native speakers employ more indirect strategies. However, the present study reveals that the nature of indirectness varies by cultural schema: American indirectness functions as strategic politeness, while Vietnamese indirectness reflects deeper socio-cultural norms of hierarchy and harmony.

Similar tendencies were also reported in the contrastive study by Eslamirasekh et al. (2012) on Persian and American English speakers. Like Vietnamese learners, Persian speakers favored indirect and mitigating strategies, underscoring the role of collectivist and high-context orientations in shaping pragmatic behavior. This convergence across cultural contexts strengthens the view that complaint realization is deeply rooted in broader sociopragmatic values, not merely linguistic proficiency.

In sum, the distribution of strategies reveals not only quantitative differences in frequency but also qualitative differences in interpersonal orientation and face-management priorities. These findings directly address Research Question 1 and provide theoretical confirmation, refinement, and extension of existing pragmatic models in cross-cultural contexts.

B. On-Record Strategy Variation: A1 and A6

Significant variation emerged in the use of on-record complaint strategies, particularly A1 (Expressions of Annoyance) and A6 (Blaming). These two strategies exhibited the largest cross-group differences. American participants employed A1 more frequently (5.9%) than Vietnamese learners (1.5%), suggesting a greater cultural comfort with expressing displeasure directly. Notably, Americans tended to use A1 in conjunction with A5 (Request for Repair) or B3 (Indirect Accusation), supporting Brown and Levinson's (1987) model of combining expressive and redressive acts to minimize face-threat:

(1) (AmC) – "Oh, look, the jacket has been damaged" (A1). "What happened?" (B3)

(2) (AmC) – "Excuse me, that plastic bag is kind of loud" (A1). "Would you mind trying to keep it down a bit?" (A5)

In contrast, Vietnamese learners employed A1 less often and typically embedded it after a prior judgment, which reflects a more deferential sequencing in pragmatic structuring. The emotional expression is subordinated to factual or moral assessment, indicating an effort to soften the FTA through contextual framing - a strategy consistent with collectivist communication norms:

(3) (VC) – "Why is there a hole in the back of my jacket?" (B3). "It's my favorite jacket" (A1).

(4) (VC) – "What did you do with my jacket?" (B3). "It's my favorite one" (A1).

This sequencing - judgment before emotion - highlights differences in pragmatic structuring. American speakers foreground emotional expression; Vietnamese speakers hedge emotion through contextual framing, likely as a politeness mechanism.

Blaming (A6) exhibited the reverse pattern. Vietnamese learners used it markedly more than Americans (23% vs. 5.2%). However, rather than employing A6 in isolation, 70% of VC instances of A6 were paired with B3 (Indirect Accusation) or A5 (Request for Repair), indicating an emergent pragmatic strategy that blends direct and indirect components. This hybridization challenges the strict binary in Trosborg's taxonomy and suggests that learners selectively adapt L1 norms within L2 pragmatic boundaries:

(5) (VC) – "How did this hole get here?" (B3). "Please fix it or buy a new one" (A5). "Don't borrow my stuff if you can't take care of it" (A6).

(6) (VC) – "You are so careless" (A6). "What did you do to my jacket?" (B3)

American uses of A6 were more standalone and less frequently mitigated, consistent with a low-context orientation favoring assertiveness:

(7) (AmC) – "You should take more care with other people's stuff" (A6).

(8) (AmC) – "Is the objective to teach me or punish me?" (A6)

Additionally, American speakers used forceful complaints across power asymmetries. In both high- and low-status interactions (+S and -S), they often employed direct complaints (A4), repair requests (A5), and A1 expressions of annoyance, demonstrating alignment with the principle of clarity emphasized in low-context cultures:

(9) (AmC) – "You didn't take care of my property" (A4). "You are responsible to repair my jacket" (A5).

In contrast, Vietnamese learners displayed reluctance to confront interlocutors, especially superiors. They often resorted to B2 (Hints), B3 (Indirect Accusation), or B4 (Indirect Complaint), and frequently opted out of direct confrontation:

(10) (VC) – "There is a new hole in my jacket" (B4).

(11) (VC) – "I'm sorry for submitting my paper late. I was sick. Could you give me more time?" (A5, with downgraders)

These patterns reinforce Nguyen's (2008) observations regarding Vietnamese learners' tendency to integrate politeness markers and deferential framing when performing direct speech acts. Furthermore, the frequent co-occurrence of A6 with B3 or A5 expands our understanding of how learners navigate politeness and clarity, offering a pragmatic alternative to strictly on-record or off-record choices.

These findings provide further empirical support to Brown and Levinson's theory of redressive action and demonstrate how pragmatic transfer interacts with L2 strategy development. They also suggest a need to revisit Trosborg's framework to account for blended strategies as legitimate forms of pragmatic accommodation.

Pedagogically, this insight calls for the design of instructional materials that train learners to integrate multiple

pragmatic layers (judgment, emotion, mitigation) within a single act. Such instruction can enhance fluency, appropriateness, and cultural sensitivity in EFL contexts. The results contribute directly to Research Question 1 and extend the theoretical discussion on strategic variation in speech act realization.

C. Off-Record Strategy Variation: B3 and B4

The two groups also diverged in their use of off-record complaint strategies. Americans used Indirect Accusation (B3) much more frequently (32%) than Vietnamese learners (14%), while Vietnamese learners used Indirect Complaint (B4) more (8.8%) than Americans (0.7%). This contrast supports prior research by Haugh (2015), Kádár (2017), and Culpeper (2011), which underscores cultural sensitivity in the choice and function of indirectness.

Wh-questions were the preferred form of B3 by both groups, serving as a means to veil blame or gently probe for an explanation. This form allows speakers to preserve plausible deniability while highlighting the issue, an approach aligned with Brown and Levinson's (1987) off-record politeness strategies:

(12a) (AmC) – "What happened to the jacket?"

(12b) (AmC) – "What did I do to get such a review?"

(12c) (VC) – "Why is there a hole in my jacket?"

(12d) (VC) – "What should I do now to have your approval?"

(12e) (VC – S4) – "What should I do now to have your approval?"

(12f) (VC – S2) – "Why did you let the door slam in my face?"

Though both groups used similar syntactic forms, their pragmatic motivations differed. American participants used B3 more assertively and across social contexts, suggesting a cultural preference for directness cloaked in indirect form. In contrast, Vietnamese learners reserved B3 for less face-threatening scenarios, showing hesitation especially in high-status interactions. This cautious use reflects the influence of hierarchical norms in Vietnamese culture.

The higher use of Indirect Complaint (B4) among Vietnamese learners suggests a distinct strategy for expressing discontent while preserving interpersonal harmony. Examples include:

(13a) (VC) – "It's OK."

(13b) (VC) – "Accidents happen. Don't worry."

(13c) (VC) – "It could happen to anyone."

(13d) (VC – S2) – "These things happen sometimes."

By contrast, B4 was rarely used by Americans, and when employed, tended to be curt:

(14a) (AmC) – "Don't worry about it."

These utterances were further classified into three tone-based categories: (1) soft acceptance, (2) neutral normalization, and (3) non-confrontational avoidance. This classification reveals how Vietnamese learners strategically modulate tone to maintain politeness and avoid confrontation, reinforcing Brown and Levinson's emphasis on negative politeness and face protection.

Table 4 illustrates the distribution of internal modifiers. Vietnamese learners used fewer modifiers overall and showed a limited repertoire of downgraders and upgraders.

TABLE 4
DISTRIBUTION OF INTERNAL MODIFIERS ACROSS THE TWO PARTICIPANT GROUPS

Modifier Type	Native speakers	Vietnamese learners	Total
Downgraders	77 (57.46%)	57 (42.53%)	134 (100%)
Upgraders	21 (75%)	7 (25%)	28 (100%)

While Vietnamese learners used common downgraders like "I think" or "maybe," American participants combined them with upgraders to calibrate tone more flexibly:

(15a) (AmC) – "I really don't agree with this review. Please go over it with me."

(15b) (AmC) – "Excuse me, that plastic bag is kind of loud. Would you mind trying to keep it down a bit?"

In contrast, Vietnamese learners tended to rely on less strategically varied forms:

(16a) (VC) – "I think we should talk."

(16b) (VC) – "I'm very sad. What's the reason?"

These patterns affirm Nguyen's (2008) and Olshtain and Weinbach's (1987) observations that Vietnamese EFL learners prioritize relational harmony, leading to softer, less confrontational complaint styles. However, this study adds a new dimension by showing how these tendencies translate into specific internal modifier usage and syntactic preference.

Taken together, the findings support and refine Brown and Levinson's framework by revealing how pragmatic choices are not only driven by face concern but also shaped by available linguistic resources and culturally preferred forms. American speakers, with greater lexical and pragmatic flexibility, navigate complaints through calibrated indirectness. Vietnamese learners rely on indirect complaint types and a smaller set of politeness markers, reflecting both cultural norms and interlanguage development.

Pedagogically, these insights point to the importance of teaching learners how to combine downgraders and upgraders strategically, not just to soften messages but to align with contextual expectations. Incorporating explicit practice in these devices within EFL curricula could enhance learners' ability to navigate complaints across diverse social situations. These findings address Research Questions 1 and 3 by revealing how internal modification and indirectness co-construct

pragmatic meaning across cultures.

D. The Use of Downgraders and Social Distance

To further examine how interpersonal dynamics shape complaints, this section investigates the correlation between social distance and the use of downgraders. Four social contexts were examined: a) friend, b) stranger, c) authority figure, and d) professor. Table 5 shows the correlation between social distance and the use of downgraders.

TABLE 5
CORRELATION BETWEEN SOCIAL DISTANCE AND THE USE OF DOWNGRADERS

Context	Friend	Professor	Authority figure	Stranger	Total
Downgraders					
Native speakers	4	21	25	27	77
Vietnamese learners	5	16	17	19	57

As shown in Table 5, both groups increased their use of downgraders as social distance increased. This finding aligns with Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness theory, which predicts greater use of redressive actions (such as hedging or indirectness) when face threat is higher. However, the degree and flexibility of downgrader use varied between the two groups.

Native speakers not only used more downgraders overall but also displayed context-sensitive modulation. For example, in interactions with strangers or superiors, Americans frequently used prefaces like "excuse me" and embedded hedging expressions to buffer complaints:

(AmC – S2) "Excuse me, that plastic bag is kind of loud. Would you mind keeping it down a bit?"

In contrast, while Vietnamese learners also employed politeness devices in similar contexts, their expressions were less modulated and more formulaic:

(VC – S2) "Please stop making noise." / "I think you're being too loud."

In interactions with professors and authority figures, native speakers commonly used mitigators such as "I'm afraid," "possibly," or "don't you think," demonstrating a pragmatic repertoire attuned to subtle shifts in power:

(AmC – S4) "I'm afraid this review doesn't reflect my actual performance."

By comparison, Vietnamese learners used more conventional and repetitive expressions:

(VC – S4) "I think it is unfair. Please consider it again."

These patterns indicate not only a quantitative difference in modifier use but also a qualitative difference in how linguistic resources are deployed across contexts. Table 6 provides a more fine-grained view of the specific lexical items employed by each group, shedding light on the pragmatic repertoire of native speakers versus learners.

TABLE 6
FREQUENCIES OF SPECIFIC DOWNGRADERS ACROSS THE TWO PARTICIPANT GROUPS

Downgraders	Native speakers	Vietnamese learners
<i>Please</i>	8	9
<i>kind of</i>	4	0
<i>don't you think</i>	5	0
<i>really</i>	9	7
<i>I think</i>	5	6
<i>I'm sorry</i>	5	9
<i>a little</i>	5	3
<i>possibly</i>	4	0
<i>a little bit</i>	4	0
<i>so</i>	7	7
<i>not very much</i>	5	0
<i>I'm afraid</i>	4	6
<i>you know</i>	6	0
<i>excuse me</i>	6	10
Totals	77	57

Table 6 highlights native speakers' broader and more idiomatic range of downgraders, including phrases like "don't you think," "possibly," and "you know," which convey tentative or deferential tones. Vietnamese learners, by contrast, tended to rely on high-frequency but less nuanced modifiers such as "please," "excuse me," or "I think." This confirms Trosborg's (1995) observation that L2 speakers may face lexical and strategic limitations when managing politeness.

These findings strengthen the theoretical framework of Brown and Levinson (1987) by illustrating how cultural expectations and linguistic competence interact to shape politeness performance. They also reinforce that social distance serves as a key trigger for pragmatic adaptation, though native speakers demonstrate a greater range of stylistic flexibility.

Pedagogically, these insights suggest that EFL instruction should incorporate explicit training in the use of downgraders across different social scenarios. Exercises could focus not only on expanding learners' lexical inventory but also on building awareness of how power and distance affect pragmatic appropriateness. This aligns with the goals of intercultural communicative competence and prepares learners for nuanced real-world interactions.

Table 7 below synthesizes key complaint strategies observed in the study. It compares the strategic preferences of

American English speakers and Vietnamese EFL learners, based on Trosborg's taxonomy, while linking them to politeness types and the use of internal modifiers.

TABLE 7
CROSS-CULTURAL COMPARISON OF COMPLAINT STRATEGIES BY GROUP BASED ON TROSBORG'S TAXONOMY

Strategy Type	Trosborg Category	Example	American English (AmC)	Vietnamese Learners (VC)	Politeness Type
Indirect Accusation	B3	"What happened to the jacket?"	✓ Frequent	Moderate	Off-record, face-saving
Request for Repair	A5	"Can you please fix it?"	✓ Frequent	✓ Frequent	On-record, mitigated
Indirect Complaint	B4	"My jacket is ruined..."	Rare	✓ Frequent	Off-record, avoidance
Blaming	A6	"You're so careless."	Low	✓ Frequent	On-record, face-threatening
Hints / Opting Out	B1/B2	"These things happen." / Silence	Moderate	Moderate	Off-record, avoidance
Downgraders Used	–	"I think", "a little", "excuse me"	✓ Rich variety	Limited	Internal mitigation
Upgraders Used	–	"Really", "absolutely"	✓ Used effectively	Rare	Intensification strategy

VI. CONCLUSION

This study investigated how native speakers of American English and Vietnamese learners of English realize complaint strategies from a cross-cultural pragmatic perspective. By applying Trosborg's taxonomy, politeness theory, and sociopragmatic constructs such as facework and internal modifiers, it revealed systematic differences in how each group negotiates face-threatening acts (FTAs).

American participants showed a preference for indirect accusations (B3) and repair requests (A5), often enhanced by a broad range of downgraders and upgraders. Vietnamese learners, in contrast, favored indirect complaints (B4) and blaming strategies (A6), often using fewer internal modifiers. These tendencies reflect deeper cultural orientations: the American speakers' pragmatic flexibility and tolerance for directness, and the Vietnamese learners' collectivist and harmony-driven communication style.

The study extends previous work (Nguyen, 2008; Chen et al., 2011; Trosborg, 1995) by offering a more nuanced understanding of complaint realization, particularly through the detailed coding of downgraders and their correlation with social distance. The findings highlight that even when using the same language, interlocutors from different cultural backgrounds may interpret and perform speech acts in fundamentally distinct ways.

From a pedagogical perspective, the results advocate for the explicit teaching of pragmatics in EFL instruction. Raising learners' awareness of politeness strategies, power dynamics, and context-sensitive use of modifiers can enhance intercultural communicative competence. Practical tools such as discourse completion tasks, role-play, and reflection on L1 transfer should be integrated into curricula to support pragmatic development.

Nevertheless, the study is not without limitations. The participant pool was relatively small and limited to two cultural groups, potentially restricting broader generalizability. The use of written DCTs may not fully capture the spontaneity and dynamic interaction present in authentic communication. Additionally, the study did not explore individual factors such as personality, gender, or educational background, which may also influence pragmatic choices. Future research could broaden the participant base to include other L2 populations, adopt longitudinal designs to track pragmatic development over time, and analyze naturally occurring discourse. Such expansions would enrich the theoretical landscape of intercultural pragmatics and provide stronger empirical grounding for EFL pedagogy.

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Comparative Analysis of High Lexicons in Balinese and Javanese Languages

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Abstract—The lexicon of a language reflects the richness and diversity of its vocabulary. This study compares high lexical items in Balinese and Javanese, focusing specifically on the *singgih* register in Balinese and the high registers in Javanese—namely *krama*, *krama andhap*, and *krama inggil*. The research investigates phonological and morphological transformations, as well as semantic shifts, that occur across corresponding lexical items. By systematically codifying the similarities and differences between these refined lexical items, the study aims to contribute to vocabulary development in both Balinese and Javanese, and potentially to the enrichment of the Indonesian lexicon. Employing a comparative-analytical methodology, this research analyzes refined lexical items drawn from a 230-word Swadesh list. The findings indicate that many Balinese refined lexical items exhibit notable similarities with their Javanese counterparts, suggesting a strong influence of Javanese—particularly from the *ngoko* and *krama* levels—on the Balinese *singgih* register. Overall, the *sor* (low) register in Balinese aligns closely with Javanese *ngoko*, while the *singgih* (refined) register corresponds to various levels of Javanese *krama*.

Index Terms—Javanese language, Balinese language, lexicons, speech level, comparative analysis

I. INTRODUCTION

Every language possesses a set of lexical items that can be arranged into phrases, clauses, sentences, paragraphs, and even extended discourse (Camblin et al., 2007). It is because the lexicon constitutes a fundamental component of language, containing all information related to the meanings and usage of words within a given language (Kardana et al., 2020; Levy et al., 2021; Pengembangan et al., 2019; Widiasmara et al., 2023). The quantity and nature of lexical items vary across languages, depending on the communicative needs of their respective speech communities. Societies with

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relatively simple modes of life tend to employ a more limited and straightforward lexicon, whereas more complex societies typically require and utilize a correspondingly more elaborate lexical repertoire. Thus, the lexicon of any given language may reflect the richness and diversity of its vocabulary.

In terms of lexicons, particularly those with high lexical density, Balinese and Javanese exhibit numerous similarities. It is mainly attributable to the long-standing and sustained historical relationship between the two ethnic groups, dating back to the periods of the Kediri, Singhasari, Majapahit, and Mataram kingdoms. Such close ties inevitably led to mutual influences, not only in language but also in culture and literature (Erawati, 2015; Erawati et al., 2023; Jayana, 2024; Wijana, 2021).

A considerable body of work has already been devoted to the study of lexicon in both languages. The Balinese lexicon has been explored by various scholars, as reflected in sources such as *Kamus Indonesia–Bali* (Sukayana et al., 2015; Sutjaja, 2006) and *Kamus Bali–Indonesia* (Partami et al., 2016). Lexical items in Balinese are typically classified into two categories: *sor* and *singgi*. The term '*sor*' denotes a low or rough register, while '*singgi*' refers to a high or high register (Suwija, 2017). These terms are used not only to describe individual lexical items but also to refer to the levels of politeness in sentences (Arnawa et al., 2022). These terms are used not only to describe individual lexical items but also to refer to the levels of politeness in sentences. Van der Tuuk (1897), in his *Kawi-Balinesch-Nederlandsch Woordenboek* (Kawi Balinese Dutch Dictionary). His works document Balinese vocabulary, including the high registers of the language. Arka (2005) employs a lexical approach to study the interaction between Balinese speech syntax, semantics, and pragmatics. Putri and Nurita (2021) highlight the causes and endeavours to preserve endangered lexicons. Budasi and Adi Ana (2025) study the maintenance of Balinese lexicons through traditional games.

Similarly, numerous studies have also addressed the Javanese lexicon. For instance, in *Tingkat tutur Bahasa Jawa* (Javanese Speech Levels), Poedjosoedarma et al. (1979) state that the Javanese lexicon is categorized into *ngoko*, *madya*, *krama*, and *krama inggil/krama andhap*. The lexicon is divided into *ngoko*, *krama*, *krama ngoko*, and *krama inggil* (Yogyakarta, 2011), following the tradition established by Poerwadarminta (1939), the pre-independence compiler of *Bausastra Djawa*. Sasangka (2019) offers a six-part classification: *neutral lexicon*, *ngoko*, *madya*, *krama*, *krama inggil*, and *krama andhap*.

Comparative research between the Balinese and Javanese languages has also been undertaken by several scholars, including Islaqudin (2019), Lailiyah and Wijayanti (2022), and Mayani (2016). One of Mayani's (2016) findings reveals that phonological, semantic, and politeness-level shifts of Javanese lexical items in Balinese occur both formally and informally. Notably, many Javanese low-register lexical borrowings have shifted into high-register forms in Balinese. Islaqudin's (2019) research indicates that Balinese and Javanese are linguistically related, sharing approximately 24% of their vocabulary, and are believed to have diverged around 279–283 BCE. Meanwhile, Lailiyah and Wijayanti (2022) estimate the lexical similarity at 30.5%, suggesting that both languages belong to the same sub-branch of the Austronesian family.

Although a range of comparative studies on the two languages has been conducted, none has specifically examined the high lexicons of Balinese and Javanese in a comparative framework. A focused comparison of these high lexical registers would yield intriguing insights. For example, some lexical items considered *singgi* in Balinese are only categorized as *ngoko* in Javanese. Words such as *tangi* 'wake up', *watuk* 'cough', *mangkat* 'depart', *ngadeg* 'stand', and *margi* 'walk' or 'road' exist in both languages with identical forms and meanings. However, while they are *ngoko* in Javanese, they are treated as high in Balinese. Notably, the reverse does not occur—*sor* lexicon in Balinese does not become *krama* in Javanese. This asymmetry is likely due to the historically close relationship between Javanese and Balinese kingdoms, in which certain informal Javanese words were adopted into Balinese as polite forms. This phenomenon may be interpreted as either an expression of deference by Balinese rulers toward their Javanese counterparts or as a consequence of the historical political dominance of Javanese kingdoms over those of Balinese (Zoetmulder, 1983).

Nevertheless, not all high lexical items in Balinese bear similarities to or correspond with *ngoko* lexical items in Javanese; many high terms in Balinese are original to the language. It can be observed in words such as *mekoratan* 'to defecate', *laib* 'to run', and *suir* 'to whistle'. In Javanese, the terms used to convey the meaning to defecate are *ngising* (*ngoko*) and *bebucal* (*krama*); for run, the equivalents are *mlayu* (*ngoko*), *mlajeng* (*madya*), and *mlajar* (*krama*); while to whistle, the term *singsot* or *sisot* is used—both of which are neutral lexical items and lack *krama* equivalents.

The '*sor*' lexicon in Balinese semantically denotes a low register. It is typically used by either the first person or second person in casual, intimate, or socially unmarked interactions. In contrast, the *singgi* lexicon denotes refinement. It is employed in formal or socially distant communication, where interlocutors are less familiar with one another and maintain a certain level of social distance. In a similar vein, Sasangka (2013) classifies the Javanese lexicon into several registers: *ngoko*, *madya*, *krama*, and *krama inggil/krama andhap*. The *ngoko* register, which parallels *sor* in Balinese, is used for informal, everyday interactions among close acquaintances or equals. The *krama* register, akin to the *singgi* register, is used in daily communication where speakers maintain a respectful distance or formality. The *madya* lexicon is considered moderately high, although it is often regarded as insufficiently polite or lacking in decorum. Meanwhile, the *krama inggil* lexicon represents a high register reserved exclusively for addressing or referring to others (second or third singular person). In contrast, *krama andhap* is an equally elevated form of speech but used solely for self-reference (first singular person).

This study compares high lexical items in Balinese and Javanese, with a particular focus on the *singgih* register in Balinese and the high registers in Javanese—including *krama*, *krama andhap*, and *krama inggil*. The research explores formal and semantic correspondences between the two languages, including phonological shifts and semantic extensions. The primary contribution of this study lies in its detailed classification of lexical relationships between Balinese and Javanese, based on data drawn from basic vocabulary questionnaires and lexicographic documentation.

By adequately codifying these similarities and differences, the high lexicons of both languages may serve as valuable resources for vocabulary development in Balinese and Javanese, and potentially for enriching Indonesian vocabulary—especially in the context of ongoing efforts by the Agency for Language Development and Cultivation to expand the Kamus Besar Bahasa Indonesia (KBBI). Accordingly, this paper presents the forms of high lexicons in both languages, analyzes their similarities and differences, and identifies the markers of lexical refinement specific to each language.

II. METHODOLOGY

This study employs a comparative analytical methodology to examine the high lexicons in Balinese and Javanese. The results were obtained using a questionnaire derived from the Swadesh list, which comprises 230 lexicons. Comparative analysis is a scientific approach that investigates two or more languages to reveal similarities and contrasts in their phonological systems, morphological structures, lexical semantics, and grammatical patterns, both historically and typologically (Comrie, 1989; Heine & Kuteva, 2005; Rankin, 2003). This approach is particularly important for studying how these two genealogically and culturally related languages build and employ lexical variants that indicate politeness levels or *unggah-ungguh* in speech.

The comparative analysis in this study involves several systematic steps. First, data collection was conducted by compiling a list of high-frequency words in Balinese and Javanese languages, based on responses to a 230-Swadesh list. Second, a process of lexical matching was conducted to identify lexical correspondences between the two languages, based on similarities in both form and meaning. Third, the matched items were classified according to levels of formality or speech register in Javanese (e.g., *ngoko*, *madya*, *krama*, *krama inggil*, and *krama andhap*) and the dichotomy of *sor* and *singgih* in Balinese. Fourth, phonological and semantic mapping was conducted to trace patterns of sound change (e.g., *pethak* > *petat*) and meaning shifts or extensions (e.g., *jero*, meaning 'house' in the Balinese language, but 'inside' in the Javanese language). Finally, historical inference was employed to determine whether the similarities were due to common inheritance from Old Javanese, borrowing, or independent innovation, thereby situating the findings within a broader Austronesian historical-linguistic context.

III. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

A. Findings

The following table presents a comparison of selected high lexicons in Balinese and their equivalents in Javanese across various speech levels. This comparison encompasses both semantic classification and the identification of lexical correspondences across the various Javanese registers: *ngoko*, *madya*, *krama*, and *krama inggil/andhap*. The aim is to assess the extent to which *the Balinese lexicon* aligns in form and meaning with its Javanese counterparts, and to identify potential shifts in pragmatic and social value that may have occurred through processes of borrowing and lexical adaptation.

TABLE 1
HIGH LEXICONS IN BALINESE AND JAVANESE LANGUAGES

Balinese Language			Javanese Language			Meaning
Sor	High	Ngoko	High			
			Madya	Krama	Krama Inggil/ andhap	
kokoan	Watuk	watuk	-	-	cekoh	cough
ngoyong	Meneng	meneng	-	mendel	-	silent
adep	Adol	adol	Mande	sade	-	sell
jits	Silit	silit	-	-	wajidan	anus
bibih	lambé	lambé	-	-	lathi	lips
gigi	untu	untu	-	-	waja	teeth
bungut	cangkem	cangkem	-	tutuk	lisan	mouth
lu'ung	becik	becik/apik	-	sae	prayogi	good
meme	biyang	emak, embok	-	biyung	ibu	mother
gunung	gunung	gunung	-	redi	arga	mountain
bo'ok	rambut	rambut	-	-	rikma	hair
lime	tangan	tangan	-	-	asta	hands
api	geni	geni	-	-	latu	fire
peteng	wengi	bengi	-	dalu	-	night

The findings above indicate that most *sor* lexical items in Balinese differ in form from their *ngoko* counterparts in Javanese. For example, the Balinese words *kokoan* 'to cough', *ngoyong* 'to be silent', *adep* 'to sell', *bibih* 'lips', *bungut*

'mouth', *bo'ok* 'hair', and *lu'ung* 'good' are all categorized as *sor* in the Balinese language. In contrast, Javanese expresses these meanings using *watuk* 'to cough', *meneng* 'to be silent', *adol* 'to sell', *lambé* 'lips', *cangkem* 'mouth', *bo'ok* 'hair', and *apik* 'good'—all of which belong to the *ngoko* register. On the other hand, the data also reveal that many *singgih* lexical items in Balinese share both form and meaning with *ngoko* lexical items in Javanese. Words such as *watuk* 'cough', *meneng* 'silent', *adol* 'sell', *silit* 'anus', *lambé* 'lips', *untu* 'teeth', and *cangkem* 'mouth' are classified as *singgih* in the Balinese language. However, these same forms are categorized as *ngoko* in the Javanese language. This suggests a shift in pragmatic value when such lexemes are borrowed or adapted between the two languages.

Furthermore, the findings show a structural difference in the lexical systems of the two languages. The Balinese lexicon is typically divided into just two levels: *sor* and *singgih*. Meanwhile, Javanese includes a more stratified system with *ngoko*, *madya*, *krama*, and *krama inggil/andhap*. Functionally, *sor* and *singgih* in Balinese correspond roughly to *ngoko* and *krama* in Javanese. It can be seen, for example, in the lexical items for 'mouth.' In Balinese language, *bungut* (*sor*) and *cangkem* (*singgih*) are used, whereas Javanese language uses *cangkem* (*ngoko*), *tutuk* (*krama*), and *lisan* (*krama inggil*). Another example can be found in the lexical representation of the concepts 'good' and 'mother.' In the Balinese language, good is expressed as *lu'ung* (*sor*) and *becik* (*singgih*), while the Javanese language uses *apik/becik* (*ngoko*), *sae* (*krama*), and *prayogi* (*krama inggil*). For the mother lexicon, the Balinese language uses '*meme*' (*sor*) and '*biyang*' (*singgih*), while the Javanese language uses '*emak/embok*' (*ngoko*), '*biyung*' (*krama*), and '*ibu*' (*krama inggil*).

B. Discussion

This subsection will address the following key points: (1) the similarities between high lexicons in Balinese and *ngoko* lexicons in Javanese; (2) the similarities between high lexicons of Balinese and Javanese; (3) instances of semantic expansion within the Balinese high lexicon; (4) connections between Balinese high lexicons and Old Javanese lexicon; and (5) original Balinese high lexicons that have no equivalents in either *ngoko* or *krama* registers of Javanese.

(a). Similarities Between High Lexicons in Balinese and Ngoko Lexicons in Javanese

High lexicons in Balinese can be classified into two types: (1) those that are entirely identical to *ngoko* lexicons in Javanese in both form and meaning, without undergoing any phonological or morphological changes, and (2) those that are like Javanese *ngoko* lexicons, but have undergone slight modifications. Based on data collected through a questionnaire consisting of 230 lexical items, it was found that 65 high Balinese lexical items correspond to *ngoko* Javanese forms. Among these, 50 items are identical in form and meaning, while 15 items have undergone some degree of modification, either through phonological addition or deletion. The following examples illustrate both types.

TABLE 2
IDENTICAL FORMS IN HIGH BALINESE AND JAVANESE *NGOKO* LEXICONS

Balinese Language			Javanese Language			Meaning
Sor	High	Ngoko	High			
			Madya	Krama	Krama Inggil/ andhap	
adep	adol	adol	Mande	sade	-	sell
bais	cokor	cokor, sikil	-	-	sampeyan, samparan	feet
gigi	untu	untu	-	-	waja	teeth
bungut	cangkem	cangkem	-	tutuk	lisan	mouth
lime	tangan	tangan	-	-	asta	hand
mejalan	mangkat	mangkat	Kesah	bidhal	tindak	depart
bangun	tangi	tangi	-	-	wungu	wake up
kokoan	watuk	watuk	-	-	cekoh	cough
api	geni	geni	-	-	latu	fire
cunguh	irung	irung	-	-	grana	nose
jera	umah	omah	-	griya	dalem	house

A close examination of the data in Table 2 reveals that many high lexicons in Balinese share identical forms and meanings with *ngoko* lexicons in Javanese, without undergoing any phonological or semantic change. Words such as *adol* 'to sell', *cokor* 'foot', *cangkem* 'mouth', *untu* 'teeth', *tangan* 'hand', *mangkat* 'depart', and *tangi* 'wake up' exhibit complete formal and semantic equivalence across both languages.

Despite these similarities, two significant differences can be observed in their actual use. First, there is a phonological distinction. In Balinese, words like *untu* 'teeth', *tangan* 'hand', *mangkat* 'depart', *tangi* 'wake up', and *watuk* 'cough' are pronounced using the retroflex stop /ɖ/, resulting in pronunciations such as /uɴtu/, /taŋaɴ/, /maŋkaɖ/, /taŋi/, and /waɖu/. In contrast, the equivalent Javanese forms retain the alveolar voiceless plosive /t/ (i.e., /t/ rather than /ɖ/), thus preserving the standard pronunciation found in *ngoko* speech. Second, there is a functional difference in terms of speech level and social register. In Balinese, these lexemes are classified as *singgih* and are typically used to express politeness and deference toward the interlocutor. In Javanese, however, the same lexemes belong to the *ngoko* level, which is employed in informal, intimate, or equal-status communication. It illustrates a shift in pragmatic function: lexicon that conveys familiarity in Javanese may carry connotations of politeness or formality in Balinese.

Meanwhile, high lexicons in Balinese that resemble *ngoko* lexicons in Javanese, but have undergone slight modifications, are exemplified by the data presented in Table 3 below.

TABLE 3
MODIFIED HIGH LEXICONS IN BALINESE COMPARED TO JAVANESE *NGOKO*

High lexicons in the Balinese Language	<i>Ngoko</i> Lexicons in the Javanese Language	Meaning
<i>Matangi</i>	<i>Tangi</i>	wake up
<i>matembang</i>	<i>Tembang</i>	sing
<i>malinggih</i>	<i>Linggih</i>	Sit
<i>jagut</i>	<i>Janggut</i>	chin/beard
<i>baduur</i>	<i>Dhuwur</i>	high/above
<i>babuyut</i>	<i>Buyut</i>	ancestor
<i>memeri</i>	<i>Meri</i>	duck

The data above illustrate that the high Balinese words *matangi* ‘wake up’, *matembang* ‘sing’, and *malinggih* ‘sit’ are closely related to the Javanese *ngoko* forms *tangi*, *tembang*, and *linggih*. These similarities become evident once the Balinese verbal prefix *ma-* is removed, revealing that the base forms in both languages are identical.

The word *jagut* ‘chin’ or ‘beard’ appears to have evolved from *janggut*, likely through the deletion of the nasal phoneme /ŋ/. Similarly, *baduur* ‘high’ or ‘above’ likely derives from *dhuwur*. This derivation may have involved an initial addition of the prefix *ba-*, forming *badhuwur*, followed by the elision of /w/, resulting in *baduur*. Other examples include *babuyut* ‘ancestor’ and *memeri* ‘duck’, both high Balinese lexemes that likely stem from *buyut* and *meri* in Javanese. The form *babuyut* may have been created through the addition of the prefix *ba-*, a standard morphological device in Balinese used to form words associated with states or qualities. As for *memeri*, this is most likely the result of initial reduplication rather than the addition of the prefix *me-*, which in Balinese typically functions as a verbal prefix. Since *memeri* is a noun meaning ‘duck’, the morphological process involved is more consistent with reduplication rather than verbal derivation.

(b). *Similarities Between the High Lexicons of Balinese and Javanese*

High lexicons in Balinese can be grouped into two categories about their counterparts in Javanese: (1) Balinese high lexicons that are entirely identical to Javanese high lexicons, both in form and meaning, without undergoing any phonological or morphological changes, and (2) Balinese high lexicon that is similar to high Javanese lexicon but has undergone certain modifications, such as sound shifts, affixation, or morphological adaptations. The following are several illustrative examples of both types.

TABLE 4
IDENTICAL HIGH LEXICONS IN BALINESE AND JAVANESE

Balinese Language	Javanese Language			Meaning
High	Madya	Krama	Krama Inggil/Andhap	
<i>Ayam</i>	-	<i>Ayam</i>	<i>Sawung</i>	chicken
<i>Griya</i>	-	<i>Griya</i>	<i>Dalem</i>	house
<i>Tumbas</i>	-	<i>Tumbas</i>	<i>Mundhut</i>	buy
<i>Toya</i>	-	<i>Toya</i>	-	water
<i>wana</i>	-	<i>Wana</i>	-	forest
<i>mantuk</i>	<i>mantuk</i>	<i>Wangsul</i>	<i>Kondur</i>	return
<i>Ibu</i>	<i>mbok</i>	<i>Biyung</i>	<i>Ibu</i>	mother
<i>luhur</i>	-	<i>Inggil</i>	<i>Luhur</i>	high/above
<i>raka</i>	<i>kang</i>	<i>Kangmas</i>	<i>Raka</i>	older brother
<i>seda</i>	<i>tilar</i>	<i>Pejah</i>	<i>Seda</i>	die

A close examination of the data in Table 4 reveals that all high lexicons in Balinese share formal and semantic equivalence with high lexicons in Javanese, without undergoing any changes in form or meaning. However, these correspondences are realized across various speech levels in Javanese, ranging from *madya* to *krama* and *krama inggil/andhap*. For example, the Balinese high term for ‘chicken’ is *ayam*, which corresponds to *ayam* in *krama* Javanese and *sawung* in *krama inggil*. The word for ‘house’ in Balinese is *griya*, which also appears in *krama* Javanese as *griya*, and in *krama inggil* as *dalem*. For ‘buy’, Balinese uses *tumbas*, which matches *tumbas* (*krama*) and *mundhut* (*krama inggil*) in Javanese. The Balinese terms *toya* ‘water’ and *wana* ‘forest’ correspond directly with the same forms in *krama* Javanese, without higher-register variants. *Mantuk* ‘return’ in Balinese corresponds to *mantuk* (*madya*), *wangsul* (*krama*), and *kondur* (*krama inggil*) in Javanese. The word *ibu* ‘mother’ in Balinese is used in high contexts and aligns with *mbok* (*madya*), *biyung* (*krama*), and *ibu* (*krama inggil*) in Javanese. For ‘above’ or ‘high’, Balinese uses *luhur*, while Javanese uses *inggil* (*krama*) and *luhur* (*krama inggil*). *Raka* ‘older brother’ in Balinese is matched with *kang* (*madya*), *kangmas* (*krama*), and *raka* (*krama inggil*) in Javanese. Finally, *seda* ‘die’ in Balinese aligns with *tilar* (*madya*), *pejah* (*krama*), and *seda* (*krama inggil*) in Javanese. These examples demonstrate that, although Balinese and Javanese high lexicons exhibit strong parallels, the Javanese equivalents span multiple speech levels, whereas Balinese typically maintains a single high form.

Meanwhile, specific high Balinese lexicons resemble their Javanese counterparts but have undergone slight phonological or morphological modifications. The following examples illustrate these cases.

TABLE 5
MODIFIED HIGH LEXICONS IN BALINESE DERIVED FROM HIGH JAVANESE

High lexicons in the Balinese Language	High Lexicons in the Javanese Language	Meaning
<i>petat</i>	<i>Pethak</i>	white
<i>nyurat</i>	<i>Nyerat</i>	write
<i>kaon</i>	<i>Kawon</i>	lose
<i>naka</i>	<i>Kenaka</i>	finger nail
<i>wimba</i>	<i>Imba</i>	eyebrow
<i>bakta</i>	<i>Beta</i>	bring
<i>kakiang</i>	<i>Kaki</i>	grandfather
<i>mataken</i>	<i>Taken</i>	ask (question)
<i>masiram</i>	<i>Siram</i>	bathe
<i>ngamanahin</i>	<i>Manah</i>	think

The data presented in Table 5 shows that the Balinese high lexicons *petat* ‘white’ and *nyurat* ‘write’ exhibit strong similarities to the *krama* Javanese forms *pethak* ‘white’ and *nyerat* ‘write’. The Balinese *petat* /pətaʔ/ is likely derived from the Javanese *pethak* /pətaʔk/, with the glottal stop /k/ at the end of *pethak* varying with the retroflex stop /ʔ/, resulting in *petat* /pətaʔ/. Similarly, *nyurat* is assumed to derive from *nyerat* /ɲəraʔt/ in Javanese, with the change from /ə/ to /u/ reflecting a typical vowel variation between mid-central and high-back vowels.

Other examples include *kaon* ‘lose’ and *naka* ‘finger nail’, which are high-level lexicons in Balinese believed to originate from the *krama* Javanese forms *kawon* and *kenaka*, respectively. The transformation of *kawon* to *kaon* likely involves the deletion of the semivowel /w/, which tends to be omitted in Balinese when flanked by adjacent vowels such as /a/ and /o/. The change from *kenaka* to *naka* can be explained by the elision of the initial syllable *ke-*.

Similarly, the Balinese high forms *wimba* ‘eyebrow’, *bakta* ‘bring’, and *kakiang* ‘grandfather’ appear to derive from the Javanese *imba* (*krama inggil*), *beta* (*krama*), and *kaki* (*krama*), respectively. The form *wimba* results from the addition of the consonant /w/ to the beginning of *imba*. *Beta* becomes *bakta* through the insertion of a glottal stop [ʔ] and a shift from /ə/ to /a/, yielding *bekta* → *bakta*. Likewise, *kaki* becomes *kakiang* through the addition of the nasal ending /aŋ/, resulting in /kaki.aŋ/.

The forms *mataken* ‘ask’, *masiram* ‘bathe’, and *ngamanahin* ‘think’ are also considered Balinese high lexicon and are assumed to derive from the Javanese *taken* (*krama*), *siram* (*krama inggil*), and *manah* (*krama*). In these cases, *mataken* and *masiram* are formed through the addition of the Balinese verbal prefix *ma-*, which is used to indicate an active verb where the subject performs the action. In *ngamanahin*, the base *manah* is modified by the simultaneous affixation of the prefix *nga-* and the suffix *-in*, forming a transitive verb that denotes an action directed toward an object.

From the analysis above, it becomes clear that Balinese high lexicon originating from Javanese high lexicon does not consistently correspond to a single level of Javanese speech. Instead, it draws variably from *madya*, *krama*, and *krama inggil/andhap* levels. In total, 49 Balinese high lexicons (28%) are identical in form and meaning to their Javanese high counterparts, while 17 items (9.71%) have undergone modifications involving phonological shifts, affixation, or morphological simplification.

(c). High Lexicons in Balinese as a Result of Semantic Expansion

In addition to the previously discussed correspondences and modifications, there are also high lexicons in Balinese that are believed to originate from Javanese, but which have undergone semantic expansion or shift. These items retain formal similarities with their Javanese counterparts but exhibit broadened or altered meanings in the Balinese context. This phenomenon is illustrated in the following table.

TABLE 6
HIGH LEXICONS IN BALINESE WITH SEMANTIC SHIFTS COMPARED TO JAVANESE

Balinese Language	Meaning	Javanese Language	Meaning
<i>Meneng</i>	Stop	<i>meneng</i>	silent
<i>panyuryan</i>	Eye	<i>pasuryan</i>	face
<i>Ngraos</i>	Say	<i>ngraos</i>	feel
<i>Jero</i>	House	<i>jero</i>	inside
<i>Ragane</i>	you (2 nd person)	<i>ragane</i>	his/her body
<i>Titian</i>	I (1 st person)	<i>tiang</i>	person
<i>Budal</i>	return home	<i>budal</i>	depart

The analysis reveals several lexicons in Balinese that, while seemingly related in form to their Javanese counterparts, have undergone semantic shift or expansion, resulting in different meanings across the two languages. These findings illustrate the dynamic nature of meaning evolution within related Austronesian languages, particularly in contexts of politeness and high registers. The word *meneng* in the Balinese language means ‘stop’ or ‘cease,’ whereas in the Javanese language, it is a *ngoko* term meaning ‘silent’. To express ‘stop’ in the Javanese language, speakers use *mandheg* (*ngoko*) or *kendel* (*krama*). *Panyuryan* in the Balinese language refers to ‘eye’, while no such form exists in the Javanese language. However, *pasuryan* (from *sura* ‘face’) appears in *krama inggil* Javanese, meaning ‘face’. Javanese language uses *mata* (*ngoko*), *mripat* (*krama*), and *paningal* or *soca* (*krama inggil*) for ‘eye’. *Ngraos* in the Balinese language means ‘say’ or ‘speak’, while in Javanese it means ‘feel’. Javanese language expresses ‘speak’ using *kandha* (*ngoko*),

sanjang (madya), *atur/matur (krama andhap)*, and *ngendika (krama inggil)*. *Jero* in the Balinese language refers to 'house', while in the Javanese language it is a *ngoko* term meaning 'inside'. For 'house', the Javanese language uses *omah (ngoko)*, *griya (krama)*, and *dalem (krama inggil)*. *Budal* in the Balinese language means 'return home', while in the Javanese language, *budal* is a *ngoko* form meaning 'depart'. Javanese language expresses 'return' with *bali/mulih (ngoko)*, *mantuk (madya)*, *wangsul (krama)*, and *kondur (krama inggil)*. *Titiyang* in the Balinese language is a high pronoun for 'I' or 'me'. In the Javanese language, the similar form *tiyang* means 'person'. *Titiyang* likely derives from *tiyang* via initial reduplication. In the Javanese language, first-person pronouns include *aku (ngoko)*, *kula (krama)*, and *abdi dalem* or *adalem (krama andhap)*. *Ragane* in the Balinese language is a polite form for 'you' (second person), while in the Javanese language *ragane* is a *ngoko* expression meaning 'your body' or 'his/her body'. To express 'you' in the Javanese language, one may use *kowe (ngoko)*, *slirane* or *sampeyan (madya)*, and *panjenengan (krama inggil)*.

The findings indicate that several Balinese lexicons, although formally similar to Javanese forms, have diverged in meaning due to processes of semantic shift, metaphorical extension, or pragmatic recontextualization. These changes reflect both the internal dynamics of Balinese and its historical interaction with Javanese, particularly in the refinement of social registers.

In total, 11 lexical items (approximately 4.78% of the 230 items surveyed) were identified as having undergone meaning change or expansion from their presumed Javanese sources. It highlights the importance of semantic analysis in comparative lexicon studies, particularly in understanding how culturally embedded concepts, such as politeness and social roles, are encoded differently in closely related languages.

(d). High Lexicons in Balinese Derived From Old Javanese

Within the *singguh* register of Balinese, several lexicons are found to originate not from modern Javanese but from Old Javanese, also known as Kawi. The following table presents examples of high Balinese lexicon believed to have their roots in Old Javanese.

TABLE 7
HIGH BALINESE LEXICONS WITH ORIGINS IN OLD JAVANESE

High lexicons in the Balinese Language	Old Javanese Language	Meaning
<i>Garba</i>	<i>Garba</i>	stomach
<i>Karna</i>	<i>Karna</i>	ear
<i>tranggana</i>	<i>trenggana</i>	star
<i>candra</i>	<i>candra</i>	moon
<i>Asti</i>	<i>Esti</i>	elephant
<i>giri</i>	<i>giri</i>	mountain
<i>Mina</i>	<i>Mina</i>	fish
<i>surya</i>	<i>surya</i>	sun
<i>Pertiwi</i>	<i>Pertiwi</i>	earth/land
<i>Teguh</i>	<i>Teguh</i>	strong
<i>Jaya</i>	<i>Jaya</i>	win
<i>ari</i>	<i>ari</i>	younger siblings

It appears that several high lexicons in Balinese, such as *ngwarih* 'urinate', *garba* 'stomach', *karna* 'ear', *tranggana* 'star', *candra* 'moon', *asti* 'elephant', *giri* 'mountain', *mina* 'fish', *surya* 'sun', *pertiwi* 'earth', *teguh* 'strong', and *ari* 'younger sibling', are likely derived from Old Javanese (Kawi language). These lexical items reflect a continuity of classical forms that have been preserved and integrated into the *singguh* (high) register of modern Balinese.

The word *ngwarih*, for example, is believed to originate from the Old Javanese term *warih*, which means 'water'. In Balinese, however, the term *ngwarih* has undergone semantic expansion, coming to mean 'urinate', that is, to release water (from the body). This shift illustrates a metaphorical extension from the original meaning. Similarly, *asti* 'elephant' in Balinese is thought to derive from *esti* or *hesti* in Old Javanese, with a vowel variation at the word-initial position. The form *esti/hesti* is a classical term for 'elephant' that reflects Sanskrit influence. The word *teguh* also demonstrates a semantic shift. In Old Javanese, *teguh* means 'firm' or 'steadfast', while in Balinese it has come to mean 'strong'. Although not identical, these meanings are conceptually related, as both connote endurance and stability.

What is particularly noteworthy is that many lexemes from Old Javanese—especially those with Sanskritic roots—have been absorbed into the high register of Balinese, where they continue to serve polite, ceremonial, or high-status communicative functions. In contrast, Modern Javanese tends to relegate many of these exact words to either *ngoko* (informal) usage or archaic or literary domains (often detached from daily spoken use). This divergence suggests that Balinese has retained and ritualized a greater portion of the Old Javanese lexicon. At the same time, Javanese, in its modern form, has undergone more lexical simplification and levelling in everyday language use.

(e). Original High Lexicon in Balinese With No Equivalent in Javanese Ngoko or Krama

Based on the collected data, several high lexicons in the Balinese language appear to be genuinely native, meaning they do not correspond directly, either in form or in derivation, to equivalent forms in Javanese, whether in the *ngoko* or high (*krama*) registers. These lexemes demonstrate the autonomous development of high vocabulary within Balinese and its ability to express politeness, deference, or refinement through indigenous linguistic mechanisms. Below is Table 8, which presents examples of such lexicon.

TABLE 8
HIGH LEXICONS IN BALINESE WITH SEMANTIC SHIFTS COMPARED TO JAVANESE

Balinese High Language	Javanese Ngoko Language	Javanese High Language	Meaning
<i>Mekoratan</i>	<i>ngising</i>	<i>bebucal</i>	defecate
<i>ngicén, mapica</i>	<i>menehi</i>	<i>nyukani, maringi, nyaosi</i>	give
<i>Ngamel</i>	<i>nyekel</i>	<i>nyepeng</i>	hold/grasp
<i>Ngentungang</i>	<i>mbuwang</i>	<i>mbucal</i>	throw away/discard
<i>Makayun</i>	<i>njaluk</i>	<i>nyuwun, mundhut</i>	ask (request)
<i>kadek, ica</i>	<i>ngguyu</i>	<i>gemujeng</i>	laugh
<i>Lime</i>	<i>tangan</i>	<i>asta</i>	hand
<i>Tengai</i>	<i>awan</i>	<i>siang</i>	midday
<i>Gadang</i>	<i>ijo</i>	<i>ijem</i>	green
<i>oka, nanak</i>	<i>anak</i>	<i>yoga, lare, putra</i>	child

The data in the table above indicate that the Balinese high lexicons are entirely distinct in form and show no resemblance to their Javanese counterparts, neither to *ngoko* nor to *krama* lexicons. For instance, *mekoratan* in the Balinese language means 'to defecate', whereas the Javanese language uses *ngising* (*ngoko*) or *bebucal* (*krama*) for the same meaning. The Balinese language *ngicen* and *mapica*, meaning 'to give', have no formal similarity to Javanese language equivalents such as *menehi* (*ngoko*), *nyukani* (*krama*), *maringi* (*krama andhap*), or *nyaosi* (*krama inggil*). The Balinese language *ngamel*, meaning 'to hold', contrasts with the Javanese language *nyekel* (*ngoko*) or *nyepeng* (*krama*). Similarly, *ngentungang* in the Balinese language, meaning 'to throw away', differs from the Javanese language *mbuwang* (*ngoko*) or *mbucal* (*krama*). The verb *makayun* in the Balinese language means 'to request' or 'to ask for', whereas Javanese language equivalents include *njaluk* (*ngoko*), *nyuwun* (*krama andhap*), and *mundhut* (*krama inggil*).

Other examples further reinforce this distinction. The Balinese language *kadek* or *ica* means 'to laugh', whereas the Javanese language uses *ngguyu* (*ngoko*) or *gemujeng* (*krama*). *Lime* in the Balinese language means 'hand', in contrast to the Javanese language *tangan* (*ngoko*) or *asta* (*krama inggil*). *Tengai* in Balinese refers to 'midday' or 'afternoon', while the Javanese language uses *awan* (*ngoko*) or *'siang'* (*krama*). *Gadang* in Balinese means 'green', while the Javanese language equivalents are *ijo* (*ngoko*) or *ijem* (*krama*). Finally, *'oka'* or *'nanak'* in the Balinese language means 'child', while the Javanese language uses *'anak'* (*ngoko*), *'yoga'* (*madya*), *'lare'* (*krama*), or *'putra'* (*krama inggil*).

These examples demonstrate that not all Balinese high lexicons originate from or are influenced by Javanese lexicons. Instead, many of them reflect genuine linguistic innovations or inheritances unique to Balinese.

IV. CONCLUSIONS

Based on the discussion above, it can be concluded that many Balinese high lexicons exhibit formal and semantic similarities with Javanese lexicons, suggesting that many of these Balinese high forms likely originated from Javanese. It is proved by the fact that out of 230 lexical items included in the questionnaire, 175 lexemes (76%) exhibit similarity with their Javanese counterparts. However, it is essential to note that not all these lexicons originate from the *ngoko* (low) register of Javanese; a substantial number correspond to the higher Javanese registers, namely *madya*, *krama*, *krama inggil*, and *krama andhap*. The detailed breakdown is that 65 Balinese high lexicons are identical to Javanese *ngoko* forms, 15 Balinese high lexicons show similarity to *ngoko* forms but with phonological modifications, such as the addition or omission of sounds, 49 lexicons are identical to Javanese *krama* forms, 17 lexicons are similar to Javanese high forms but have undergone phonological changes, 11 lexicons appear to originate from Javanese but have undergone semantic shifts in Balinese, 18 lexicons are presumed to derive from Old Javanese (Kawi), and finally, several Balinese high lexicons have no known equivalents in Javanese, indicating native innovation.

Thus, it can be said that *sor* lexicon (informal Balinese) is broadly aligned with Javanese *ngoko*, while *singgi* lexicon (high Balinese) corresponds to Javanese *krama*. In Balinese, the *singgi* register is employed to express politeness and deference between interlocutors (first and second persons). Meanwhile, in Javanese, politeness is not solely marked by *krama*. However, it must also be reinforced with *krama inggil* and/or *krama andhap* lexicons to convey honorific nuances in formal and hierarchical communication contexts.

The markers of high lexicon in both languages have not yet been adequately documented, particularly in the case of Balinese. It suggests the need for further research focused on identifying and analyzing the markers of high-register vocabulary, especially in Balinese. In contrast, the markers of high lexicon in Javanese have already been the subject of extensive scholarly investigation by several experts.

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Reclaiming Identity: A Feminist Analysis of Trauma and Resistance in Toni Morrison's *Beloved* and *God Help the Child*

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Abstract—This paper offers a feminist analysis of Toni Morrison's *Beloved* (1987) and *God Help the Child* (2015), exploring the intersection of trauma and resistance in Black female identity. Drawing on Black feminist thought, particularly Bell Hooks, Patricia Hill Collins, and Judith Butler, the study examines Sethe and Bride's psychological experiences as reflections of Black women's struggles for self-definition within oppressive systems. *Beloved* highlights the trauma of slavery and its impact on Black motherhood, while *God Help the Child* addresses internalised racism and the performative nature of beauty standards. Through acts of resistance and identity reclamation, Morrison's protagonists assert self-love as a transformative force in healing from intergenerational trauma.

Index Terms—Black Feminism, trauma, motherhood, colourism, resistance

I. INTRODUCTION

Toni Morrison's novels intricately explore the relationships between race, gender, and trauma in the lives of African American women. Her storytelling reveals the muted realities of Black feminine suffering, highlighting how these women are oppressed physically, mentally, and as constructs. This analysis integrates feminist and trauma approaches in examining *Beloved* and *God Help the Child*, concentrating on the emergence and dissolution of Black female identity due to enslavement, colourism, and maternal disattachment. The paper draws on Black feminist thought, especially the works of Bell Hooks, Patricia Hill Collins, and Judith Butler, arguing that in Morrison's narrative, resistance is not presented as defiant struggle, but rather unconscious acts of survival, self-reclamation, and storytelling. Morrison's feminist framework centres on her transformative vision of Black motherhood, which creates a sharp departure from prevalent Western notions that romanticise a mother as nurturing, selfless, and emotionally unwavering. Morrison's mother figures are defined by trauma and oppression, as she depicts them as emotionally stable nurturers.

In *Beloved*, Sethe's haunting act of infanticide emerges as a desperate form of maternal agency within the brutal conditions of slavery, symbolising both the horrors of maternal dispossession and the radical lengths to which Black mothers have gone to protect their children. In *God Help the Child*, Sweetness's emotional detachment from her daughter, Bride, reflects the internalised colourism that distorts maternal love in a racially stratified society.

Morrison's portrayal of motherhood in both texts resists the myth of the selfless Black matriarch and instead reveals motherhood as a conflicted, politicised space where identity is negotiated and reclaimed (Yan & Li-hui, 2017). Through her exploration of maternal alienation, racialised trauma, and the intergenerational transmission of pain, Morrison reframes the concept of resistance. Her protagonists do not merely endure; they assert their humanity through acts of care, memory, and narrative. By centring the lived realities of Black women and their struggles for self-definition, Morrison's work becomes a powerful feminist statement that challenges patriarchal and racist discourses while affirming the resilience and complexity of Black female identity. To unpack Morrison's approach, it is useful to consider Adrienne Rich's influential distinction between *motherhood* as a patriarchal institution and *mothering* as a personal, potentially

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empowering experience. As Rich notes in *Of Woman Born* (1976), "The institution of motherhood is...a male-defined construct...whereas the experience of mothering is a source of female power" (Rich, 1976, p. 13). Lauri Umansky, drawing from Rich, elaborates on this tension by differentiating between the "negative" feminist discourse where motherhood is viewed as oppressive and the "positive" discourse that envisions a liberatory potential in non-patriarchal mothering (Umansky, 1996, pp. 2–3). Morrison's fiction aligns with the latter, asserting Black mothering as a politically charged act that not only nurtures children but also fosters resistance against racial commodification and internalised inferiority.

In *Beloved*, Morrison portrays Sethe's act of killing her daughter as a harrowing expression of maternal agency within the grotesque bounds of slavery. This act, while morally complex, represents a mother's desperate effort to reclaim ownership over her children's fates: "If I hadn't killed her, she would have died, and that is something I could not bear to happen to her" (Morrison, 1987, p. 200). Sethe's trauma reflects the historical dehumanisation of enslaved Black mothers, whose maternal bonds were routinely violated. Morrison does not glorify Sethe's decision but rather situates it within a broader historical context that highlights how slavery distorted maternal love into something violent and desperate. The ghost of *Beloved*, then, becomes not just a literal haunting but a metaphor for intergenerational trauma and the struggle for maternal self-redemption. Similarly, in *God Help the Child*, the character of Sweetness illustrates how internalised racism corrupts maternal love. Sweetness distances herself emotionally from her daughter, Bride, due to the latter's dark skin: "It's not my fault. It's not my fault. It's the Lord's. Or the Devil's. Who knows?" (Morrison, 2015, p. 43). Here, Morrison critiques the lingering effects of colourism and systemic racism, showing how a legacy of racial self-loathing shapes maternal rejection. Yet, through Bride's journey of self-discovery and healing, the novel also gestures toward the possibility of reclaiming identity outside the bounds of maternal validation.

Scholars like Andrea O'Reilly have emphasised the political dimensions of Black mothering in Morrison's work, asserting that "in loving her children, the mother instils in them a loved sense of self and high self-esteem, enabling them to defy and subvert racist discourses that naturalise racial inferiority" (O'Reilly, 2004, p. 11). Morrison's representations disrupt stereotypical images of the Black matriarch, strong yet self-effacing, by imbuing her mothers with agency, emotional depth, and contradictions. These women are not moral archetypes but complex figures navigating a society structured to erase their autonomy (Rajkumar & Vijayakumar, 2024). Ultimately, Morrison reclaims Black motherhood as a multifaceted identity that carries both trauma and resistance. Through Sethe and Sweetness, and through the daughters who have the burden of their mothers' choices, Morrison articulates a feminist vision in which mothering becomes a means of survival, defiance, and identity reclamation in the face of historical and contemporary oppressions. As Patricia H. Collins aptly argues:

African-American communities value motherhood, but the Black mothers' ability to cope with race, class, and gender oppression should not be confused with transcending those conditions. Black motherhood can be rewarding, but it can also exact a high personal cost. The range of Black women's reactions to motherhood and the ambivalence that many Black women feel about mothering reflect motherhood's contradictory nature. (Collins, 2000, p. 133)

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Morrison's work has been widely studied within feminist and postcolonial frameworks. In *Beloved*, scholars have highlighted the use of memory and haunting as strategies for dealing with historical trauma (Henderson, 1991; Wyatt, 1993). Caruth (1996) emphasises that trauma is often experienced belatedly and manifests in recurring memories or silences, an idea reflected in the character of Sethe, whose trauma returns through the ghostly presence of her deceased daughter. In contrast, *God Help the Child* has been read as a modern meditation on the legacies of colourism and the commodification of Black female bodies (Page, 2017; Schreiber, 2010). The novel is frequently viewed as Morrison's critique of the socio-cultural aesthetic and moral judgments inflicted upon Black women. Hooks (1981) and Collins (2000) discuss the internalised racism and beauty osmosis within patriarchal structures that hold dominion over Black women. Morrison's female characters, especially Bride, are shaped in *Autobiography of My Mother* by Butler's (1990) theory of performativity, transforming in relation to her external environment, which, for Bride, denotes a traumatic dislocation and subsequent reconstruction. These works provide the basis for a detailed feminist approach to trauma and identity in Morrison's selected novels.

In Keita's (2018) analysis, she looks into the depiction of the terror of being black in *God Help the Child* by Morrison through the angles of abjection and trauma. She advocates that Morrison "conjures and exorcises the terror of being a Black person" so that her protagonists can confront and heal from the racial trauma. Likewise, Ramirez (2015), explores the concept of toxic motherhood in *God Help the Child*, highlighting how racism affects maternal relationships. She notes that the novel "explores the damaging effects of racism on motherhood and the dramatic impact of toxic mothering upon children." Furthermore, Beaver (2012), analyses *Beloved*, focusing on how slavery disrupted mother-child relationships. She observes that "Morrison explores the fact that slave mothers often were not allowed to raise or nurse their children, and shows the damage it does to the mother-child relationships." Keane discusses one of her reviews of Morrison's *God Help the Child*, noting a shift in perspective regarding trauma. She states, "The narration of *God Help the Child* betrays an impatience with the residues of trauma that hold back its characters from loving anew" (Keane, 2019).

Hameed and Wan Fakhruddin (2023). This paper delves into feminist identity in *Beloved*, emphasising the harrowing past of slavery and its impact on Black women's identities. Mayberry (2021). Mayberry's chapter in *The Critical Life of*

Toni Morrison examines *God Help the Child*, discussing themes of trauma and identity. She provides insights into how Morrison's later works continue to explore the complexities of Black womanhood. Likewise, Ramtani analyses *God Help the Child*, focusing on internalised colourism and its effects on maternal relationships. She highlights Sweetness's justification for her treatment of her daughter, stating, "How else can we hold on to a little dignity?" (Ramtani, 2017). To the core, Gay (2015) discusses the complexities of maternal love in *God Help the Child*, noting that Sweetness "will apologise for her child's dark skin" but not for her worldview or parenting methods. Similarly, Amissine (2018) distinguishes African feminism from Western feminism, emphasising that African feminism "underlines the notion of motherhood and is not 'anti-men'," which aligns with Morrison's depiction of maternal roles that are culturally rooted rather than oppositional. In the same vein, Badejo (1998) asserts that African feminism "embraces beauty, power, serenity, inner harmony, and a complex matrix of power," highlighting its unique characteristics compared to Western feminism and reinforcing the depth of Morrison's female characters. O'Reilly (2004) contributes to this discourse by discussing the political dimensions of Black mothering in Morrison's work, asserting that "in loving her children, the mother instils in them a loved sense of self and high self-esteem, enabling them to defy and subvert racist discourses." Moreover, Rich (1976) in *Of Woman Born* provides a foundational framework for understanding Morrison's maternal figures by distinguishing between motherhood as a patriarchal institution and mothering as an empowering experience.

Additionally, Umansky (1996) elaborates on the tension between negative and positive feminist discourses on motherhood, a tension reflected in Morrison's complex maternal characters. To further this, Singh (2016) analyses the destruction of motherhood in *Beloved* as she explains the ways in which women had to part with their offspring to enslavers. Such an act lingers delicately in contemporary understandings of motherhood. In addition to this, Fatoumata (2018) investigates the poetics of Blackness in *God Help the Child*, focusing on how Morrison transmutes the terror of being Black into healing and redemptive narrative. In more or less the same manner, López Ramírez (2015) analyses the novel's toxic motherhood and its effects on racism and internalised colourism—the maternal bond within these is deeply affected. From a viewpoint of narrative development, Keane (2019) points out the priority shift in *God Help the Child*: Morrison moves away from the earlier sympathetic portrayals of trauma, which suggests a new phase in her writing about pain and healing. Together with this, Hameed and Wan Fakhruddin (2023) provide descriptions of *Beloved* showing the fight and flight of Black women out of slavery while nurturing feminism and racial oppression. This strand is continued by Mayberry (2021), who examines how *God Help the Child* reinforces trauma and identity discourse to narrate the protagonist's self-acceptance and empowerment journey.

III. METHODOLOGY

This research adopts a qualitative approach, which is best suited for the interpretative work experienced in literary analysis. The study mainly concerns itself with the novels *Beloved* and *God Help the Child* by Toni Morrison as focal texts to analyse the intersection of feminism, trauma, and identity pertaining to bowing to racial violence. These two selected novels, which are nearly three decades apart, are systematically sampled based on their chronological order in Morrison's body of work. *Beloved* is an early attempt to capture the lingering psychological ramifications of slavery, and *God Help the Child* is her last meditation on the internalised racism and colourism across generations. In this analysis, the focus will be on the narrative framework, characterisation, and symbolic imagery, particularly on the ways Black female trauma is performed and how she resists embodiment. The analysis from these angles fosters the development of trauma, memory, and feminist interpretation centred on the social and psychological outcomes of the main actress's experiences. The approach is multifocal, bringing together the aspects of text interpretation with theoretical analysis that seeks to reveal the ways in which Morrison shapes her narratives of survival, resistance, identity reclamation, and self-definition in demasculated terms. Through the exploration of perspective changes, fragmentation of the narrative, and symbolic motifs, the analysis aims to illuminate the part of storytelling as an act of witnessing and a means of gaining power.

IV. DISCUSSION

A. Tracing the Shadows of Historical Trauma and Collective Memory

The novel epitomises Toni Morrison's *Beloved* depicting trauma and memory in diverse aspects, placing the narrative within the frameworks of sociological, psychological, and historiographical notions of injury, harm, and collective suffering. Sethe's distressing trauma is central to the story: the lifelong struggles of a mentally and spiritually imprisoned former enslaved woman, her past ensnaring her present, Samir (2020). *Beloved* is not just a haunting figure representing infanticide, but a ghostly manifestation of fragmented memory and unhealed trauma. Morrison's nonlinear narrative, dynamic viewpoints, and rich symbolism of the story paint not only the infliction of trauma, but also how it is woven into the patterns of time. The characters' psychological splintering mirrors these narrative strategies, especially Sethe's frail attempts to face the burdening horizon of her past, suffixed with merciless violence and grief-filled history, Suganya et al. (2025). As a community, addressing an isolated individual's traumatic memories that must be dealt with publicly illustrates Morrison's avoidance of trauma narration as burdensome only attributed to a single person and emphasising slavery-centred trauma as a collective heritage. Critical scholarship has long recognised *Beloved* as a seminal text that bridges literary storytelling with trauma theory and memory studies. Scholars argue that Morrison's engagement with the

legacy of slavery reveals the impossibility of fully reconciling with a past that continues to echo in the present (Hssairi, 2024).

The novel functions not only as a literary exploration but as a theoretical commentary on racial injustice, historical memory, and the lasting psychological damage of systemic oppression. The trauma endured by Morrison's characters, particularly Black women, cannot be isolated from the socio-historical contexts of racism and sexism. Indeed, Morrison foregrounds how Black women are doubly marginalised, with their identities fractured by both racial discrimination and gendered expectations. The convergence of individual and collective trauma is central to understanding the novel's deeper messages on memory, healing, and the reclamation of identity (Udoette, 2024). The significance of trauma in *Beloved* and *God Help the Child* extends beyond literary narrative into psychological realism. Morrison's portrayal of trauma resonates with clinical understandings of the condition. In psychoanalytic terms, Sigmund Freud described trauma as an experience so overwhelming that the mind fails to process it, resulting in prolonged psychological disturbance. Similarly, Cathy Caruth defines trauma as a catastrophic event that is not fully grasped at the time of occurrence, later returning in the form of intrusive memories or hallucinations. Sethe's post-traumatic behaviours and the spectral return of Beloved vividly illustrate this conceptualisation. Moreover, *God Help the Child* highlights the emotional trauma of childhood neglect as it pertains to Bride and her mother, Sweetness, who emotionally abuses Bride by disowning her because of her dark skin. This kind of rejection inflicts enduring psychological wounds that adversely shape Bride's ability to form healthy relationships throughout her life (Wang, 2020).

Morrison highlights how some of the earliest psychological scars, particularly concerning one's race and appearance, become deeply embedded and shape one's self-esteem as well as one's sense of self. Trauma, in Morrison's stories, is not only inflicted physically; it also includes emotional neglect and social abandonment. The narrative put forth by developmental psychology corroborates and expands upon the literary vision presented by Morrison, stating that abuse, separation, or absence of maternal love results in deep-rooted trauma, which is especially unforgiving in early childhood and can undermine the child's psychosocial development. Studies indicate that a vast majority of children experience trauma before the age of sixteen, often through witnessing or enduring maltreatment or emotional deprivation. Emotional abuse and neglect, though sometimes less visible than physical abuse, can have equally damaging, long-lasting effects (Subzal & Ahmed, 2021). In *God Help the Child*, the Bride's emotional starvation due to colourist rejection reflects this dynamic, underscoring how racism operates within family structures and perpetuates intergenerational trauma.

B. The Haunting of History: Trauma and Identity in Beloved and God Help the Child

In *Beloved*, Morrison constructs a narrative that unearths the deeply rooted psychological trauma of slavery through the spectral figure of Beloved, who serves as both a literal ghost and a metaphor for the repressed horrors of the past. Set in post-Civil War America, the novel reveals how the scars of slavery remain etched into the consciousness of formerly enslaved individuals. The protagonist, Sethe, though physically free, is mentally imprisoned by the violent legacy of slavery. Her act of infanticide, killing her daughter to spare her from enslavement, stands as both a tragic assertion of maternal agency and a manifestation of historical horror. As Hooks (1981) asserts, slavery not only exploited Black women physically but also stripped them of their maternal rights, rendering motherhood a site of profound vulnerability and commodification. Sethe's desperate act, though morally ambiguous, reflects an attempt to reclaim autonomy in a system designed to deny her that very power. The ghost of Beloved Sethe's reincarnated daughter epitomises the notion of "acting out" trauma, a concept elaborated by LaCapra (2001), where the trauma resurfaces in disruptive, repetitive behaviours rather than being cognitively processed or "worked through." Beloved's presence at Bluestone Road dismantles the fragile stability Sethe has tried to create, forcing her to confront suppressed memories and unresolved guilt.

Caruth (1996) argues that trauma resists full assimilation into consciousness and often returns in the form of haunting memories, which demand acknowledgement and narration. Morrison utilises the supernatural not as escapism but as a literary device that intensifies the confrontation with historical realities, compelling both Sethe and the reader to reckon with the persistent echoes of racial violence. Moreover, Morrison illustrates that trauma is not only individual but communal through symbolic spaces like the Clearing, where Baby Suggs preaches self-love, and the communal exorcism of *Beloved*, the novel gestures toward a collective confrontation with historical memory. These moments function as rituals of communal catharsis, highlighting the social dimension of healing and the necessity of shared acknowledgement of pain. As Samir (2020) emphasises, *Beloved* "narrates slavery as an inherited trauma, one that embeds itself in memory and must be addressed collectively for recovery to begin".

In contrast, *God Help the Child* shifts the temporal and thematic focus to a contemporary context, addressing the traumas stemming from internalised racism and childhood neglect. The protagonist, Bride, is emotionally abused by her mother, Sweetness, solely for being dark-skinned, which mirrors the legacy of racial hierarchies internalised within Black communities. Morrison critiques the illusion of a post-racial society by exposing how colourism, an extension of white supremacist beauty standards, continues to shape the self-worth of Black girls and women. Bride's quest for identity and validation, often through her appearance and romantic entanglements, reveals the long-term psychological damage inflicted by early emotional trauma (Donia & Haikal, 2022). Much like Sethe, Bride must confront her past to reclaim her selfhood. Her transformation is marked not only by physical changes, her body begins to regress into that of a child, but also by an emotional journey that forces her to reckon with the roots of her self-loathing. As Wang (2020) observes, Morrison "traces the psychological implications of trauma through the protagonist's bodily responses," suggesting that

unresolved emotional pain manifests physically. This somatic portrayal of trauma aligns with feminist trauma theory, which sees the body as a site where oppression and identity struggles are inscribed.

C. *Intergenerational Trauma and Feminist Resistance*

Toni Morrison's novels intricately explore the enduring and intergenerational impact of trauma, particularly on Black women. These stories portray not only how social and individual misfortunes are passed down from one generation to the next but also how Black women wrestle with systemic violence, erasure, and generational suffering while working to reconstruct their sense of self. It is within the framework of historical consciousness and feminist critique that one can appreciate Morrison's work as revealing trauma, in whatever form—slavery or colourism—is always present in the psyche and poetics of her characters. In *Beloved*, Sethe, an ex-enslaved woman, is depicted as a ghostly figure holding onto the painful trace of infanticide, which was done to protect her daughter from the horrors of slavery.

The ghost of her daughter, Beloved, returns not only as a supernatural presence but as a symbolic embodiment of unresolved trauma. This haunting dramatises Dominick LaCapra's concept of "acting out" trauma, wherein the traumatic past re-emerges repetitively and compulsively, obstructing healing (LaCapra, 2001). Moreover, Caruth (1996) argues that trauma "is experienced too soon, too unexpectedly, to be fully known," a view echoed in Morrison's fragmented narrative structure, which mirrors the disorientation of traumatic memory. As Steenkamp (2020) notes, *Beloved* "forces the reader into a nonlinear experience of pain, where memory and reality blur, reflecting Sethe's psychological fragmentation".

The novel does not confine trauma to the individual. The African American community surrounding Sethe partakes in collective rituals such as the exorcism of Beloved that become necessary for communal healing. These acts of shared confrontation with pain and loss reflect what Gilmore (2017) describes as "ritualised resistance," where community-based interventions become mechanisms for reclaiming history and identity. Through these rituals, Morrison foregrounds a Black feminist ethic of care and solidarity, highlighting that recovery is not possible in isolation. The legacy of trauma in *Beloved* is also portrayed through the lens of postmemory, a term coined by Marianne Hirsch to describe the inherited memory of trauma experienced by subsequent generations. Denver, Sethe's daughter, is a vessel of this inherited pain. Isolated and burdened by her family's history, Denver's journey toward independence and social integration symbolises the potential to interrupt the cycle of transmitted trauma. As Pittman (2019) observes, Denver's transformation is "a narrative of resilience in which individual healing mirrors the reconstruction of collective identity." Morrison revisits these themes in *God Help the Child*, shifting from historical slavery to modern expressions of trauma caused by colourism and parental neglect.

The protagonist, Bride, is emotionally abused by her mother, Sweetness, for her dark skin, an act rooted in internalised racism. Sweetness believes that emotional detachment will fortify her daughter against a racist society. However, this maternal rejection scars Bride, who grows up seeking external validation through beauty and romantic relationships. As Kehinde (2021) asserts, "Bride's identity becomes a performance, structured around how others perceive her blackness and desirability." The bride's emotional and physical regression into a childlike state is emblematic of the resurfacing of early psychological trauma. This regression forces her to relive her past and piece her identity together once more. Morrison provides a metaphor for the ways unresolved childhood trauma plays out in adulthood by using the Bride's bodily change alongside Herman's (1992) three-stage model of trauma recovery—synthesis of deficiency, estrangement, and the establishment of safety, remembrance, and reconnection. Viewing it this way, Bride's self-acceptance and subsequent return to her roots represent a woman's act of defiance to patriarchal standards of value and womanhood, of which she has been socially conditioned to internalise.

D. *Colourism, Rejection, and Performativity*

Toni Morrison scrutinises the self-destructive legacy of colourism alongside its psychological impact on Black identity within today's society. Bride, the central character, suffers emotional rejection at the hands of her mother, Sweetness, who is light-skinned. Bride's deeply rooted racism drives her to emotionally reject her mother's love due to the contorted "blue-black" skin tone she was born with. This rejection fuels an unending endeavour towards seeking love and acceptance. She outwardly assimilates into the white world of corporate America, using her beauty and business accolades to mask the unspeakable torment from childhood psychologically. As a result, Bride's sense of self morphs into an increasingly objectified suffering narrative crafted. Butler's (1990) notion of performativity, in which gender and identity are not stagnant phenomena but rather dynamic constructs perpetually performed through social repetition, captures this succinctly. The bride personifies this as she haphazardly builds a palatable self of Eurocentric beauty standards. "Self-assured" as she may appear, this illusion dissipates when she becomes devastated after the romantic relationship she invested in tangentially evaporates. This disintegration catalyses a post-physiological regression, where instead of blooming into womanhood, she further constricts into a prepubescent form. The bodily transformation epitomises the collapse of her performative identity, ensuing from inward introspection, forcing Bride to reconcile with the emotions she has repressed for years. As highlighted by Awad (2021), Morrison employs physical regression as a means of narrating the journey toward the inner child, which reveals the vulnerability of identities formed through socialisation.

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The spectral existence of *Beloved* forces Sethe to revisit her history and subsequently her past from a different angle. The trauma silencing her is shattered. Sethe's life becomes a canvas of struggle and oppression; a repeating cycle akin to Butler's performative reiteration, yet stemming from a deep-seated violence inflicted by race. "Sethe's maternal identity is one forged in the crucible of slavery's destruction of kinship... making motherhood both sacred and suspect," argues DeLombard (2007). Morrison uses *Beloved* to vividly portray the conflict between the inner self and the self-constructed as a result of social and historical trauma. Moreover, *Beloved* presents Denver's coming-of-age as a journey toward breaking inherited performativity. Denver, born into a legacy of pain and silence, initially internalises the family's isolation. However, she eventually steps beyond the confines of her haunted home and seeks community. Her emergence into the public sphere marks a symbolic shedding of inherited trauma and an embrace of a more autonomous identity. This transformation parallels that of the Bride in *God Help the Child*, where healing arises not through performance but through vulnerability, truth-telling, and reconnection.

E. Storytelling, Sisterhood, and Resistance

In *Beloved*, the power of storytelling is central to the recovery of self and memory. Sethe, haunted by the trauma of slavery and the loss of her daughter, initially avoids recounting her past. Yet, it is through storytelling, spoken memories, shared pain, and communal witnessing that healing begins. Morrison illustrates that telling the truth of Black suffering resists historical narratives that have silenced and dehumanised Black people. Paul D's demand that Sethe "put [the story] where the pain is" (Morrison, 1987, p. 86) encapsulates the novel's ethical call for confronting, rather than repressing, trauma. Sethe's ultimate recovery begins when the women in her community gather at her doorstep to exorcise the spirit of *Beloved*. This act is not simply spiritual; it is symbolic of the reclaiming of collective agency. As Wyatt (1993) observes, this exorcism is a "ritual of female community" that asserts the necessity of solidarity among Black women in healing and in reclaiming identity from the grasp of historical violence. Storytelling here becomes embodied in a communal ritual that enables survival and redefinition. Moreover, Morrison complicates the notion of historical truth by utilising a fragmented, multi-voiced narrative structure. Characters' perspectives are woven into the fabric of the novel, reflecting how trauma defies linear chronology and demands multiple, overlapping testimonies. This narrative form resists the dominant archival logic of history, positioning oral memory and personal storytelling as counter-histories that speak from the margins.

In *God Help the Child*, Morrison explores the devastating consequences of the absence of nurturing female relationships. The protagonist, Bride, is raised by a mother, Sweetness, who withholds affection out of fear that her daughter's dark skin will subject her to societal rejection. Sweetness's coldness, while portrayed as a misguided form of protection, leaves Bride emotionally desolate and disconnected from her body and self-worth. Unlike *Beloved*, where sisterhood is eventually found in the community of women, *God Help the Child* shows a solitary figure seeking reconnection through fragmented relationships (Rajkumar & Vijayakumar, 2023). Yet, it is through unexpected connections with other marginalised figures, Booker, Queen, and Sofia, that Bride begins the long process of emotional rebuilding. These relationships serve as surrogate forms of sisterhood, emphasising the significance of empathy and shared vulnerability. As Harkin (2016) points out, Morrison's characters often "navigate trauma through relationships that reconstitute the self in ways that challenge the norms of care, kinship, and love" (p. 204). Queen, in particular, functions as a maternal surrogate, providing Bride with the compassion and care that her biological mother denied her. Queen's simple acts of feeding Bride, keeping her warm, and allowing her space become revolutionary acts of healing, echoing *Beloved's* theme that recovery is not only individual but relational and embodied.

Morrison redefines resistance not as overt political rebellion but as a quieter, yet equally radical, assertion of survival, dignity, and love. Her Black female characters resist annihilation not with weapons but with memory, care, and the reclaiming of their bodies and stories. In both novels, Morrison challenges Western ideals of individualism by emphasising interdependence as a strength and love as a form of resistance. In *Beloved*, Sethe's refusal to forget even in her pain is itself a resistance against the historical erasure of enslaved women's voices. Her love, though flawed and destructive, is born of a world that sought to strip her of the right to mother, feel, and choose. As Krumholz (1992) asserts, Morrison presents "love as the site of both oppression and resistance," making it a complex and potent force in the struggle for Black womanhood. Similarly, Bride's eventual confrontation with her past in *God Help the Child* represents a shedding of performative beauty and capitalist validation. She learns that survival requires vulnerability to speak, to feel, and to be cared for. As Berman (2019) notes, "Bride's narrative embodies a turn from spectacle to substance, from performance to

presence" (p. 315). This return to emotional truth and bodily presence is Morrison's feminist call to reimagine Black identity as self-authored, nurtured, and healed through communal and emotional engagement.

V. CONCLUSION

Toni Morrison's *Beloved* and *God Help the Child* offer profound meditations on Black female identity by foregrounding the entangled legacies of historical and contemporary trauma. Through the voices and experiences of her protagonists, Sethe and Beloved, Morrison dismantles hegemonic narratives surrounding motherhood, beauty, and female subjectivity. As this study has shown through the lenses of Black feminist theory and trauma studies, both novels illustrate how trauma is inscribed on the Black female body and psyche, but also how storytelling, memory, and communal care emerge as transformative forces of resistance and empowerment. Sethe's harrowing decision to kill her daughter rather than return her to slavery is at once a manifestation of trauma and an assertion of agency. In recalling this act, she insists, "I will never run from another thing on this earth. I took and put my babies where they'd be safe" (Morrison, 1987, p. 236). Sethe's refusal to forget even the most painful aspects of her past is Morrison's reminder that healing requires the reclamation of memory, not its erasure. As Pratt (2022) argues, Morrison "foregrounds trauma as a generational inheritance, one that Black women confront through acts of narration, remembrance, and ritual" (p. 112). The exorcism of Beloved, orchestrated by the women of the community, becomes a symbolic reclaiming of the maternal body and a collective reassertion of Black womanhood.

In *God Help the Child*, Morrison shifts from the historical to the contemporary, examining how colourism and internalised racism fracture identity. Bride's rejection by her mother, Sweetness, for being "too black", initiates a lifelong performance of perfection rooted in capitalist beauty standards. Her declaration, "I looked good... better than ever. And suddenly I was happy. Totally happy" (Morrison, 2015, p. 6), is later undermined by physical regression and emotional collapse. As Bride confronts her past, she is stripped of her performative femininity and forced to rebuild her self-worth through vulnerability and emotional introspection. This shift parallels what Okonkwo (2021) calls "a move from spectacle to authenticity, an act of feminist reclamation in the face of neoliberal commodification of Black beauty" (p. 143). Morrison's feminist lens also complicates traditional conceptions of motherhood. Sweetness, unlike Sethe, attempts to protect her daughter by aligning with societal prejudice, stating, "It's not my fault. It's the way of the world" (Morrison, 2015, p. 3). Yet Morrison critiques this complicity, revealing how internalised racism becomes a generational cycle of harm. In contrast, the maternal surrogacy offered by Queen to Bride becomes a redemptive space, illustrating Morrison's vision of care beyond biology—a care rooted in empathy, healing, and presence.

Recent studies reinforce Morrison's portrayal of storytelling and sisterhood as crucial tools of resistance. As Johnson (2023) observes, "Morrison crafts sisterhood not as mere camaraderie but as a political structure through which Black women reclaim narrative control and refuse erasure" (p. 189). Whether through Sethe's community or Bride's reconnections, Morrison reimagines survival as a collective endeavour that challenges dominant patriarchal and racial ideologies. Ultimately, *Beloved* and *God Help the Child* illustrate that reclaiming identity requires a courageous confrontation with trauma in its rawest forms. Morrison's protagonists resist victimhood not through spectacle, but through acts of remembrance, bodily care, and emotional truth. Their journeys show that survival is itself a radical form of resistance, especially when undertaken in a world that seeks to silence and fragment Black women's stories. As Morrison writes in *Beloved*, "It's not evil. Just sad. Something sad" (p. 107), a line that encapsulates her empathetic rendering of pain not as weakness, but as the soil from which strength emerges. Through a rich interplay of narrative, memory, and affect, Morrison redefines resistance as the radical act of existing lovingly, truthfully, and visibly in a hostile world. Her work continues to shape contemporary feminist discourse by centring Black women's voices, making space for their grief and their triumphs, and transforming trauma into a site of reclamation and rebirth.

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The Quest for Identity in Saud Alsanousi's *The Bamboo Stalk*: A Psychosocial Reading Through Erikson's Identity Development Theory

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Abstract—This research examines the psycho(social) identity development of Isa (also referred to as Jose), the protagonist in Saud Alsanousi's novel, *The Bamboo Stalk* (2012), through the lens of Erik Erikson's theory of psychosocial development. Applying Erikson's eight stages of identity development, the paper explores Isa's progression from infancy to adulthood, focusing on his journey from identity diffusion to identity achievement. The study centers on Isa's maturation, using detailed examples from the novel to illustrate his internal struggles and personal growth. While the paper primarily focuses on Isa's identity exploration, it briefly touches on social, economic, and cultural issues that intersect with his development. Ultimately, this research highlights how Isa, despite a challenging environment and difficult childhood, successfully attains the virtues of fidelity and love—core to Erikson's adolescent and young adulthood stages—through processes of sublimation, understanding, and forgiveness. This study eventually affirms the applicability of Erikson's theory to Isa's narrative, providing valuable insight into his quest for self-discovery.

Index Terms—*The Bamboo Stalk*, Alsanousi, identity, Erikson, psychosocial

I. AN OVERVIEW OF THE NOVEL

In 2012, Kuwaiti writer Saud Alsanousi won the International Prize for his Arabic novel, *The Bamboo Stalk*, which garnered widespread acclaim. The novel was translated into English by Jonathan Wright (Qualey). It chronicles the life of Isa/Jose, the son of a wealthy Kuwaiti father, Rashid Attarouf, and a Filipino maid, Josefine Mendoza. Following Isa/Jose's birth, the Attarouf family disowns him and rejects him as a part of their family. Josefine is also compelled to return to the Philippines. Isa/Jose faces dual hardships: discrimination in the Philippines due to his Arabic heritage, poverty, and fatherless status, as well as maltreatment in Kuwait because of his mother's social status and his Filipino background, evident in his appearance. Throughout his journey, he grapples with internal conflicts concerning his true identity, torn between two names, languages, religions, social classes, countries, and lives.

II. ERIKSON'S PSYCHOSOCIAL THEORY OF IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT

In the 1950s and 1960s, the American psychologist and psychoanalyst Erik Erikson developed the idea known as the Stages of Psychosocial Development in his books *Childhood and Society* (1950) and *Identity: Youth and Crisis* (1968). Erikson held the same view as Sigmund Freud that personality evolved throughout successive phases. Erikson also agreed with Freud that the unconscious plays a crucial role in personal development (Cherry, 2023). However, Erikson's psychosocial development theory expanded upon Freud's psychosexual development theory through the establishment of parallels between childhood phases. Erikson also added to Freud's theory by incorporating the impact of social dynamics and the continuation of psychosocial development into maturity (Carrey, 2010). According to Cherry, "Freud's approach has fallen out of favor with many modern psychologists and researchers, but Erikson's views remain popular and relevant" (2023). Erikson's theory, in contrast to Freud's theory of psychosexual stages, addressed the influence of social experiences throughout the individual's lifespan. Erikson, therefore, was concerned about the roles that relationships and social contact play in human development. Erikson emphasizes the role of cultural, social, and environmental influences in personal growth as individuals encounter new challenges (May-Varas et al., 2023).

According to Erikson, personality evolved through a succession of stages. Erikson's theory posits that human progress

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includes eight predetermined stages from infancy to late adulthood. According to Vogel et al. (2009, p. 406), the following are the stages that comprise Erikson's theory:

- Stage 1: Trust vs. Mistrust (Infancy from birth to 18 months)
- Stage 2: Autonomy vs. Shame and Doubt (Toddler years from 18 months to three years)
- Stage 3: Initiative vs. Guilt (Preschool years from three to five)
- Stage 4: Industry vs. Inferiority (Middle school years from six to 11)
- Stage 5: Identity vs. Confusion (Teen years from 12 to 18)
- Stage 6: Intimacy vs. Isolation (Young adult years from 18 to 40)
- Stage 7: Generativity vs. Stagnation (Middle age from 40 to 65)
- Stage 8: Integrity vs. Despair (Older adulthood from 65 to death)

Each stage has characteristics such as virtues, psychological conflicts, significant relationships, and existential questions. Successfully resolving these conflicts is essential for individuals to transition confidently into the next new phases of life. It is important to note that resolution does not necessarily involve complete mastery or elimination of confusion but rather achieving a necessary balance without regression (May-Varas et al., 2023).

Erikson's theory entails that the eight consecutive phases of a person's development are impacted by social, psychological, and biological variables at different phases in one's life (Kivnick & Wells, 2014; Knight, 2017). Erikson contends that within each stage, individuals encounter a pivotal conflict in their growth (Malone et al., 2016). According to Erikson, these conflicts are predicated on developing a psychological quality or failing to develop that quality. There is a high likelihood of personal development during this period but also a high likelihood of failure. According to Orenstein and Lewis (2022), people who resolve the conflict effectively leave the stage with psychological assets that will benefit them throughout their lifetimes. These conflicts may prevent them from acquiring the fundamental skills necessary for a robust sense of self if they are not addressed effectively.

Erikson's psychological theory entails that an individual undergoes a psychosocial crisis during each stage, which may positively or negatively impact on the growth of their personality. Erikson claims that these crises are psychosocial in nature, as they arise when the psychological requirements of the individual collide with those of society. Based on the theory, the effective completion of each stage leads to the development of fundamental virtues such as hope and integrity and a healthy personality. The ego can utilize basic virtues as defining qualities to overcome later crises. An unhealthy personality and sense of self can result from the inability to complete further phases, which can be caused by the failure to complete a stage. Failure results in negative consequences such as despair and mistrust; nonetheless, these phases can be effectively rectified in the future (McLeod, 2024).

Erikson's bio-psychosocial theory has impacted numerous academic disciplines, including identity formation and modern literary theory. Within the context of Saud Al-Sanousi's novel, *The Bamboo Stalk*, and upon assessing Isa's/ Jose's psychosocial development, the focus will be on the following phases in his lifespan: infancy, early childhood, play age, adolescence, and early adulthood. The protagonist's prenatal conditions will also be examined due to their significance and applicability to the subject of study. The issues of trust, shame, initiative, industry, and intimacy will also be explored to gain insight into how the protagonist grappled with and resolved his internal complexities while coming to terms with identity diffusion.

III. LITERATURE REVIEW

Previous studies have explored the identity and identity crisis theme in Saud Al-Sanousi's novel, *The Bamboo Stalk*. Within this context, they also investigated issues pertaining to religion, culture, discrimination, sexual exploitation, social inequalities, exclusions, and marginalization from various perspectives. For example, Al-Mutairi (2016) examined the novel as a Bildungsroman novel and explored the main character's identity quest from childhood to adulthood. On the other hand, Bouazza (2022) and Al Areqi (2015) discussed cultural hybridity in the novel, and Mohammed (2021) deployed intersectional theory to illustrate the protagonist's experience of oppression and discrimination in its various manifestations. Hammoud (2023) exposed the novel's depiction of female sexual exploitation; Almutairi et al. (2019) emphasized the novel's binary cultural identity; and Jarrar (2015) scrutinized the novel's dual identity and identity division; Abdu-Alhakam et al. (2020) examined the identity crisis associated with religious confusion.

According to the Merriam-Webster Dictionary, a Bildungsroman is "a novel about the moral and psychological growth of the main character." As a Bildungsroman protagonist, Isa begins a quest for maturity and growth, showcasing the transitional stages from childhood to adulthood and his psychological evolution. His introspective journey culminates in the Philippines, where he comes to terms with the challenge of integrating into Arabic Islamic culture despite sharing the same blood and genetics. Isa/Jose tries hard to embrace his duality and reconcile his contradictions, even when others may not (Al-Mutairi, 2019). Isa has to experience all the stages of his life to reach his final decision. When he decides to return to the Philippines, his feelings of social exclusion, confusion, pain, bewilderment, and suffering culminate, and he ultimately achieves a sense of resolution. Isa reconciles with his dual reality of double cultures, names, nationalities, and religions as he realizes he is not a bamboo stalk. However, realizing that he is not the same as a bamboo stalk, he confesses that he cannot uproot his roots and transplant them into another soil where they can grow and thrive naturally (Mohamed, 2021).

Other studies that dealt with Isa's grafting or "planting himself" in another culture addressed a different view. They examined the novel through Colin Richards's Graft Theory lens. Isa's identity construction is manifested as he tries to ascertain himself into two different and incompatible cultures. However, he fails to claim recognition of Kuwaiti society for wider cultural, religious, national, and social reasons (Almutairi et al., 2019). Isa's inability to integrate into another culture is not addressed negatively in all studies where "vulnerable" Isa suffers from societal denouncement. On the contrary, Jarrar highlights the significance of Isa's hybridity in overcoming the tension of diaspora and multiculturalism. Isa resolves his insider and outsider conflict by compromising the two cultures, nations, and religions so he doesn't have to choose one of them (Jarrar, 2015).

Although Jarrar, Almutairi, and Mohamed focus on multiple facets of the cultural complexities of Isa's identity, others investigate religion, social exploitation, social marginalization, and social class as major themes in the novel. By following the descriptive discourse analysis method, researchers suggest that Isa's identity crisis emerges from a religious dilemma in his father's community. The predominant power of socioeconomic norms and entrenched traditions prevent religion (Islam) from playing its true role, manifested in equality and justice among people regardless of their ethnicity or social class. In the same way, Isa's diffusion among the three religions, Islam, Christianity, and Buddhism, aggravates his loss. Isa experiences internal contradictions between Islamic teachings and Muslim behaviors, which affects his religious identity negatively and ultimately impedes his identity achievement during adolescence (Abdu-Alhakam et al., 2020).

Concerning social vulnerability and discrimination against women, another study explores the theme of sexual exploitation manifested in Filipino women's relationship with Josefine, the maid, and her wealthy employer. This insight spreads to cover a wider vision, including that of other women in the novel. Josefine, her sister, and other Filipino women are forced to use their bodies under economic and social weakness, which violates their dignity and leaves them with irremediable psychological and physiological effects of anxiety, fear, low self-esteem, and unwanted pregnancies (Hammoud, 2023). Although Hammoud calls for social acts of women's protection against sexual exploitation, she doesn't elaborate on its disastrous effects on their children. In the case of Isa and his cousin Merla, both victims suffer the most from the illegitimate relations of their parents.

These studies are important because they connect Isa's identity construction to a wider socio-cultural environment. However, they provide neither a precise analysis of the protagonist's inner conflict throughout his lifespan nor shed light on his psychosocial development stage by stage. Following Erikson's psychosocial theory and based on evidence from the novel, this paper analyzes Isa's growth from infancy to adulthood and from identity diffusion to identity realization. It traces how he finally achieved his identity despite the challenges and contradictions.

Erikson's psychoanalytic theory has been employed to analyze numerous fictional characters in numerous articles. For instance, Santoso and Fajar (2023), Putra (2024), and Peterson and Stewart (1990) have all implemented Erikson's psychoanalytic theory in their research. However, *The Bamboo Stalk* novel has not received a systematic analysis within Erikson's theory, despite a proliferation of studies discussing the concept of identity confusion and its cultural impact. Throughout his life, Isa has experienced numerous conflicts resulting from the surrounding environment, which shapes his personality. Erikson has addressed those conflicts and related them to cultural factors following a gradual description of negotiated achievements and failures. In the novel, Isa gradually experiences psychosocial dilemmas by providing a detailed description of them. Even infancy and preschool stages are addressed from different social, cultural, and psychological perspectives. This makes Isa's character a good example to be understood through Erikson's lenses.

IV. ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

The novel is divided into five parts: Isa before birth, Isa after birth, Isa: the first wandering, Isa: the second wandering, and Isa on the margin of the homeland. The first part describes the circumstances of Isa's parents and how they met and got married. It gives a clear background of their cultural and socioeconomic classes.

A. *Isa Before Birth*

Although Erikson doesn't address the role of the prenatal surrounding environment in shaping human characters and identity, many other recent studies have shed light on it. The circumstances of Isa's creation are mentioned and analyzed to provide background knowledge and to add a deeper understanding of the character based on Erikson's framework, which contributes to affording an overall picture of his life.

Before his birth, Isa / Jose describes his mother and the women alike as handkerchiefs that strange men use before throwing them away (Alsanousi, 2012). Isa states that they are "objects of unidentified fathers" (Alsanousi, 2012, p. 18). However, Isa / Jose feels privileged over them because his father doesn't deny him. He promises his mother will acknowledge him when the time comes. The circumstances of his mother's pregnancy are not ideal. His mother is a maid in a house of people who abuse her verbally. Her constant anger and dissatisfaction force her to avenge them on purpose, especially the lady of the house, Ghaneemah. Ghaneemah doesn't like Isa's mother because she thinks Josefine is ominous.

Along with her three daughters, Ghaneemah is meant to be her daughter-in-law. Isa's mother's forced labor as a servant in a foreign nation, despite her desire to further her education as a woman who enjoys reading as a hobby, highlights another aspect of her suffering. (Alsanousi, 2012).

Secrecy and skepticism surround Isa's first creation. His parents agreed to marry secretly on an unofficial marriage contract at night. Isa's father is unwilling to tell anyone about his relationship with his mother because it is a disgrace to

his family. Isa's mother hides her pregnancy at first. Then, when Ghaneemah discovers this, she expels her son and his wife out of the house. Her pregnancy is surrounded by doubt. It is a secret that must be hidden because it is a shame, a curse, a mistake, an infliction. It wasn't a real marriage (Alsanousi, 2012).

Recent studies in psychology have revealed that the emotional distress, anxiety, or depression of prenatal mothers has serious effects on their offspring and later impacts their long-lasting psychological growth (Glover, 2019). This explains how Isa suffers from anxiety and an inferiority complex later in his life. He calls himself a "number" (Alsanousi, 2012, p. 17); a "thing" (Alsanousi, 2012, p. 211); a "rat in front of an eagle" (Alsanousi, 2012, p. 220); "the rat which is me stays silent" (Alsanousi, 2012, p. 221); "a pet dog" (Alsanousi, 2012, p. 253), and "a rotten fish" (Alsanousi, 2012, p. 245).

B. Stage One: Infancy (0–2)

In the first moment of Isa's birth, his father refuses him unconsciously. Isa's mother describes him: "he looks at you for a long time looking for even one thing that looks like him, but he was watching a mixture of different faces, his face isn't among them" (Alsanousi, 2012, p. 49). This might explain why Isa has never been satisfied with his face later in his life: "damn this face, multiple names but my face remains steadfast" (Alsanousi, 2012, p. 252); "I am rejected, I am not a king, I am Isa Rashid Attarouf, a name brings honor and face brings shame" (Alsanousi, 2012, p. 214); "I stand in front of the mirror watching myself nothing resembles me except my face" (Alsanousi, 2012, p. 285).

However, his father carries him to his grandmother, hoping to forgive them when she sees the baby. Instead, she refuses to accept them, calls Isa a "disgusting thing who likes his mother, a curse!" (Alsanousi, 2012, p. 51), and urges her son to get rid of them quickly. Under the family pressure, Isa's mom returned to the Philippines with her son. There, they live in absolute poverty, in an overcrowded and unhygienic house, suffering from her father's addiction, gambling, and abuse. His grandfather also refuses him as the son of an unidentified father. Despite her dismal situation, Isa's mother takes care of herself and her son by adapting to her father's expectations and sharing her money with the family. As a mother, she protects and loves her son, which might help Isa not mistrust all the people around him and mitigate the incoming psychosocial damage inflicted upon him later.

Isa's mother's care and affection make up for the sense of abandonment from his father, grandmother, and grandfather. Erikson contends that infants experience the dilemma of trust vs. mistrust, which is shaped by the caregiver's relationship with them. In Isa's case, despite the skeptical environment, Isa's mother (his caregiver) harnesses him with love and care. Eventually, he has achieved the virtue of hope required to move on successfully to the next stages, although he must face other challenges that create some psychosocial complexes as he is growing up.

C. Stage Two: Early Childhood (2-4) & Stage Three: Preschool (4-5)

This is a distinguished phase in Isa's development. His mother marries another man, travels away, and leaves Isa with her sister, Aida, who takes care of him. Aida is an anxious young woman who walks with red eyes and a solid countenance because she is addicted to Marijuana. She suffers from sex exploitation because she was forced to work in prostitution when she was seventeen years old, in addition to having a fatherless baby girl. Although Aida tries to take care of her daughter and Isa, especially when his grandfather abuses him, "I will take care of him," she says" (Alsanousi, 2012, p. 79), her efforts wouldn't affect the children positively. Young children who stay with addictive, troubled caregivers suffer anxiety, depression, low self-esteem, and cannot regulate their emotions (Manza, 2023). In these two stages, where family and parents play a crucial role in Erikson's interpretation, Isa suffers from shame, guilt, and doubt due to his grandfather's abuse, his mother's abandonment, and his aunt's neglect, which minimizes his abilities in exploration and self-assertion.

Later in the adult phase, he encounters challenging situations that mirror these circumstances. For example, when a stranger tries to rape him, he feels guilty. Instead of blaming the rapist, he doubts himself and wonders if the reason is his physical appearance: "My appearance doesn't tell if I am one of those feminized men, although many of my homelands are like that" (Alsanousi, 2012, p. 336). When he fears spoiling the seats, he doesn't value himself as a worthy human; "I liked the place although I shrank in my seat afraid of spoiling anything unintentionally" (Alsanousi, 2012, p. 217); he happily accepts a room in his father's home, which is an "annex for servants" (Alsanousi, 2012, p. 229); and he "never claims his right to his father's money" (Alsanousi, 2012, p. 243). He frequently reminds himself of his unworthiness: "I am of no value; they don't need me" (Alsanousi, 2012, p. 224); "My grandmother doesn't look at me as if I am invisible" (Alsanousi, 2012, p. 247). Furthermore, he believes he is undeserving of love: "I don't know; she used to hate me" (Alsanousi, 2012, p. 206). He doesn't even have a favorite food, as he is willing to accept anything offered to him: "I didn't think before if I liked the food or not; the food is for me to stay away from hunger" (Alsanousi, 2012, p. 197).

Erikson suggests the importance of the second and third stages in achieving the virtues of will and purpose. These pertain to children's relationships with parents and family. It seems that Isa has a toxic, troubled relationship with his family, exacerbated by the absence of his parents. As a result, Isa's conflicts remained unresolved, leading him to grow up with self-doubt, low self-esteem, and guilt, all of which heavily influenced his later life.

D. Stage Four: School Age (5-12 Years)

Unlike the previous stages of Isa's life, this phase stands out due to the significant events that have shaped his identity construction and personal choices in adulthood. Some events pertain to his exploration of his religious identity, while

others focus on acknowledging the existence of his other identity. His mother reveals his other identity by narrating his father's memories and the necessity of returning to Kuwait to claim his real heritage as a member of the Attarouf family.

When he is nine, Isa has to attend a confession ritual at school, imagining his father's promised land. At this point, Isa has contemplated his faith as a means of salvation, confessing his minor transgression of stealing a half-cooked chicken from an elderly woman out of hunger. However, he doesn't feel relieved, and the sin of "bee buzzing" has been following him ever since. The priest reassures him, "God will forgive you if you pray, and the bee buzzing will fade" (Alsanousi, 2012, p. 70), but Isa wonders: "I pray a lot, but the bee likes staying in my head for a long time" (Alsanousi, 2012, p. 70). When he is twelve, Isa visits the church to do "a confirmation ritual according to the seven holy secrets despite receiving only three of their baptism, confession, and confirmation" (Alsanousi, 2012, p. 67).

According to Erikson, children at this age seek answers to their existence and consciously explore their abilities to claim competence. However, abuse, ridicule, or punishment can cause them to regress (May-Varas et al., 2023). Isa tries to enhance his independence by questioning his relationship with God and dreams of having a more comfortable life in Kuwait as the son of a rich and honorable man. He also develops a specific emotion towards nature: "I imagined myself as a tree in my grandfather's land" (Alsanousi, 2012, p. 93). He distinguishes his feelings: "As much as I love the green color in Mendoza's land, I hate Mendoza" (Alsanousi, 2012, p. 93). He also develops a personal ethical commitment towards saving the environment around him.

On the other hand, Mendoza, his grandfather, has turned Isa's life into an inferno, both physically and psychologically. The old man doesn't hide his hatred toward Isa; he hallucinates under the influence of drink, keeps telling the boy frightening myths to torment him, assigns him frequent arduous, tedious work, and shouts at him day and night. Isa's anger, bitterness, and hidden hatred towards his grandfather's abuse have intensified, leading him to rebel, complain, and draw comparisons between his life and that of his cousin Merla. Ultimately, he leaves the family and school, looking for a job in the city a few years later.

In addition to the timeline and circumstances around him, two pivotal events affect Isa's life. The first event is the accident that befalls his younger brother, Adrian, while the second is the frequent trips he takes with his cousin Merla. Adrian manages to crawl to the nearby river and falls into the water, resulting in an intellectual impairment. Even at age five, Isa takes responsibility for caring for his brother. The incident has torn Isa between guilt and shame. Scientific studies relate childhood trauma to delayed psychosocial development, low well-being, and depressive thoughts (Dorresteijn et al., 2019), which makes it hard for Isa to feel fully competent and independent later in his teens.

Contrary to the first incident, Isa's multiple journeys with Merla in the mountains, caves, and markets enrich his soul and allow him to explore intimacy as another dimension of his identity for the first time. Merla is the feminine version of Isa; she also suffers from identity diffusion, like him. She is fatherless and a daughter of an addicted, and broken woman. However, she deals with her psychological problems differently. Unlike Merla, Isa's nurtured environment and his grandfather's maltreatment largely subjugate him, with "no one submissive to Mendoza but me" (Alsanousi, 2012, p. 106), whereas Merla frequently exhibits rebellious behavior. She is aggressive, doesn't adhere to her mother's instructions, smokes Marijuana, has a girlfriend, and treats her grandfather abhorrently. Her feelings of inferiority and social exclusion have impeded her from achieving Erikson's virtue of competence at this stage of her life.

Similarly, Isa remained far from achieving competence. At this stage, the child compares himself to other children, according to Erikson. Isa compares himself to his cousin Merla, questioning his status as a submissive and weak individual. Erikson argues that children must achieve themselves through social activities, sports, schoolwork, and family life. Isa has endured significant hardships at this point in his life due to the denial of his natural rights as a child. Still, his discovery's journeys with Merla compensated for some voids in his life and contributed to saving him later from self-damage.

E. Stage Five: Adolescence (13-19)

This is a critical stage in Isa's life because he leaves his family and school to explore other identities. Religious affiliations, occupational roles, and self-definition, including nationalities, values, defenses, capacities, idealizations, and rejection or acceptance of individual and group identifications, are among other characteristics related to identity in Erikson's theory (Peterson, 1990). At this stage, achieving identity requires answering Erikson's theory's main question, "Who am I?" (May-Varas et al., 2023).

(a). Isa's Exploring His Religious Identity

Isa, the son of a Christian mother and a Muslim father, can't decide which religion to follow. His mother doesn't encourage him to embrace Christianity when he is young. Because she believes he is going to convert to Islam like his father, his aunt insists on taking him to the church to complete the sacred rituals, and the other members of his family call him Buddha. Isa hesitates to embrace any faith; he is perplexed and wonders, "What if I borrow my faith?" (Alsanousi, 2012, p. 85).

In his journey to explore his faith, Isa visits the Seng Guan Buddhist temple in Manila. The candles and prayers reassure him of the same feelings in the church: "Was it faith that gave me this feeling of awe about the place? Or do candles, statues, and icons play a role in this?" (Alsanousi, 2012, p. 104). As Isa leaves the temple and enters the taxi, the driver wonders about the presence of the cross around his neck while visiting the temple. Isa replies, "To bring something, although I am uncertain of it" (Alsanousi, 2012, p. 180).

Even after traveling to Kuwait and learning to pray and fast as a Muslim, Isa continues to wear the cross while imagining his father whispering in his ear, "Allah Akbar," when he is born. Isa is not convinced of the privilege of one religion over the other because he believes that Christianity and Buddhism "both call for tolerance, goodness, and favorable treatment. Would I treat one of them if I followed the others?" (Alsanousi, 2012, p. 36). Among his family in Kuwait, he acts like a Muslim, but he "wants to practice any ritual that makes me nearer to God" (Alsanousi, 2012, p. 261).

At this stage, Isa feels lost among the three religions besides having complex inquiries within the same religion. He thinks about the priest in the church and asks, "How difficult are your questions, Father, and how straightforward are my answers?" Yes, Yes, Yes!" (Alsanousi, 2012, p. 105). In the same way, Islam arouses Isa's curiosity. He has two contradictory images of Islam: the first is the heroic Muslim leader Makataan Sultan, who is a national figure in the Philippines, and the other is Abu Sayyaf, who is known for robbery, kidnapping, extortion, and killing of hostages (Alsanousi, 2012), he wonders: "Which one is Islam? Which is Islam, the one depicted in the Ressala movie or the one that led to the death of the film's director?" (Alsanousi, 2012, p. 273).

(b). Isa's Exploring His Occupational Roles

Overwhelmed by his demanding grandfather, sixteen-year-old Isa decides to travel to the city looking for a job. Upon his arrival, he realizes his potential: he must perform numerous tasks for Mendoza in the town at no cost, and he can exchange these tasks for monetary compensation. He begins his career as a street banana seller, transitions to a professional massage therapist at the Chinese center, and eventually secures a position in a tourist company, albeit at a modest salary. Working for the company allows him to mix with other nations, especially Arab Kuwaitis, enabling him to explore his inner affiliation with his other identity. He immerses himself in the Arabic language, music, and culture. He becomes accustomed to them. "I started to recognize Kuwaitis because I am one of them; I convinced myself" (Alsanousi, 2012, p. 151), and one day, he finds himself telling a group of Kuwaitis that he is just like them. "Hey, stop. My name is Isa. I am one of you; please wait for me" (Alsanousi, 2012, p. 151). Moreover, Isa feels surprised and confused because his sadness over Kuwaiti stranger tourists traveling back to Kuwait surpasses his grief over his grandfather's funeral (Alsanousi, 2012, p. 161). At this point, he questions his real national and familial identity. These thoughts and feelings have led to an increase in Isa's space for another identity. As he wanders through Manila's streets, he thinks, "Despite the years I have lived among you, I don't belong to you" (Alsanousi, 2012, p. 179).

(c). Isa's Exploring His National Identity

Several cultural, economic, and social factors affect Isa's perception of himself. Isa is torn between two nationalities, two countries, and two languages. He also suffers from a split in the body and mind. His outside appearance is Filipino, but he thinks he is Kuwaiti inside. In short, he is "Kuwaiti made in the Philippines" (Alsanousi, 2012, p. 159). This conflict is not limited to inner complexities; it spreads to create externally complicated situations that have exacerbated his inner ones. Owning a Filipino face makes him vulnerable and marginalized in Kuwait. One policeman steals his money by asking for his identity card (Alsanousi, 2012); another takes him to jail without scrutiny; and an airport officer disrespectfully directs him to join the foreigners' queue without checking his passport. His voice has settled Isa's staggering thoughts: "Shall I go to the Filipinos' queue, or shall I stand with people who don't resemble me?" (Alsanousi, 2012, p. 184). "They must be Kuwaitis, like me" (Alsanousi, 2012, p. 185). Without understanding the officer's Arabic language, Isa shivers and wonders if he is in a military zone, yet he protests silently, "He refused my face before he saw my passport!" (Alsanousi, 2012, p. 186).

These situations aren't limited to strangers; they extend to his father's family. After finally accepting him as a family member, his grandmother feels ashamed of keeping him at her house. Isa is admitted to the servants' annex, made sure to be hidden, and forbidden to introduce himself as Attarouf's son. He feels "I am a secret that shouldn't be revealed to others" (Alsanousi, 2012, p. 230). Isa makes a concerted effort to blend in with Kuwaiti society in various ways. He seeks to convince himself, among others, that he is Kuwaiti. He wears their clothes, shares their food, obeys their social and traditional rules, participates in their social and political activities, and takes care of his grandmother's hurt knee. However, all of Isa's attempts have gone in vain. Kuwait and its people have rejected him as an intruder, and he feels rejected and displaced: "I feel bitter alienation towards land and people" (Alsanousi, 2012, p. 195). Isa assimilates himself: "The bamboo in those luxurious vases seems to be like me in Attarouf's house, not in its normal place" (Alsanousi, 2012, p. 217). Paradoxically, Isa's pain and disappointments are proved to be his way to reconcile with himself and realize who he is.

(d). Isa's Identity Crisis Peaks

According to Erikson, an identity crisis is a turning point toward maturity because the individual seems to achieve a reconciliation between his past, present, and future on the one hand and forge a resolution between the inner self and society's expectations. It is a crossroads stage where adolescents must choose regardless of their upbringing (May-Varas et al., 2023). Isa must endure numerous traumatic experiences before he can ultimately discover his identity by confronting his circumstances.

The turning point happens when his aunt Noureyah calls her baby son Isa, but Isa (the protagonist) thinks she is calling him, so he comes to celebrate with the family and their guests. On that day, Isa faces immense humiliation in front of the

guests as his grandmother, half-sister, and aunts reject him as a member of their family. Later, his aunt follows him, cursing him, and says, "Shut up! If I call you Filipino, then you have to answer. I was calling my son, you jerk!" (Alsanousi, 2012, pp. 266-267). Isa, heartbroken, retreats to his room, shedding tears and experiencing hallucinations (Alsanousi, 2012). At this point, Isa realizes he can't be part of the Attarouf family. Submissive, kind Isa shows his first rebellious act when his half-sister calls him to congratulate his grandmother on Eid. His outrage is evident when he asks, "After everyone has left? Why are you treating me in this manner after she assured me that the 'shame' face would not be visible to anyone? Does God also refuse me?" (Alsanousi, 2012, p. 275).

During the same period, he receives an email from Merla asking him to reconcile with his reality: "Overcome your face as I have overcome mine; prove to yourself before others who you are; believe in yourself, and then others will believe in you. If they don't, that's their problem, not yours" (Alsanousi, 2012, p. 282). The impact of the email, coupled with his inner depression, causes Isa to erupt in anger when the neighbor mistakenly believes he is the new servant. "I am Isa Rashid Attarouf; whether you like it or not, this is what I inherited from my father. While I inherit my mother's features, I do not inherit her previous occupation in this house. What should I do to recognize myself?" (Alsanousi, 2012, p. 287). Ultimately, Isa decides to leave the Attarouf family and hires a small flat in a Filipino building for immigrants, where he sees "the Philippines in the new flat, although it is in Kuwait" (Alsanousi, 2012, p. 308). He realizes that he is living in Kuwait, just as any expatriate Filipino struggles to achieve his dreams as a machine (Alsanousi, 2012). Isa becomes brave enough to face people other than his family. He challenges Ibrahim's thoughts about miracles and Islam when he claims that the name of God is written on the clouds. He also doubts Ibrahim's faith logic when he says that God inflicts disasters on people to increase their faith. Isa asks him, "Does God send the waves to destroy the believers' homes around the mosque so that nonbelievers believe this is the true religion?" (Alsanousi, 2012, p. 289).

(e). *Isa Gains the Virtue of Fidelity*

Isa believes that being the son of a Muslim father and a Christian mother is not a shortcoming. On the contrary, he allows himself to learn more about Buddha and feels grateful to his parents for introducing him to two different religions because this "makes me know my God by my way" (Alsanousi, 2012, p. 66). Finally, he reconciles with his beliefs because he is confident that "there is no place for faith but heart" (Alsanousi, 2012, p. 299) and is satisfied with his faith: "I pray as no one does but me" (Alsanousi, 2012, p. 356) and "I have almost started to find my relationship with God; I am secure with it" (Alsanousi, 2012, p. 312). The act of differentiation between God and believers is another dimension of Isa's religious maturity: "Religions are greater than believers. In my right ear, the voice of Adhan rises; in the left, the church bells ring; and in my nose, the smell of Buddha temple's incense; I know God is here" (Alsanousi, 2012, p. 300).

Beyond religion, Isa has embraced his dual identity and social status as a source of joy. He holds the belief that a nation that rejects cultural diversity and its citizens who succumb to the influence of class and tradition are the true victims. He comes to believe that the Attarouf family is his curse, not vice versa: "Attarouf is my curse; I am not the curse of Attarouf" (Alsanousi, 2012, p. 394). Moreover, he symbolically feels superior to the Attarouf family because it represents discrimination and social bias: "I will hurt Attarouf if I write" (Alsanousi, 2012, p. 326). His realization that his late father has suffered special alienation (Alsanousi, 2012, p. 386) and that his half-sister and many others experience displacement in their homeland relieves him because he has a choice that is not available to them. Isa is also Filipino, so they are stuck, but he is free: "We are stuck in this Attarouf; we can't free ourselves from it, but you can" (Alsanousi, 2012, p. 349).

The wealth and prosperity in Kuwait, which Isa once dreamed of as a paradise, have already suffocated him; "Kuwait becomes smaller as a matchbox" (Alsanousi, 2012, p. 383); he admits to himself that "Kuwait is a false reality" (Alsanousi, 2012, p. 323). Isa recognizes that there are more precious things to find, such as family, accessibility, and acceptance, "In my isolation, I find myself missing my family in the Philippines. The water in the Philippines is sweeter" (Alsanousi, 2012, p. 303). Isa understands that if "Kuwait has spat him out" (Alsanousi, 2012, p. 380), it is not his fault; it is the biased social system's responsibility.

Although Erikson discusses the importance of the adolescence phase in achieving an identity, he doesn't prioritize it as a crucial and distinctive stage. Other psychologists, however, are attentive to its role in shaping human identities. For instance, psychologist James Marcia, renowned for his research on the development of identity during the late phases of adolescence, primarily focuses on this phase under Erikson's theory. He proposes four types of identity, each based on the presence or absence of two variables: commitment and exploration (Adelson, 1980; Bohlin et al., 2009). According to Erikson, Isa begins to develop his identity by exploring various life choices. He sets out on a quest to find answers and resolve the entrenched psychosocial complexes from his childhood. He left his hometown and freed himself from Mendoza. However, he doesn't reach out for answers, as the curse of his past has followed him. This requires him to face challenges to resolve his identity confusion in the next stage of his life.

F. *Stage Six: Early Adulthood (20-39)*

In accordance with Erikson's sixth stage, Isa has finally achieved balance concerning religion, national identity, and self-worth. His self-esteem is achieved through a deep awareness of himself, and it peaks when he writes his own story in his native language. According to McAdams and Gietl, the most powerful tool to achieve psychosocial sameness and continuity in life is narrative because it is the point where culture and self may harmonize with each other (McAdams & Gietl, 2015).

Reading the novel's final chapter, Isa has achieved a balance of identity. Through sublimation and forgiveness, he grows on a psychological and physical level. His reconciliation with his life, his two families, double religions, dual nationalities, and reality sublimates into the abstract act of writing as he narrates his story. According to Freud, sublimation is a mature defense mechanism that challenges aggressive subconscious feelings (Cohen & Kim, 2020). Isa has found the answer to this stage: "Can I love?" (May-Varas et al., 2023).

Forgiveness is another sign that proves Isa's maturity. Self-control, well-being, and a developed sense of psychological health are associated with maturity (Allemand et al., 2022). Moreover, it is important to understand the different dimensions of empathy within an individual's roles and contexts because it helps to analyze a real-world situation (Joseph & Kaplan, 2024). Isa practices empathy toward himself and others regarding his newly discovered, well-defined psychological and social identity. He forgives his grandfather, Mendoza, his grandmother, Ghaneemah, and his aunt, Noureyah. Because he is fatherless, he sees his grandfather's harsh qualities and maltreatment as a sign of emptiness, weakness, and the projection of his inner misery. "I comprehend why Mendoza used to express, 'I am alone; I am weak'" (Alsanousi, 2012, p. 202). His grandmother's rejection of him is a whole-culture and community decision (Alsanousi, 2012, p. 77). Even his aunt Noureyah's rage is justified: "I don't blame her if the small cat roars" (Alsanousi, 2012, p. 370).

According to Erikson, in early adulthood, intimacy vs. isolation is the stage of readiness to share life with others after achieving identity in the previous one, so it is necessary to resolve all the previous psychosocial conflicts to enjoy healthy intimate relationships. Isa has achieved his identity at this stage and resolved the lingering residues of the past. Not only did he come to reconcile with his past, duality, and psychosocial challenges, but he also overcame them by imposing his narrative through literature. He develops a special concept of himself based on accepting and submitting to all contradictions. So, he successfully got married to Merla, practiced gratitude, and experienced satisfaction.

V. CONCLUSION

This paper attempts to provide a thorough psychological analysis of Isa's character and traces his quest for identity at different stages of his life. The research employs a qualitative descriptive approach to gather and analyze data in detailed descriptions. It offers a profound comprehension of Isa's internal conflicts as he undertakes a spiritual and difficult journey to unearth his identity. Following Erikson's psychosocial framework, particularly in studying Bildungsroman novels, offers a thorough analytical exploration of the character's personality. Erikson's theory of psychosocial development allows us to deconstruct Isa's character in *The Bamboo Stalk*, tracing his life stages from childhood into early adulthood and exploring his inner journey from diffusion and loss to maturity and reconciliation.

The investigation demonstrates that the protagonist effectively achieves both fidelity and love, the virtue of the adolescent and adulthood stages, through sublimation, understanding, and forgiveness, despite contending with a difficult childhood and a challenging environment. Isa has achieved his individuality while also reconciling past issues. Through the medium of writing and literature, he was able to not only overcome his psychological and social obstacles but also achieve reconciliation with his past and dualities. It is through the acceptance and submission of all contradictions that he cultivates a unique self-concept. Therefore, he secured a fruitful marriage to Merla, cultivated gratitude, and experienced contentment. Isa takes over the Attarouf family's narrative by authoring the novel. Isa, the denial impoverished maid's son, constructs an alternative reality where he controls the scenes and events and underscores his marginalized identity through discourse. Isa, therefore, imbues his life and faces the traditional dominant forces of family and social class, and he reaches the ultimate self-authenticity by telling his story not in Arabic but in his Filipino language, Tagalog. Saud Al-Sansui presents his novel as a mere translation of Isa's voice in a call for inclusive, just communities.

The novel showcases individuals in a state of cultural hybridity, still in the process of discovering their true identities and grappling with the conflict between their native homelands and their adopted countries. The study may provide valuable insights for other expatriates, aliens, strangers, and marginalized individuals, helping them recognize the impact of external injustice and human limitations stemming from traditions, racism, and discrimination. Literature does not merely serve as "art for art's sake," but claims a social and ethical responsibility. *The Bamboo Stalk* is a compelling novel that delves into various issues while examining the protagonist's self within a broader social and ethical context. It embodies a humanistic, realistic narrative that offers an understanding of real situations and connections (Santoso & Fajar, 2023). It is possible to infer that *The Bamboo Stalk* is a narrative about the internal healing and forgiveness of underprivileged, virtually damaged humans who are bearing the heavy burdens of class and race. If we anticipate Isa's middle and late maturity in the context of Erikson's psychosocial theory of identity development, Isa will probably achieve success and fulfillment in his 70s or 80s and master the virtue of wisdom.

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Emotion Metaphors We Live by: A Cognitive Study of Metaphors With Body Parts in Colloquial Jordanian Arabic

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Abstract—This study investigates how metaphors with body parts used in colloquial Jordanian Arabic are constructed and communicated to express emotions. This study, grounded in conceptual metaphor theory frameworks, used a thematic approach to analyze a dataset of 110 metaphors. The data collection period extended from October 4th to December 27th, 2024. The data analysis revealed six themes that were central to emotions in colloquial Jordanian Arabic. These themes included anger, shame, happiness, pride, sadness, and fear. They emphasized the importance of body part metaphors in constructing different emotions in colloquial Jordanian Arabic. The findings showed that several categories of conceptual metaphors, including orientational, structural, behavioral, and ontological, were employed in the linguistic expressions of these metaphors. These conceptual metaphors contribute to the construction of positive and negative emotions. Moreover, our findings revealed several conceptual patterns for linguistic metaphors, including body parts and expressing emotions. By providing insight into the construction of conceptual metaphors with body parts that articulate different emotions, this study contributes to a greater understanding of how metaphors can help express complicated emotions.

Index Terms—body part metaphors, emotions, conceptual metaphor theory, colloquial Jordanian Arabic

I. INTRODUCTION

The expression of emotions, such as happiness, anger, fear, sadness, and guilt, is an essential aspect of human existence that is inescapable throughout our lives. Wollheim (2008) defined emotions as mental states or dispositions represented in the human mind. Human nature fundamentally includes a spectrum of emotions elicited by both positive and negative events. In the reviewed literature and our daily experiences, metaphors serve as a prevalent means of conveying emotions to recipients. According to Charteris-Black (2004), the terms motion and emotion share a common etymological origin, suggesting that their interconnections reflect the distinct mental experiences we experience.

Conversely, metaphor, as posited by Lakoff and Johnson (1980), is a ubiquitous linguistic phenomenon that emerges instinctively across all facets of life, including the abstract notions of emotion. Before the publication of *Metaphors We Live By* (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980), this occurrence was initially viewed as a rhetorical and ornamental issue from an Aristotelian perspective. Nevertheless, this notion has been disproved, and metaphor has been recognized as the process of elucidating an inaccessible concept or reality by referencing a more accessible or familiar counterpart. At this point, analogies involving human body parts provide an effective means of expressing concealed emotions to interlocutors and conveying perceptions of the surrounding world.

Although extensive research has examined metaphors across diverse domains, there has been comparatively less focus on emotional metaphors associated with body parts, from both universal and cultural perspectives (e.g., Kövecses, 2003, 2010; Liu & Zhao, 2013; Al-Ramahi, 2016; Hamdi, 2016). This is the area in which our study intends to examine changes. It examines culturally specific metaphors utilized in colloquial Jordanian Arabic and their reconceptualization within various metaphorical patterns or themes. By applying Lakoff and Johnson's (1980) cognitive theory of metaphor (CMT), which typically addresses the creation or decontextualization of emotional linguistic metaphors, we explored the different themes conveyed through emotional metaphors used by speakers of colloquial Jordanian Arabic. These themes not only represent emotions but also shape how these emotions are communicated by interlocutors.

The significance of our study lies in its potential to shed light on how body part metaphors used in colloquial Jordanian Arabic are constructed and communicated to express emotions (e.g., sadness, happiness, and anger). By analyzing 110 body part metaphors, we aim to understand the emotions communicated through these metaphors and how these emotions are linguistically constructed. The findings of this study will contribute to broader discussions on how emotions are articulated through metaphors of body parts.

Through this research, we seek to answer the following questions:

- 1) What emotions are conveyed through metaphors involving bodily parts?
- 2) How are these emotions constructed through body parts metaphors in colloquial Jordanian Arabic?

In answering these questions, we hope to not only highlight the importance of body part metaphors in shaping and communicating emotions but also show how language can be a space where meanings can be generated and communicated in diverse ways.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

A. Related Literature

Research on body part metaphors representing emotions is limited in literature, mostly because metaphorical representations of emotion in the reviewed texts typically lack verified citations or contextualization. Moreover, humans, by and large, express their abstract emotions in relation to their concrete body parts (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). This implies that the conceptualization of human emotions is generally similar, notwithstanding the cultural variances expressed in our body parts (Kövecses, 2003). For example, Kövecses (2003) suggested conceptual metaphors for all emotion metaphors derived from their verbal expressions, exemplified as HAPPINESS IS BEING OFF THE GROUND, which is rooted in the metaphorical expression *they were in the clouds* (Kövecses, 2003, p. 21). However, in Chinese culture, the emotion of happiness is conceptualized as: HAPPINESS IS FLOWERS IN THE HEART (Liu & Zhao, 2013). Mashak et al. (2012) studied emotion metaphors in English and Persian languages. They found that both languages share some basic ideas about emotions, but there are slight differences in the conceptualizations of sadness. Various emotion types were also detected and redefined as concrete entities exemplified by fire, illness or poison, living being, light, and destructive forces of nature in the political discourse of Germany (Zorina, 2024).

Apart from the CMT framework, it has been found in a more recent study conducted on nursing students' feelings towards COVID-19 that their negative emotion of FEAR with respect to this pandemic is mirrored and reshaped in terms of concertized and visible dark colors (Atay et al., 2024). This study provides a clear-cut insight that concealed abstract emotions need to be determined using more concrete terms. Zibin and Hamdan (2019) analyzed figurative devices employed in Jordanian Arabic to conceptualize the emotion of fear. This study indicates that figurative devices, such as conceptual metonymy, conceptual metaphors, and conceptual metaphonymy, are employed to conceptualize FEAR. Conversely, our study mainly focused on FEAR in relation to metaphors of body part. In addition, our study was primarily concerned with the emotions conveyed through metaphors involving bodily parts.

Body part metaphors exemplified by 'eyes' were also examined in the expression of the emotions of guilt and fear in the holy Qur'an (Al-Mousa, 2020). It is apparent that literal descriptions of emotions and feelings are incomparable to their metaphorical counterparts in articulating diverse emotional experiences (Ortony & Fainsilber, 1987). This is further corroborated by an empirical study on emotions, which indicated that metaphors evoke more vivid emotional responses than literal words (Mohammad et al., 2016). Despite the universally physiological and bodily experiences of expressing human emotions, culture plays a significant role in their restructuring (Kövecses, 2003). For instance, the emotion of being 'extremely happy' in Tunisian Arabic is linguistically realized as 'being on the verge of death or craziness,' which is not shared universally.

These studies highlight the complex facets of metaphorical expressions, primarily their connections to fire, illness, poison, living entities, light, and destructive forces of nature. Research on the use of body part metaphors in the expression of emotions within colloquial Jordanian Arabic remains rare. The present investigation examines additional body part metaphors frequently used to express emotions in colloquial Jordanian Arabic, thereby addressing the gap noted in Kövecses' (2003) analysis of universal patterns of body part metaphors associated with emotions. Our research expands the scope of existing research by examining the structures of metaphors associated with body parts. This study advances the current scholarship on the mundane metaphors of emotion, addressing a substantial gap in the literature on emotion metaphors.

B. Theoretical Framework

In cognitive semantics, metaphor is no longer viewed exclusively as a decorative element in literature and poetry. It is an essential device for comprehending how people convey abstract notions and plays a crucial role in our perception of the figurative language associated with these concepts. Metaphors emerge unconsciously in everyday language as a medium to convey our thoughts and emotions to others with whom we converse (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). Conceptual metaphor theory (CMT) developed by Lakoff and Johnson (1980) was employed in this study as a framework for incorporating abstract concepts, particularly emotions. The most important aspect this theory (CMT) does is that it makes it easier to organize metaphorical utterances using conceptual metaphors.

Lakoff and Johnson (1980) identified three primary categories of conceptual metaphors: Orientational, structural, and ontological. First, the orientational metaphor through which understanding complex concepts is based on spatial orientations, such as UP-DOWN, IN-OUT, and FRONT-BACK, as in the conceptual metaphor HAPPY IS UP, which is based on metaphoric expression, *my spirits rose* (Lakoff & Johnson, 2003, p. 15). Structural metaphors, wherein abstract concepts are delineated through concrete counterparts, exemplified by HAPPINESS IS A NATURAL FORCE, are based on the linguistic manifestation of metaphors, *I was overwhelmed with joy* (Kövecses, 2010, p. 108). Third, ontological metaphors whereby poorly delineated concepts or emotions are shaped in terms of containers, substances, or objects, as in ANGER IS A HOT FLUID IN A CONTAINER that is linguistically realized by *making one's blood boil* (Kövecses, 2010, p. 54).

These types provided insights into our analysis by explaining the structures of metaphors related to body parts, which are the central focus of this article. Incorporating Lakoff and Johnson (1980) conceptual metaphor theory (CMT) was helpful in determining the types of conceptual metaphors employed in body part metaphors to embody certain emotions. We should keep in mind that emotions are usually discussed through what Goatly (2011) calls "metaphor themes and sub-themes," in which the vehicle domains are mapped onto the tenor domains. We can rethink the concept of EMOTION by considering WEATHER, which encompasses the movement of FLUIDS or EXPLOSIONS. This led to the metaphor theme EMOTION IS WEATHER, with the sub-themes EMOTION IS FLUID and EMOTION IS EXPLOSION (Goatly, 2011, p. 20).

Lakoff and Johnson (1980) delineated the core principles of conceptual metaphor theory (CMT) as the conventional argument, conceptual structure argument, and embodiment argument. The conventional argument suggests that metaphors are widely used in ordinary languages. The conceptual structure proposes that metaphors extend beyond verbal phenomena. Linguistic metaphors illustrate how concepts are structured within cognition. People describe and understand one concept through another by 'mapping' knowledge from the 'source concept' to the 'target concept.' Moreover, in the embodiment argument, the source conceptions are often substantially concrete and possess a certain 'bodily basis' (Johnson, 1987, p. 13), on the one hand. Conversely, the target concepts are often abstract and cannot be directly experienced or witnessed. The conceptual structure argument states that our understanding is largely based on our physical existence and the places in which we live. This is because many of our concepts are metaphorical. The three arguments offered insights into the network of concepts organized within metaphors to express emotions, aiding in the interpretation of metaphors of body parts in colloquial Jordanian Arabic.

III. METHODOLOGY

We employed a qualitative methodology and implemented a thematic analysis framework along with conceptual metaphor theory (CMT). This facilitated a comprehensive examination of the strategies inherent in body part metaphors employed daily in colloquial Jordanian Arabic.

Data was collected from October 4th to December 27th, 2024. Throughout this timeframe, we collected 289 metaphors from Jordanian people with whom we interact daily. We additionally requested that our university students write metaphors related to the typical body parts with which they are acquainted. The assignment was designated as non-evaluative, with participants urged to write metaphors related to bodily parts that are relevant to them in their vernacular and used in their daily lives. The metaphors gathered were initially written in Arabic and subsequently translated into English by the first and second authors, who are native Arabic speakers and proficient in English.

Ethical considerations are of utmost importance in this study. All participants provided informed consent after receiving comprehensive information regarding the study objectives, the voluntary nature of their involvement, and their entitlement to withdraw at any point without consequences. Consent was obtained prior to the assignment. To safeguard the participants' privacy, their names were omitted from all transcripts and publications. The data were securely stored on encrypted devices that were solely accessible to the researcher. Ethical approval for this study was obtained from the institutional Ethics Review Board.

The data was compiled using purposive sampling. This sampling method allowed us to select instances rich in information (Patton, 2002) and improved our ability to address the research questions. Moreover, the purposive sample enabled us to select metaphors that encompassed those pertaining to body parts and convey emotions. This facilitated the development of themes related to emotions such as sadness, anger, and fear. Following the collection of 289 metaphors from people and our students, we meticulously examined each and eliminated those without sufficient information to address our study inquiries. We considered the metaphor 'His tongue is like the edge of a sword' sufficiently informative to be utilized in addressing our study questions. Concurrently, we eliminated 179 metaphors from the dataset because of their irrelevance to the research questions. For example, as our research concentrates on metaphors related to body parts that convey emotions, we excluded the metaphor 'your talk is on my eye and my head' from our analysis. Accordingly, 110 metaphors were analyzed.

The raw materials were recognized, classified, and examined. We employed Patton's (2002) thematic analysis to identify codes, categories, and themes. We began by acquiring further knowledge of the available information. We conducted a thorough analysis of the data and took notes to streamline the coding process. Initial codes were extracted from the data gathered. Preliminary codes were generated through a comprehensive investigation of the large datasets. Diverse codes were systematically organized to create thematic groups. We analyzed the coded data to identify potential

thematic patterns to address the first research question. We conducted a comprehensive assessment after generating themes related to emotions.

This study was based on Lakoff and Johnson's (1980) conceptual metaphor theory (CMT), which was used to assess and elucidate the identified themes. By examining the orientational, structural, and ontological metaphors in the coded data, we learned more about the different types of conceptual metaphors. We addressed the second research question by examining the categories of conceptual metaphors in the formation of metaphors involving body parts, and how they convey emotions.

IV. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This section analyzes the construction and communication of body part metaphors in colloquial Jordanian Arabic to convey emotions. Utilizing Lakoff and Johnson's (1980) cognitive theory of metaphor (CMT), we examined the various themes expressed through emotional metaphors employed by speakers of colloquial Jordanian Arabic. These themes signify emotions and influence how these emotions are conveyed by interlocutors. This analysis is organized by themes and includes a detailed look at exact metaphorical expressions to explain how metaphors for body parts relate to the emotions expressed.

Theme 1: Anger

As proposed by Kövecses (2010), the emotion of ANGER in colloquial Jordanian Arabic shares slight universal metaphorical patterns. For example, in some languages, ANGER metaphorically surfaces in '*His blood is boiling*' and '*My heart is full of anger*' which are conceptualized as ANGER IS A HOT FLUID IN A CONTAINER. However, there are culture-specific instances in which this emotion is shaped by various conceptual themes or patterns.

1. He *burst* my gall bladder.
2. He *poisoned* my body.
3. He *raised* my blood pressure.
4. He *burnt* my blood or nerves.
5. It *continues with me* until my nose.
6. *Sparks* in his eyes.

Looking at the metaphorical expressions in (1-6), the human body and its parts are viewed as containers holding the emotion of ANGER. According to Kövecses (2010), container metaphors are the most common conceptualization of human emotions, as shown in the universally shared examples. However, metaphors instances in 1-6 are colloquially used by Jordanian speakers in that the emotion of ANGER is sensed by different body parts, and they are usually uttered when someone feeds up with negotiation with others. For example, the linguistic metaphor in (1) underpins the conceptual pattern ANGER IS AN EXPLODED CONTAINER, whereby anger looks like a balloon filled with air to the extent that it eventually erupts. This finding aligns with Belkhir (2016), who demonstrated both similarities and differences in the use of ANGER metaphors across languages. Belkhir's (2016) study shows that in American English, the three main metaphors for ANGER come from the ideas of CONTAINER, POSSESSED OBJECT, and OPPONENT, whereas in Kabyle, they come from THE FIRE, CONTAINER, and POSSESSED OBJECT. These findings validate the near universality of the CONTAINER metaphor.

In (2), anger prevails as POISON contaminates the entire body, thus realizing the metaphor pattern ANGER IS A POISONOUS SUBSTANCE. In examples (3) and (4), the emotion of ANGER is conceptualized as SUBSTANCE, which can be either burst or burnt. Both instances are commonly uttered by Jordanian speakers when someone repeatedly becomes furious by another. As such, they underpin the ontological metaphor type: ANGER IS A BURST SUBSTANCE and ANGER IS A BURNT SUBSTANCE. Our findings correspond with Bogdzevič (2021), who examined the metaphors of anger, fear, and sadness embedded in the conceptual system of English speakers and explored the role of various bodily and cultural factors in the creation of those metaphors. In Bogdzevič's (2021) study, the metaphors mapped the source domains of CONTAINER, ANIMAL, SUPERNATURAL BEING, HIDDEN ENEMY, TORMENTOR, SMELL, TASTE, PLANT, MIXED SUBSTANCE and PURE SUBSTANCE onto the target domains of ANGER, FEAR and SADNESS. Likewise, the emotion of ANGER in (5) is determined as a boiling liquid or steam filling the whole body, where it rises from the heart until the nose, thus coming up with the metaphor pattern ANGER IS A BOILING LIQUID/STEAM FILLING ONE'S NOSE. Finally, ANGER is realized in terms of sparks of FIRE filling the eye in which the linguistic metaphor in (6) serves as a fodder for the proposed theme ANGER IS FIRE SPARKS IN THE EYE. Our findings align with those of Nummenmaa et al. (2013), who suggested that emotions are depicted in the somatosensory system as universally applicable categorical somatotopic maps. Awareness of these emotion-induced physiological alterations may contribute significantly to the emergence of consciously experienced emotions.

Theme 2: Shame

This emotion of shame is highly sensitive to Arab culture as it is associated with negative or bad norms and conduct, and is contrasted paradigmatically with honor (Landes, 2007). Tissari (2006) identified shame as a bad experience that is interrelated with notions such as negative emotions, bad morals, misfortune, and regret. Shyness, however, can be either positive or negative depending on the situation encountered (Al Jallad, 2010). Kövecses (2003) proposed the universal conceptual metaphor SHAME IS A DECREASE IN SIZE which is based on the metaphoric expression, *I felt*

this big and HIDING AWAY FROM PEOPLE which are commonly uttered by Jordanian speakers. Nevertheless, other metaphoric instances are not universally shared.

7. *His eye was broken.*
8. *Had the earth split and swallowed me.*
9. *S/He put our heads in the mud.*

In the first instance, shame is usually sensed when a person commits a mistake or has a weakness known to people and does not dare to utter a word in front of them. The eye is seen as the body part upholding the emotion of shame and hence conceptualizing the metaphor pattern SHAME IS SOMEONE'S BROKEN EYE. However, shame in (8) is embodied in terms of the whole body buried in earth: SHAME IS AN EARTHED PERSON'S BODY. This finding corresponds with Bročić (2018) who found that negative self-evaluation feelings are more strongly associated with the image of a reified emotion forcibly contacting the experiencer. Unlike the above metaphors by which shame is experienced by oneself, it is reflected and mirrored by someone's relatives and, more specifically, the family. Usually, this metaphorical expression is produced when someone commits adultery or fails in their studies. As such, we can infer the metaphor pattern SHAME IS SOMEONE'S BURIED HEAD IN MUD. This resonates with Maunder (1996), who argues that shame can be expressed in relation to psychological and biological systems. Instances (7), (8), and (9) show that shame is metaphorically constructed in both systems. The biological reference to shame is embodied through 'eye' in (7), 'me' -whole human body in (8), and 'heads in the mud' in (9). These instances reflect the psychological aspect of shame.

Theme 3: Happiness

The emotion of happiness in colloquial Jordanian Arabic shares the orientational conceptualizations of HAPPINESS IS UP and HAPPINESS IS BEING OFF GROUND, as proposed by Kövecses (2010). In colloquial Jordanian Arabic, the shared metaphors are linguistically realized as follows: *He flew with joy*, and *He hit his head on the ceiling out of joy* as in examples (10) and (11) below. However, metaphoric expressions in 12-15 display different source domains and patterns.

10. *He flew with joy.*
11. *He hit his head on the ceiling out of joy.*
12. *Joy doesn't fit in with me.*
13. *He brought joy into my heart.*
14. *He showered my heart.*
15. *His smile stretched from ear to ear.*

The emotion happiness in (12) is viewed in terms of a container in which its capacity does not cope with a substance (i.e., the whole human body). Based on this containment metaphor, we can infer the conceptual pattern HAPPINESS IS AN INCAPABLE CONTAINER FOR HOLDING A SUBSTANCE. Nevertheless, happiness in (13) is conceptualized in terms of an entity or substance, and the heart is the container holding it. As such, the conceptual pattern of HAPPINESS IS AN ENTITY ENTERING A CONTAINER is inferred. Similarly, showing one's heart in example (14) means bringing good news to someone. As such, happiness is sensed in terms of good news, and the heart is a container holding it, whereby we can infer the pattern HAPPINESS IS AN ENTITY MOVED INSIDE A CONTAINER. In the last instance, happiness is based on an orientational basis that is different from UP-DOWN fashion; it is conceptualized horizontally as in the pattern HAPPINESS IS A MOVING ENTITY FROM EAR TO EAR. Our analysis aligns with Yu (1995), who explored how the concept of happiness is metaphorically structured in English and Chinese. Our findings also resonate with Yu (1995) and Safarnejad et al. (2014), who argued that the metaphor of happiness is largely grounded in shared bodily experiences, with linguistic surface variations that can be explained by different cultural perspectives.

Theme 4: Pride

Like other emotion themes, pride is metaphorically realized through different linguistic expressions reflecting orientational, behavioral, or ontological types of conceptual metaphors. Below is a list of the most common metaphorical expressions that represent this theme:

16. *His head is getting as big as a pot.*
17. *His head can't fit in the door.*
18. *Back strap.*
19. *He is the hair of my moustache.*
20. *His nostrils are in the sky.*
21. *He spreads his shoulders like a turkey.*

Pride in instances (16) and (17) is based on behavioral responses when someone gets overpraised yet utters these linguistic metaphors. Accordingly, we can infer the conceptual pattern PRIDE IS SOMEONE'S HEAD THAT IS GETTING BIGGER. In colloquial Jordanian Arabic, the human back in example (18) symbolizes strength as opposed to someone's broken back, which is shown under the sadness emotion theme, and moustache in (19) symbolizes virility. Sijpesteijn (2018) contends that hairstyle and mustache are powerful ideological and social signifiers of inclusion and exclusion, group identity, and othering in Arab cultures.

Back strap and *moustache* metaphors (see Examples 18 and 19) are usually produced when a person cherishes and brags about his brothers and relatives as support. Thus, the conceptual patterns inferred might appear as PRIDE IS A PERSON'S SUPPORTED BACK and PRIDE IS A PERSON'S THICK MOUSTACHE. The metaphoric instances in (20) and (21) are based on the orientational metaphor type, in which expressing the emotion of PRIDE IS UP looks offensive to people, unlike the positive pride emotion shown in examples (18) and (19) yet inferring the pattern PRIDE IS UP. Likewise, the linguistic metaphor in (21) involves a negative pride emotion in which we can generate the metaphor pattern PRIDE IS A PERSON'S SPREADED SHOULDERS. These findings are consistent with Xi and Pingying (2017), who showed that in a cross-cultural context, metaphorical variations appear in three types: physical experience, character of emotion, and cultural-related metaphor.

Theme 5: Sadness

The emotion of sadness in colloquial Jordanian Arabic is conceptualized through the following metaphoric expressions:

22. *His death broke my back.*
23. *His death left achiness in the heart.*
24. *My heart was taken off from its place.*
25. *His chest gets constricted.*

The linguistic metaphors in (22) and (23) are commonly uttered when a member of someone's family, relatives, or closest friends decease, and as such, body parts exemplified by the back, heart, and chest (as in examples 22, 23, 24, and 25) are the most frequently used ones. It was mentioned earlier that the back body part symbolizes support, which in turn displays the emotion of pride. However, expressing sadness, particularly at death events, is symbolized by a broken back, yet we can infer the conceptual metaphor pattern SADNESS IS A PERSON'S BROKEN BACK. In example (23), sadness is embodied in terms of a substance that settles in a container, which leads us to infer the pattern SADNESS IS A PERPETUAL ACHING SUBSTANCE IN A CONTAINER.

Likewise, the conceptual metaphor in (24) is usually uttered when hearing shocking news such as death; hence, the heart, which is commonly conceptualized in terms of a container (Siqi, 2020) turns into a substance and the whole body of a container. This finding echoes Zhou and Jiang (2020), who emphasized that the source domains for HEART metaphors include CONTAINER, OBJECT, and LIVING ORGANISM, which could justify the universality of conceptual metaphors. Accordingly, sadness can be conceptualized as SADNESS IS EJECTED SUBSTANCE FROM A CONTAINER. Lastly, apart from the death context, sadness emotions prevail when a person is annoyed with bad news or by other people's sayings, yet the chest-body part metaphor is usually employed to express sadness. As such, the inferred metaphor pattern resembles SADNESS IS A TIGHTENED SUBSTANCE.

Theme 6: Fear

The emotion of fear is universally realized through embodied experiences and behavioral responses; however, it is conceptualized via different body parts common to colloquial Jordanian Arabic, as listed below:

26. *His legs couldn't carry him.*
27. *His heart fell down.*
28. *His heart has become between his legs.*
29. *He lost his mind.*
30. *His blood froze/ dried up.*

Legs are momentum body parts that carry the whole body to stand up (Herr & Popovic, 2008). This implies that fear is based on embodied experiences, physiological and behavioral responses, or reactions (Kövecses, 2010). However, they become incapable of doing so when experiencing the emotion of fear in colloquial Jordanian Arabic (see Example 26). As such, fear linguistic metaphors can be conceptualized in terms of FEAR IS INCAPABLE PERSON'S LEGS TO LOAD HUMAN BODY. The *heart* metaphor in instances (27) and (28) is conceptualized in terms of a substance that fell down (i.e., orientational grounds) rather than being a location or container holding different emotion types, following Kövecses (2010). Accordingly, the metaphoric expressions in these examples can be figured in terms of the metaphor pattern: FEAR IS FALLEN HEART FROM ITS LOCATION. In (29), the mind as part of the human body is utilized to conceptualize the emotion of sadness (Kövecses, 2010).

Nevertheless, in colloquial Jordanian Arabic, this body part is metaphorically uttered to express fear, and as such, its weightlessness indicates a person's fear of shocking or unreasonable news. Based on this, the inferred metaphor pattern can be FEAR IS DECREASE IN THE WEIGHT OF A PERSON'S MIND. Lastly, blood metaphors in colloquial Jordanian Arabic are commonly used to conceptualize different types of emotions (Zibin, 2021). Fear in (30) is understood in terms of the liquid that becomes a dried or frozen substance hindering a person's life to go on. This leads to the generation of the conceptual metaphor pattern FEAR IS FROZEN BLOOD/DRIED MATERIAL. This finding is consistent with Zibin's (2021) study, which examined blood metaphors in Jordanian Arabic. According to this study, blood is considered a source domain that can be used to conceptualize character traits, essence, and emotion.

V. CONCLUSION

This study analyzed 110 metaphors from a conceptual metaphor theory perspective to identify the categories of conceptual metaphors employed in the linguistic expressions of these metaphors. Conceptual metaphors and thematic

analytical frameworks steered this research. The findings of this study suggest that several themes have emerged that signify emotions and influence the way these emotions are conveyed by interlocutors. These themes included anger, shame, happiness, pride, sadness, and fear. In addition, the findings show that metaphors for body parts are fully related to the emotions expressed.

Furthermore, our findings revealed several conceptual patterns for linguistic metaphors, including body parts and expressing emotions. Anger is conceptualized as 'ANGER IS AN EXPLODED CONTAINER,' 'ANGER IS A POISONOUS SUBSTANCE,' 'ANGER IS A BOILING LIQUID/STEAM FILLING ONE'S NOSE,' and 'ANGER IS FIRE SPARKS IN THE EYE.' Shame is conceptualized as 'SHAME IS SOMEONE'S BROKEN EYE,' 'SHAME IS AN EARTHED PERSON'S BODY,' and 'SHAME IS SOMEONE'S BURIED HEAD IN MUD.' Happiness is conceptualized as 'HAPPINESS IS AN INCAPABLE CONTAINER FOR HOLDING A SUBSTANCE,' 'HAPPINESS IS AN ENTITY ENTERING A CONTAINER,' 'HAPPINESS IS AN ENTITY MOVED INSIDE A CONTAINER,' and 'HAPPINESS IS A MOVING ENTITY FROM EAR TO EAR.' The conceptual patterns for pride emotion are 'PRIDE IS SOMEONE'S HEAD THAT IS GETTING BIGGER,' 'PRIDE IS A PERSON'S SUPPORTED BACK,' 'PRIDE IS A PERSON'S THICK MOUSTACHE,' and 'pattern PRIDE IS A PERSON'S SPREADED SHOULDERS.' The conceptual metaphor patterns of sadness are 'SADNESS IS A PERSON'S BROKEN BACK,' 'SADNESS IS A PERPETUAL ACHING SUBSTANCE IN A CONTAINER,' 'SADNESS IS AN EJECTED SUBSTANCE FROM A CONTAINER,' and 'SADNESS IS A TIGHTENED SUBSTANCE.' Fear linguistic metaphor is conceptualized as 'FEAR IS INCAPABLE PERSON'S LEGS TO LOAD HUMAN BODY,' 'FEAR IS A FALLEN HEART FROM ITS LOCATION,' 'FEAR IS DECREASE IN THE WEIGHT OF A PERSON'S MIND,' and 'FEAR IS DRIED BLOOD/MATERIAL'.

However, this study had some limitations. The metaphors examined in this study were limited to the period October 4th to December 27th, 2024. Furthermore, this study used a limited sample size of only 110 metaphors of body parts. Because of the qualitative nature of this study, we chose instances with a significant amount of information for a full analysis of the data volume.

The findings of this study should encourage future research on the potential of emotional expressions of body part metaphors. The findings of this study are restricted to certain emotions articulated through body part metaphors; therefore, future research can add to the body of knowledge on the subject by investigating other types of metaphors that convey emotions. Future research should investigate new emotional metaphors in social and cultural settings.

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Following the Trend and Focusing on Pastime—A Critical Review of the Poetry Translation by the Mandarin Duck and Butterfly School

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Abstract—Looking close into poetry translation published in major magazines of the Mandarin Duck and Butterfly School, this paper finds out “pastime” has been a key word to explain the preferred themes, style and poetic features of its poetry translation. Using modern poetic theories, this paper also carries out contrastive analysis between original and translated poems, to diagnose poetic deficiencies and trace poetic genes of the translated poems. Besides, this paper tries to explain poetry translation development of this School based on its interaction with new literature groups in “May 4th” movement. A critical review of the poetry translation of this School can help to understand vernacular poetry creation and translation, and popular literature development in modern China.

Index Terms—Mandarin Duck and Butterfly School, poetry translation, pastime, poetics

I. INTRODUCTION

The Mandarin Duck and Butterfly School is considered to say highly of amusement and entertaining, producing light creations for fun. Such creations flourished between the 1910s and 1930s, especially during the 1920s. The School's works were widely spread in magazines like *Saturday* (*Libai liu*), *Violet* (*Ziluolan*), *Half-month* (*Banyue*), *Civil Rights* (*Minquan bao*), *A Cluster of Fictions* (*Xiaoshuo congbao*), *A New Collection of Fictions* (*Xiaoshuo xinbao*), *Free Talk* (*Ziyou tan*, the supplement of *Shenbao*), *Funny Place* (*Kuaihuo lin*, the supplement of *Xinwen bao*), etc. Representatives of this School consist of Xu Zhenya, Li Dingyi, Cheng Xiaoqing, Gu Mingdao, Bao Tianxiao, Zhou Shoujuan, Zhang Henshui, etc. After rounds of battle between the Mandarin Duck and Butterfly School and New Literature groups, the 1930s saw the fading of the former and growing of the latter.

Different from the Literature Study Society (*Wenxue yanjiu hui*) and the Creation Society (*Chuangzao she*), the Mandarin Duck and Butterfly School didn't start from a formal meeting with a guiding principle. It was Zhou Zuoren who first talked about “the Mandarin Duck and Butterfly style”. In a speech at Peking University on April 19th, 1918, Zhou took “the Mandarin Duck and Butterfly style like *Yulihun*” as an example to introduce modern novels in old style (Fan, 1999, p. 14). Qian Xuantong mentioned “*Yanqingchidu*, *Xiangyanyunyu* and the Mandarin Duck and Butterfly novels” (Qian, 1919, p. 74). Liu Bannong thought *Yulihun* (written in *pianti*, a rhythmic prose characterized by parallelism and ornateness), vague in content and sickening in style, should be classified into a Mandarin Duck and Butterfly novel (Wei, 1984, pp. 118, 180-181). It can be figured out that “Mandarin Duck and Butterfly” was first used to name romantic novels written in *pianti*. Since writers of this School touched many themes other than romance, “Mandarin Duck and Butterfly” as a notion has been expanded and scholars nowadays tend to judge this School from the angle of literary interest. “‘Mandarin Duck and Butterfly’, in a broad sense, can be used to refer to novels aiming at amusement” (Fan, 1999, p. 14). “‘Mandarin Duck and Butterfly’ writers tend to say highly of amusement” (Chen, 2005, p. 114).

As an important translating power in late Qing dynasty and early Republican China period (referring to 1912-1949 in mainland China), literary translation of the Mandarin Duck and Butterfly School has attracted scholars' attention. Representative studies include: this School's translation activities and its influence from the perspective of translation history (Li, 2004), description of this School's translation of western literatures from the perspective of Imagology (Hu, 2011), mapping of this School's translation pattern based on review of translation in the Republican China period (Xiu, 2014), etc. it can be seen that previous studies have mainly focused on novel translation of this School.

Many Mandarin Duck and Butterfly translators were excellent both in Chinese and English, is it possible for them to choose western poetry to translate for amusement? Few scholars have noticed this field. With this question in mind, using modern poetic theories, this paper makes a thorough investigation into the poetry translation of the Mandarin

Duck and Butterfly School [Table 1 near here], to get a better knowledge of the development of modern Chinese poetry creation and translation, and to get a better understanding of Chinese popular literature in the 1920s.

II. LITERARY VIEW OF “AMUSEMENT AND PASTIME” INFLUENCED THE SCHOOL’S POETIC CHOICE

Commercialization of novels in late Qing dynasty and early Republican China period brought about writer’s professionalization. As early professional writers, Mandarin Duck and Butterfly writers loved to publish their creations and translations in newspapers and magazines. Moreover, most of them were editors, driving newspapers and magazines to be typical platform for them to manifest their works. An investigation of this School’s poetry translation published in newspapers and magazines has found out that writers preferred traditional Chinese poetic form, just like their preference of *pianli* when writing novels; due to their literary view of “pastime and amusement”, writers seemed relatively free when translating, adding and deleting at will.

Lefevere (2004, p. 26) holds that there are micro and macro levels concerning poetics: “one is an inventory of literary devices, genres, motifs, prototypical characters and situations, and symbols; the other a concept of what the role of literature is, or should be, in the social system as a whole”. Mandarin Duck and Butterfly writers’ literary view of “pastime and amusement” place a direct influence on writers’ micro poetic choices.

The most direct influence of “pastime and amusement” upon Mandarin Duck and Butterfly translators is their sensitiveness to market demands. They needed to produce the most wanted products. Wanted products are usually profitable products. Literary genres other than novels were unpopular in Chinese publishing market at that time (Bao, 1971, p. 349). The submitting rule of *Play Magazine* (*Youxi zazhi*) even read that poetry submission would not be paid (see *Play Magazine*, 1931, Vol. 1). This explains the relatively few poetry translations for Mandarin Duck and Butterfly School. Although in a limited number, the poetry translation of this school still serves as a good example to manifest its poetic choice of translating theme and style.

A. Translating Themes: Scenery and Romance

Similar to their novel translation, Mandarin Duck and Butterfly translators chose poetries describing sceneries and romance to translate (see Table 1 for reference). As editors, they also chose to publish such poems in their magazines. It can be seen that, in Mandarin Duck and Butterfly magazines, “interesting” was a key word. Wang Dungen said in the Preface of *Saturday* (*Libai Liu*) that it was interesting and simple to have such a magazine to kill time after a whole week’s labor (Wang, 1914, p. A1-2). Magazine theme mentioned in “Editor’s Word” in *Red Rose* (*Hongmeigui*) was to interest its readers (Zhao, 1929, p. A1-2). Scenery and romance are two typical themes to interest readers. Moreover, Mandarin Duck and Butterfly magazines tended to produce market-wanted works. In 1920s, inspired by Lin Shu’s translated novels, scenery and romantic themes were extremely popular. This provided another important reason for the School’s choice of translating theme.

TABLE 1
POETRY TRANSLATION OF THE MANDARIN DUCK AND BUTTERFLY SCHOOL

Name	Author	Translator	Magazine	Publishing Year	Poetry Pattern
1. “Dear”	Pollard	Zhou Shoujuan	Saturday	1915	Free style (rewriting)
2. “A Red, Red Rose”	Robert Burns	Su Manshu	Saturday	1921	five-character classical
3. “A Red, Red Rose”	Robert Burns	Zhang Zhenlv, Zhu Qiuqing	Saturday	1921	classical vernacular
4. “Laogong yong” (“The Village Blacksmith”)	H. W. Longfellow	Xu Dange	Saturday	1921	five-character classical
5. “Qiangwei” (“The Last Rose of Summer”)	Tom Moore	Ruoqu (Teng Gu)	Saturday	1921	Lisao-style
6. “To a Lady”	Byron	Su Manshu	Saturday	1921	five-character classical
7. “Maid of Athens, Ere We Part”	Byron	Su Manshu	Saturday	1921	five-character classical
8. “Bukesiyide baofu”	(?)	Zhang Zhenlv	Saturday	1921	vernacular
9. “Ziluolan huaxia”	(?)	Yang Yuguang	Saturday	1921	Lisao-style
10. “Ziluolan”	Walter Scott	Jiang Wanli	Saturday	1921	five-character classical
11. “Zhanhou”	Alice Cary	Tianhunshi	Saturday	1928	vernacular
12. “Ziluolan qu”	Walter Scott	Zhou Shoujuan, Yuan Hanyun	Saturday	1929	five-character classical
13. “Yi womao”	(?)	Bi Renyong	Saturday	1929	five-character classical

B. Translating Style: Free and Leisure

Errors can be seen quite often in Mandarin Duck and Butterfly poetry translations. Adding and deleting were also common. One typical Mandarin Duck and Butterfly translator Zhou Shoujuan deleted 8 sentences when translating a

British poem named “Dear”. These are due to their leisure attitude in poetry creation and translation, as well as the common liberal attitude for translation in 1920s. Yan Fu’s “Translator’s Words” in *Tianyan lun* indicates literary translation’s norms at that time: “As long as the theme of the original work be transmitted, there’s no need to stick to word-for-word translation” (Luo, 2009, p. 202). This trend hadn’t changed till the May 4th Movement.

The free translation style is also closely tied to this School’s literary interest. Since translation was for amusement, there’s no need to be serious. After the May 4th Movement, literal translation gradually gained acceptance. However, the Mandarin Duck and Butterfly poetry translation was still free. The translation of “Farewell” (written by Tagore, translated by Fengsheng, published in No. 5, Vol. 11, 1920 *Fiction Monthly*) was not a complete reproduction, with lots of errors; two “Violet”s (written by Walt Scott, one translated by Zhou Shoujuan and Yuan Hanyun, published in No. 1, Vol. 4, 1929 *Violet*, the other translated by Jiang Wanli, published in No. 103, 1921 *Saturday*) had totally different line numbers and different meanings. That is to say, poetry translation of this School can be seen as creation rather than translation. The original poem was taken as raw materials for translators to make a second creation.

Literary view of “pastime and amusement” has influenced Mandarin Duck and Butterfly’s choice on genres, themes and styles, etc. Moreover, Poetic form, as an important manifestation of poetic choice, also showed the impact of this literary view, which will be elaborated in the next section.

III. LITERARY VIEW OF “AMUSEMENT AND PASTIME” LED TO MIXTURE OF POETIC FORMS IN THIS SCHOOL’S POETRY TRANSLATION

Growing in traditional Chinese culture, Mandarin Duck and Butterfly writers were “easy to satisfy and unwilling to change” (Feng, 2013, p. 27), which can find its roots in traditional Chinese philosophy. They, as traditional Chinese writers, loved traditional writing style such as *pianti* in novels, and traditional Chinese poetic form in poetry. However, sensitivity to market demand and reader preference made them willing to follow the trend of vernacular poetry. This School’s poetry translation, therefore, manifests a mixture of traditional and new poetic forms. Their translating strategies transferred from domestication, to trying vernacular poetic form, ending up with a drastic decline after this School’s “departure” with the New Literature groups.

A. Following the Tradition: Domestication

The period from 1890 to 1919 saw a peak in introducing foreign literatures (Shi, 1990, p. 18). During that period, almost all foreign poetries were translated into traditional Chinese forms, be it five-character, four-character, saoti (a poetic form named after *Lisao* written by Qu Yuan). Mandarin Duck and Butterfly translators initially translated poetry into traditional Chinese poetic forms. Here is an example from No. 102 in *Saturday*:

TABLE 2
JIONGJIONG CHIQUANGMI

A Red, Red Rose (Translated by Su Manshu in 1908)			
O, my love's like a red, red rose,	8	類類赤牆靡	
That's newly sprung in June;	6/a	首夏初發苞	a
O, my love's like the melodie,	8	惻惻清商曲	
That's sweetly played in tune.	6/a	眇音何遠姚	a
As fair art thou, my bonnie lass,	8	予美諒天紹	a
So deep in love am I;	6/b	幽情申自持	b
And I will love thee still, my dear,	8	倉海會流枯	
Till a' the seas gang dry.	6/b	相愛無絕期	b
Till a' the seas gang dry, my dear,	8	倉海會流枯	
And the rocks melt wi' the sun;	6/c	頑石爛炎熹	b
I will love thee still, my dear,	7	微命屬如縷	c
While the sands o' life shall run.	6/c	相愛無絕期	b
And fare thee still, my only love!	8	摻袪別予美	d
And fare thee weel a while!	6/d	離隔在須臾	c
And I will come again, my love,	8	阿陽早日歸	d
Though it were ten thousand mile (Burns, 1996, p. 694).	7/d	萬里莫踟躕 (Su, 1921, pp. 52-53)	c

PS: in “6/d”, “6” is the number of English syllables or number of Chinese words, “d” the rhyming scheme. The same below.

This Chinese poem was translated by Su Manshu in 1908, from “A Red, Red Rose” by Robert Burns (1759-1796). Poetry translation into Chinese at that time were normally in traditional Chinese form (Wang, 2014, pp. 927-938). Two other poems translated by Su Manshu in 1914 were also in traditional Chinese form.

The original poem was in ballad form, 4 lines in each stanza, with the 1st and 3rd lines in iambic tetrameter, and the 2nd and 4th lines iambic trimeter (Baldick, 2001, p. 24). Metrical variations occur in the 11th and 16th lines, the 11th line headless with 7 syllables and the 16th line hypermetrical (McAuley, 1966, p. 77). The translated poem was in five-character form, retaining the rhyming pattern and adding rhyming lines. The five-character line was inconsistent in foot number with the original. Linguistic repetitions such as “O, my love’s like ...”, “Till a’ the seas gang dry” have been retained in the translated version. Compared with the original plain style, the translated poem appeared to be a traditional Chinese poem.

Traditional Chinese rhythm has been a major constraint to retain the original poetic features. Many a translator noticed this phenomenon. Liu Bannong said that it was hard to transfer foreign poetic rhythm into traditional Chinese poetic forms (Liu, 1918, p. 433). Zhou Shoujuan mentioned it was a great pity to fail to translate a foreign poem into traditional Chinese form. In order to recoup this pity, Zhou started his experiment of translating English poems into vernacular Chinese.

B. Attitude Toward Vernacular Poetic Form: From “Pitiful” Try to Active Following

The pitiful try made by Zhou Shoujuan is “Dear” below published in *Saturday* (No.52, 1915):

TABLE 3
“DEAR”

Dear (Trans. By Zhou Shoujuan in 1915)			
One little word we oft bestow,	8/a	一小字者	4
The root from which all friendship grow,	8/a	实为相爱之根	6
which joy and sweetness may impart,	8/b	脱以真心出之	6
If given truly from the heart.	8/b	则弥觉甜蜜而温馨	8
But if with careless ease it slips,	8/c	顾用之过滥,	5
Too frequently o'er honeyed lips,	8/c	即一无可贵	5
It falls unnoticed to the earth,	8/d	摔之地上	4
To any heart of little worth.	8/d	人且不屑掇拾	6
But coming from a heart sincere,	8/e	设出自真心,	5
And spoken tenderly, how dear	8/e	道以檀口,	4
The little word of letters four,	8/f	则虽止寥寥四字母,	8
Thus consecrated evermore.	8/f	亦足以乘千秋万世而弗朽	11
"Dear friend", he in a formal way,	8/g		
Addressed her but the other day,	8/g		
And now he pauses long, to think	8/h		
When he can with pen and ink	7/h		
The loving tenderness impart,	8/i		
That vibrates through the passionate heart	9/i		
And wondered if she will forgive,	8/j		
And emphasize the adjective.	8/j		
This little word we often trace	8/k	此一字	3
May cover but a tiny space	8/k	于纸上占地虽小	7
Upon the page, and yet include	8/l	实则其四字母之间	8
A world within its latitude.	8/l	乃有一世界在	6
Dear_dearest_DARLING_thus it throws	8/m	此亲爱也 至亲爱也	8
Its tendrils out, so fast it grows,	8/m	有如植物 卷鬚一出	8
And ripens in suspicion's hour,	8/n	立即怒长	4
To love's serene and perfect flower (Zhou, 1915, pp. 35-37).	9/n	不久遂开庄严灿烂之花	10

There are 7 stanzas in the original poem, 4 lines in each stanza. The original rhyming scheme is aabb ccdd eeff gghh iijj kkl mmmn. There are metrical variations in the 16th, 18th and 28th line. The 16th line is headless with 7 syllables, “passionate” in the 18th line pronounced as 2 syllables, the 28th line hypermetrical with the last one uncounted as part of the rhythm (McAuley, 1966, p. 77). The translated poem hasn’t manifested either the original’s rhythmic or rhyming scheme. Two stanzas omitted, the translated poem has retained almost none of the original poetic features.

1915 saw the establishment of *La Jeunesse* (*Xin qingnian*), judged as the start of New Culture Movement. Zhou Shoujuan’s translated poem above was published in the same year. Its unrhyming and free style can be seen as the prelude of Mandarin Duck and Butterfly School’s vernacular poetry translation.

Elites like Hu Shi tried to manipulate translation to control the trend of the New Culture Movement. Poetry in vernacular form without meter suited their purpose, just as Hu Shi said, “No *pianti* for prose, no rhythm for poetry” (Hu, 1918, pp. 286-306). They resorted to this poetic form to translate foreign poems. In fact, what elites at that time wanted to manipulate was much more than culture. They were eager to improve the whole society. They used their discursive power to change the paradigm of poetry translation to realize their ideological demand. The Mandarin Duck and Butterfly School had a short “honeymoon” with the New Literature writers at the beginning of the New Culture Movement. Evidence can be found in poetry translation of the Mandarin Duck and Butterfly School at that time.

The period between 1920 and 1921 witnessed most of vernacular poetry translation of the Mandarin Duck and Butterfly School. Zhang Zhenlv, one of this School’s translators, contributed about half of the total number of vernacular poetry translation. A close look into Zhang’s translating style can provide a practical reference to the overall translating style of the School. Zhang’s translation of “A Red, Red Rose” is as follows:

TABLE 4
YIDUO HONGMEIGUI

A Red, Red Rose (Co-trans. By Zhenlv and Qiuqing)			
O, my love's like a red, red rose,	8	我爱像那鲜红的玫瑰,	9
That's newly sprung in June;	6/a	六月里花纔(才)娇滴滴的放;	10/a
O, my love's like the melody,	8	我爱像那温和的音乐,	9
That's sweetly played in tune.	6/a	弹出来甜蜜蜜的声响。	9/a
As fair art thou, my bonnie lass,	8	我那轻盈的妙人儿啊! 像你这样的美丽,	16
So deep in love am I;	6/b	竟累我溺入深深的爱河;	10/b
And I will love thee still, my dear,	8	可是我依旧爱你, 我爱,	9
Till a' the seas gang dry.	6/b	纵使有一天海枯。	7/b
Till a' the seas gang dry, my dear,	8	等到哪一天海枯, 我爱,	9
And the rocks melt wi' the sun;	6/c	连那石头都给太阳晒融了;	11
I will love thee still, my dear,	7	我依旧爱你, 我爱,	7
While the sands o' life shall run.	6/c	那是生命像飞沙般的乱跑。	11
And fare thee still, my only love!	8	同你分别, 我唯一的爱,	9
And fare thee well a while!	6/d	同你分别一会儿见。	8/c
And I will come again, my love,	8	我定要再到此地来, 我爱,	10
Though it were ten thousand mile (Burns, 1996, p. 694).	7/d	即使有一万里的路程见。(Zhang & Zhu, 1921, pp. 52-53)	10/c

As a typical vernacular translation, the 2nd, 4th, 6th, 8th, 14th and 16th lines are rhymed, inconsistent with the original; word number in each line are irregular, failing to retain the original form of intersection between tetrameter and trimeter; as to the semantic level, errors are seen in the translation of “And I will love you still” and “while the sands o’ life shall run”.

Zhang Zhenlv was good at writing and translating, receiving Zhao Shaokuang’s appreciation (Rui et al., 2010, p. 323). Zhang published various vernacular novels during the May 4th Movement (Jia & Yu, 1993, pp. 377-383). He also manifested notable talent in poetry creation. As to translation, Zhang published 4 translated proses in vernacular form in “Free Talk” from Aug. 11th to 14th, 1920. “A Red, Red Rose” translated by his partner and him retained part of the rhyming scheme of the original. All above has proven Zhang’s basic ability to handle the poetic features of the original. His ignorance of such poetic features in his translation attributed to his tended accordance with the New Culture Movement.

“Following the trend” manifested in Zhang’s poetry translation could also be seen in poetry creation and translation of other Mandarin Duck and Butterfly writers. In the “partial reform” period of *Fiction Monthly* (*Xiaoshuo yuebao*) in 1920, Shen Yanbing was invited to be the chief editor of a new column called “New Trends in Novels (*Xiaoshuo xinchao*)”. During this period, Zhou Shoujuan published 7 short translated novels and a multi-scene drama (*Social Pillar* by Ibsen), whose content and form were consistent with the New Culture Movement (Fan, 2009, pp. 5-14). Even after 1921, when the Literature Study Society took full charge of *Fiction Monthly*, Mandarin Duck and Butterfly works rejected, Zhou Shoujuan still opened up special issues in *Free Talk* to publish vernacular novels together with their translations (Fan, 2009, pp. 5-14). Moreover, *Saturday*, co-edited by Zhou Shoujuan and Wang Dungen, published 7 vernacular poems and translations from January to August in 1921. Drastic fall in the number of vernacular poems could be seen before and after that year. All these can be judged as “honeymoon” evidence between the Mandarin Duck and Butterfly School and the New Literature groups.

However, it didn’t last long before the Mandarin Duck and Butterfly School stopped its steps to “follow the trend”. The reason lies in that it is unwilling to investigate or think steadily (Wei, 1984, p. 118). Lack of theoretical construction, this School lost its field when faced with criticism mainly from the Literature Study Society.

C. Giving up Poetry Translation in Vernacular Form

Zhou Shoujuan’s “Free Talk of Free Talk” published in No. 30 “Special Issue for Fictions (*Xiaoshuo tekan*)” marks the end of cooperation between the Mandarin Duck and Butterfly School and the New Literature groups (Zhou, 1921, p. 5). Ever since then, no poetry translation appeared in *Saturday*, as a typical Mandarin Duck and Butterfly magazine. For *Violet*, another typical one, only 1 poetry translation appeared from Nov. 1925 to Jun. 1930. In sharp contrast to the New Literature scholars’ literary interest of “translating foreign masterpieces” (Hu, 1918, p. 305), the Mandarin Duck and Butterfly School, representative of “popular” literature, departed from the “elite” one gradually.

However, departure from the “elite” literature doesn’t mean Mandarin Duck and Butterfly’s giving up of new poetry. “Popular” literature means to cater for popular taste instead of sticking to old culture. Fashionable as it is, new poetry has a considerable number of readers at that time. This School continued to produce poetry in vernacular form. Typical Mandarin Duck and Butterfly magazines were embellished with poems in vernacular forms. What is notable for the Mandarin Duck and Butterfly writers lies in that they lacked conscious exploration of the vernacular poetic form and was quite free at poetry creation and translation.

It can be seen from analysis above that the Mandarin Duck and Butterfly writers mainly translated poems in traditional Chinese form. They followed the trend of translating in vernacular form in the New Culture Movement, mainly during the period from 1920 to 1921. Departed from the New Literature groups, they lost interest to look into poetry translation in vernacular forms. Poetic features haven’t been retained in their poetry translation, be it in

vernacular or traditional Chinese form.

IV. CONCLUSION

Influenced by the literary interest of “amusement and pastime”, the Mandarin Duck and Butterfly translators haven’t done many poetry translations. However, this literary interest has had a deep impact on themes, styles and features of this School’s poetry translations. The poetry translation of this School has been in vernacular form for a little while. It is also “amusement and pastime” that determines this School’s giving up on vernacular poetry translation. More than 100 years later, taking the relation between the Mandarin Duck and Butterfly School and the New Literature groups in May 4th period into consideration, we can find that this School didn’t stick to the “old”. It “followed the trend”. It is just “amusement” deep in its heart that causes its departure from the “new”. Based on the historical context, we can see the reason why it made that choice, to realize the whole picture of poetry translation of the Mandarin Duck and Butterfly School.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This work was supported in part by Key Program for Philosophical, Social Science Research: Poetic and Genealogical Research of Poetry Translation in China from 1919 to 2019, sponsored by the Ministry of Education, PRC (17JZD046).

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Constructing Culinary Desires: Lexical and Discursive Patterns in Thai Food Advertising in Indonesia

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Abstract—This study examines the linguistic strategies employed in Thai food advertising targeted at Indonesian consumers, with a focus on lexical and discursive patterns. Utilizing critical discourse analysis (CDA), it explores how descriptive adjectives, cultural references, sensory language, and localized terms work together to create persuasive narratives. Advertisements from digital platforms such as Instagram and YouTube were analyzed to uncover how Thai food branding blends cultural authenticity with localized appeals. Findings reveal that terms like "authentic", "heritage", and "spicy" alongside phrases like "a journey through Thai taste" and "rooted in Thai tradition" serve to evoke sensory experiences and cultural connections. By incorporating Indonesian-specific references, such as "rasa otentik" and "cita rasa Thailand," these advertisements strike a balance between the exotic appeal of Thai cuisine and familiar cultural elements, ultimately fostering consumer engagement. This study contributes to the understanding of how language functions as a tool of both persuasion and cultural storytelling in transnational marketing.

Index Terms—Thai food advertising, critical discourse analysis, lexical patterns, discursive patterns

I. INTRODUCTION

Recent studies on linguistic strategies and discursive practices in food advertising highlight the intricate ways language is employed to evoke desire and construct cultural narratives. Food advertising employs a variety of linguistic strategies and discursive practices to influence consumer behavior and perceptions. These strategies are tailored to different target audiences and cultural contexts, often emphasizing pleasure, fun, and emotional appeal.

It can be seen in the language and strategies of low-nutritional-value food advertising, which shows that the discursive strategies used in low-nutritional-value food advertisements for children tend to associate the products with positive experiences such as enjoyment, adventure, and success, and use words that create a happy and pleasant atmosphere (Jiménez-Morales et al., 2019). This study found that advertisements use language that captures children's attention through semantic vocabulary related to fun, friends, and enjoyable activities, especially in the cereal and biscuit categories.

Then, Blasco and Jiménez-Morales (2021) examined language use strategies analyzed through a linguistic study of breakfast product advertisement texts published in various media in Spain. The researchers identified and classified lexical items (key words) used in advertisements based on their meaning and context, then grouped them into semantic fields such as food quality, mood, actions, and recreational experiences. The main strategy found is the use of language that focuses on promoting positive experiences and happy emotions, such as words related to "happiness", "success", "smiles", "fun", and others. These words are used to build an association that consuming the product will provide a pleasant and emotionally satisfying experience, despite the product's low nutritional content.

Previous research on Thai food advertisements has shown that Thai advertisements employ lexical and discursive patterns. Thai food menus employ a specialized vocabulary that includes high-frequency words, academic terms, and colloquial expressions, indicating a unique lexicon tailored to the culinary context (Low, 2023). In the context of Thai food products on international platforms like Amazon, English is predominantly used, often in combination with Thai, to appeal to a broader audience. This bilingual approach helps in maintaining cultural authenticity while ensuring accessibility (Low, 2023). Thai food advertisements often leverage cultural tropes such as "Thainess," which encompasses national identity, popular culture, and commodified consumption. This is evident in tourism advertising videos where "Thainess" is resemiotized to be accessible and authentic to Western tourists (Jocuns, 2020). Advertisements for various products, including food, often use emotional engagement strategies. For instance, Thai TV commercials for insurance products emphasize moral and family values, which could be a similar approach in food advertising to resonate with cultural values (Svetanant et al., 2022). Thai food advertisements often feature images of food dishes accompanied by fresh vegetables, herbs, and spices to evoke a sense of authenticity and appeal. This visual strategy is crucial in conveying the quality and cultural significance of the food (Low, 2023).

Some of the research findings above indicate that the strategic use of language and imagery resonates with cultural values and enhances product appeal (Jocuns & Jocuns, 2023). Additionally, the selection of appropriate lexical patterns can shape discourse patterns, thereby influencing consumer perception and driving the success of food brands (Sornsaruht, 2020). The choice of lexical patterns in food advertisements is a manipulative strategy to influence consumer behavior (Ren, 2023). The lexical and discursive patterns in Thai food advertisements have a strong influence on consumer behavior and cultural resonance. Advertisers strategically use language and imagery to evoke emotional responses, align with cultural values, and manipulate consumer perceptions.

While these studies provide valuable insights into the linguistic and cultural strategies in food advertising, few have examined the specific case of Thai food promotions in Indonesia. It is a significant gap, considering the increasing presence of Thai culinary branding in the Indonesian digital landscape. Unlike previous research, which often focuses on broader regional trends or singular linguistic strategies, this study investigates both lexical and discursive patterns in Thai food advertising targeted at Indonesian audiences. By doing so, it uncovers how language is tailored to resonate with local cultural contexts while maintaining the global appeal of Thai cuisine.

The importance of analyzing lexical and discursive patterns in food advertising lies in their ability to reveal underlying cultural dynamics and consumer psychology. In the context of Thai food promotions in Indonesia, such analysis can uncover how linguistic choices create cultural connections, evoke sensory experiences, and construct desirable narratives about Thai cuisine. Moreover, understanding these patterns contributes to broader discussions on cultural diplomacy and the role of language in transnational marketing.

Given this context, the present study aims to fill the research gap by critically examining the lexical and discursive strategies employed in Thai food advertising in Indonesia. This research is crucial for understanding how language serves as a tool for cultural and commercial exchange in the digital age, and it builds upon previous findings by providing a focused analysis of this understudied phenomenon.

II. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

A. Critical Linguistics

Critical linguistics examines how language operates as a tool of power, persuasion, and ideology. Rooted in critical discourse analysis (CDA), this perspective seeks to uncover hidden power structures and ideologies within texts. Fairclough (1995) asserts that language is inherently tied to social power and inequality, making it an essential area for understanding how discourse shapes and is shaped by societal structures. Van Dijk (2006) extends this notion by emphasizing the role of discourse in legitimizing dominant ideologies. For example, in the context of advertising, critical linguistics investigates how language choices not only promote products but also reinforce certain cultural and social hierarchies. This perspective is crucial for uncovering how Thai food advertisements use linguistic strategies to construct cultural authenticity and desirability, ultimately influencing consumer perceptions and behaviors.

In the realm of advertising, critical linguistics is particularly valuable for analyzing how language choices not only sell products but also reinforce cultural and social norms. Fairclough's (1995) framework, which examines the interconnections between text, discourse practices, and sociocultural practices, offers a holistic approach to understanding how advertisements perpetuate specific cultural narratives. This approach is crucial in analyzing how Thai food advertisements use linguistic strategies to construct an image of authenticity, desirability, and cultural superiority, targeting Indonesian consumers. Moreover, the use of seemingly neutral language in advertisements often carries hidden ideological implications. For example, bilingual advertising can reveal how English, as a global language, is used to construct identities and reinforce power dynamics in non-English-speaking countries.

Critical linguistics also explores the ideological implications of seemingly neutral language in advertisements. Fairclough's framework highlights the interplay between text, discourse practices, and sociocultural practices, providing a comprehensive approach to understanding how advertisements function as cultural artifacts. By applying critical linguistics, this study examines how Thai food advertisements utilize and exploit cultural narratives to appeal to Indonesian consumers.

B. Lexical Patterns

Lexical patterns refer to the recurring arrangements and associations of words within a text, which can be identified through their repetitious and synonymous nature (Yamada, 2005). These patterns are crucial in understanding how words co-occur and interact within both written and spoken discourse.

Lexical patterns play a crucial role in lexical cohesion, which refers to the interconnectedness of words within a text to establish meaning and coherence (Buttery & McCarthy, 2013). This notion was first examined comprehensively by Halliday and Hasan (1976) and subsequently by Hoey (1991).

There are notable differences between spoken and written lexicon. In spoken discourse, lexical patterns often manifest through chunking and collocation, which help in the negotiation and social convergence of conversations (Buttery & McCarthy, 2013). Written texts, on the other hand, may exhibit more structured and formal lexical patterns.

The study of lexical patterns has been greatly enhanced by corpus linguistics, which uses large datasets to identify and analyze these patterns. Tools like keyword-in-context (KWIC) and collocation software help in observing and detailing these patterns (Biber, 2009; Hunston, 2015).

Lexical patterns are closely linked to grammatical structures, forming what is known as lexical grammar. This approach emphasizes that lexis (vocabulary) and grammar are interconnected, and patterns often reflect this relationship (Biber, 2009; Hoey & O'Donnell, 2008).

Understanding lexical patterns is beneficial in language teaching, especially for English language learners. Recognizing these patterns can aid in reading comprehension and vocabulary acquisition (Jablonkai, 2010; Yamada, 2005). Lexical patterns are not only relevant in everyday language but also in specialized contexts such as academic writing, film scripts, and even video games. Each context may exhibit unique patterns that serve specific functions, such as creating engagement or characterizing dialogue (Heritage, 2020).

Lexical patterns are fundamental to the structure and meaning of both spoken and written language. They help in creating coherence through lexical cohesion, are studied extensively using corpus linguistics, and are integral to the concept of lexical grammar. These patterns have practical applications in language teaching and various specialized contexts, highlighting their importance in both theoretical and applied linguistics. Understanding and identifying these patterns can significantly enhance our comprehension and use of language.

C. Discursive Patterns

Discursive patterns refer to the broader structural and strategic use of language in constructing narratives and achieving persuasive goals. These patterns often include storytelling, cultural framing, and appeals to sensory experiences. Kress and Van Leeuwen (2002) emphasized the multimodal nature of discursive patterns, where text, visuals, and other semiotic resources work together to create a coherent message. In the context of Thai food advertising, discursive patterns often revolve around themes of cultural exploration, sensory indulgence, and authenticity.

Patterns refer to the structured ways in which discourse is organized and presented in various contexts. These patterns comprise several aspects: textual, generic, and social aspects. The actual content and structure of the text. Generic aspects are the genre or type of discourse, such as legal, managerial, or conversational. The social context and interactions that shape the discourse (Lung, 2008, 2011). Discursive patterns can be organized hierarchically, meaning that individual patterns are structured in a layered manner. This hierarchical model facilitates an understanding of how different elements of discourse are interconnected and contribute to the overall construction of meaning (Lung, 2008, 2011).

In law and management, Discursive patterns in these fields show significant differences due to the intrinsic nature of each discipline. Understanding these patterns helps learners internalize the specific ways discourse is constructed in their respective fields (Lung, 2008). In economics, hierarchical patterns reflect the discipline's inherent nature. Recognizing these patterns helps students achieve professionalism (Lung, 2011). In personal relationships, discursive patterns often involve argumentative attacks and defensive responses, which can escalate conflicts. These patterns are characterized by reproaches, accusations, and criticisms (Sáez & Marco, 2023).

Discursive Patterns in Specific Contexts such as Classroom Settings and Organizational Discourse. The interaction between instructional formats and discursive patterns in classrooms is complex. While discourse analysis has expanded our understanding of classroom interactions, the productive interplay between discourse and learning outcomes remains an open question (Klette & Ødegaard, 2016). In organizations, discourse is not just a reflection but a foundational element that shapes organizational life. Different perspectives on text and agency highlight how discourse contributes to the constitution of organizations (Putnam & Cooren, 2004).

Discursive patterns are essential for understanding how discourse is constructed and functions across different contexts. By examining the textual, generic, and social aspects and recognizing the hierarchical organization of these patterns, researchers and practitioners can gain deeper insights into the dynamics of communication in various fields. This understanding is crucial for improving educational practices, resolving conflicts, and enhancing organizational communication.

D. Thai Food Advertising in Indonesian Online Media

Under the Thai Select branding campaign, the Thai government funds initiatives to promote Thai food, which is known for its variety and delicious flavors (Svetanant et al., 2022). The emergence of 'selfie tourism' as a means of enhancing a destination's brand equity has been attributed to social media (SM), demonstrating the increasing impact of social media in marketing culinary experiences (Svetanant et al., 2022). Thai television's food and beverage advertising primarily promotes unhealthy foods, with a particular emphasis on sugar-sweetened beverages (Jaichuen et al., 2018; Jindaratnapanorn et al., 2024).

Due to the distinctive flavors and appearance of Thai food, as well as its cultural significance, Thai food advertising in Indonesian online media may differ from other forms of food advertising (Svetanant et al., 2022). Thai food advertising may need to consider the impact of social media content on brand image and customer behavior, given the influence of digital marketing strategies on consumer perceptions and behaviors in the Indonesian food industry (Sutia & Fahlevi, 2024).

Culture has a significant influence on customer behavior and decision-making, and it also affects how a brand is seen in the local community (Herdimansyah, 2021). Thai advertising emphasizes the importance of understanding cultural

values in advertising messaging by reflecting social and economic changes, as well as Thai cultural traits (Ciochetto, 2006; Punyapiroje & Morrison, 2007).

Thai food advertising may need to consider the generational distinctions between Generation Y and Generation Z to tailor marketing techniques to their unique preferences, according to a study on the influence of social media advertising on customer behavior in Indonesia's food industry (Sutia & Fahlevi, 2024). Consumer behavior and brand perception are influenced by culture, according to a study on the subject. It suggests that Thai cuisine advertising in Indonesian online media may be influenced by Indonesian food culture (Herdimansyah, 2021).

III. METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a critical approach, employing critical discourse analysis (CDA) to examine the linguistic and discursive strategies in Thai food advertisements targeting Indonesian consumers. CDA is particularly suited for uncovering power dynamics, cultural ideologies, and identity constructions embedded in promotional texts. By focusing on both textual and contextual dimensions, this approach facilitates a comprehensive understanding of how language constructs meaning and influences perceptions.

The data for this research comprises online advertisements promoting Thai cuisine in Indonesia, collected from various digital platforms, including social media (Instagram). These advertisements were selected based on their relevance, prominence, and linguistic richness.

By narrowing the dataset to advertisements from 2024, this research captures the most current trends and strategies, offering insights into the evolving dynamics of Thai food branding in Indonesia. This approach ensures the relevance of findings to ongoing discussions in linguistic, cultural, and marketing studies.

The primary instrument for data collection was a framework designed to identify and analyze lexical and discursive patterns. This framework focuses on two dimensions. 1) Lexical Patterns: Specific word choices, including descriptive adjectives, culturally significant terms, and sensory language. 2) Discursive Patterns: Structural and strategic use of language, including storytelling, cultural framing, and appeals to sensory experiences.

Data analysis followed a multi-step process:

1. Textual Analysis: Identifying and categorizing lexical items and discursive structures within the advertisements.
2. Contextual Interpretation: Relating these textual elements to broader cultural and social contexts, particularly Indonesian consumer culture.
3. Critical Interpretation: Evaluating how these linguistic strategies reflect and reinforce cultural ideologies, power relations, and consumer psychology.

The analysis was guided by key principles of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), emphasizing the interplay between language, power, and ideology (Fairclough, 1995; van Dijk, 2006). By integrating lexical and discursive analyses, this study provides a nuanced understanding of the linguistic strategies employed in Thai food advertising in Indonesia.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A. Lexical Patterns

Analyzing lexical patterns in Thai food advertisements targeting Indonesian audiences reveals a strategic use of descriptive language, culturally resonant terms, and sensory appeals. Table 1 provides a summary of the most frequently used lexical patterns identified in the data.

TABLE 1
LEXICAL PATTERNS IN THAI FOOD ADVERTISEMENTS

Lexical Category	Examples	Frequency (Occurrences)
Descriptive Adjectives	Authentic, Spicy, Rich, Creamy	25
Cultural References	Thai Heritage, Royal Cuisine	18
Sensory Language	Tangy, Sweet Aroma, Crispy Texture	22
Localized Terms	Rasa Otentik, Cita Rasa Thailand	20
Hyperbolic Expressions	Best in the World, Must-Try Taste	15

The following are examples of advertisements on Instagram that exhibit lexical patterns similar to those presented in Table 1.



Figure 1. Example of Descriptive Adjectives

Sources: <https://www.instagram.com/baanyingthairesto/reel/CqjoogPjjAX/>

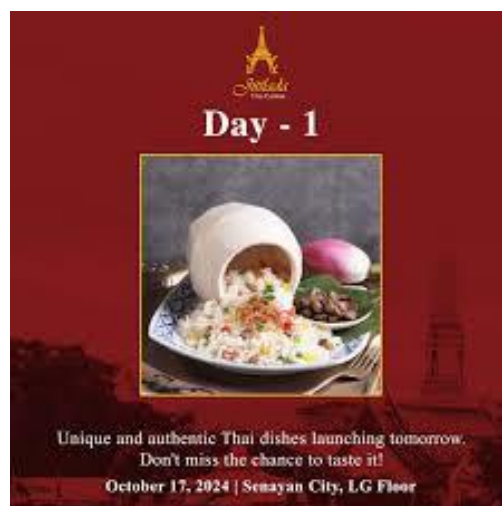


Figure 2. Cultural References Advertisement Example

Source: <https://www.instagram.com/jittladarestaurant/reel/Cv1cDTbhFOV/>



Figure 3. Sensory Language Advertisement Example

Source: <https://www.instagram.com/waithaifood.id/p/C8J3E1ByFfC/>



Figure 4. Localized Terms Advertisement Example
Source: <https://www.instagram.com/ichitanindo/p/C9cOF4fS2Ow/>



Figure 5. Hyperbolic Expressions Advertisement Example
Source: <https://www.instagram.com/p/CzvQywOLBX4/?locale=id&hl=en>

These lexical patterns serve multiple purposes. Descriptive adjectives and sensory language evoke vivid imagery, appealing directly to the consumer's sensory perceptions. Cultural references highlight the authenticity and heritage of Thai cuisine, capitalizing on its global reputation for uniqueness and richness. Localized terms, such as "rasa otentik," demonstrate a strategic effort to connect with Indonesian consumers by incorporating familiar linguistic elements.

Lexical choices play a pivotal role in shaping consumer perceptions and constructing cultural narratives. Emphasizes that lexical items are imbued with cultural and ideological meaning, influencing how products and cultures are perceived globally (Yu et al., 2020). For example, terms like "authentic" and "heritage" resonate with consumers seeking genuine culinary experiences, reflecting a preference for a connection to traditional culinary practices. Language choice in multicultural marketing is crucial. It can influence consumer behavior and brand perception by aligning with cultural and linguistic preferences. For instance, using culturally congruent language in branding and advertising can enhance engagement and market penetration (Pezzuti, 2023).

Descriptive adjectives such as "spicy" and "creamy" evoke vivid sensory imagery, which is a hallmark of effective food advertising (Ren et al., 2024; Weenen et al., 2005). These adjectives directly engage consumers' imaginations, creating expectations about taste and texture. The emphasis on sensory appeals aligns with Fairclough's (1995) assertion that lexical choices in advertisements are ideologically motivated to naturalize specific cultural narratives. The incorporation of localized terms like "rasa otentik" and "cita rasa Thailand" is particularly noteworthy, as it reflects a hybridized marketing strategy designed to bridge cultural boundaries. This localization strategy not only enhances relatability but also positions Thai cuisine within the cultural lexicon of Indonesian consumers (Sarma, 2017). Such lexical blending mirrors global marketing trends where cultural adaptation becomes a key driver of consumer engagement.

Furthermore, sensory language, such as "sweet aroma" and "crispy texture," appeals to universal sensory experiences, which are integral to successful food advertising campaigns. The role of sensory descriptions in establishing emotional connections with consumers (Chakravarty, 2014; Uk & Kayan, 2021). These findings underscore the dual role of lexical choices in both appealing to sensory perceptions and reinforcing cultural identity.

Overall, the strategic use of descriptive, cultural, sensory, and localized lexical patterns in Thai food advertisements demonstrates how language serves as a powerful tool in cross-cultural marketing. This multi-layered approach aligns with the broader theoretical frameworks of critical discourse analysis, suggesting that lexical patterns are not only tools for persuasion but also mechanisms for constructing and maintaining cultural narratives. The cultural embeddedness of lexical choices suggests that such terms are not merely descriptive but carry ideological and emotional significance (Lanzi, 2018; Pinnavaia, 2022). For instance, the use of terms like "authentic" and "heritage" in Thai food advertising aligns with global trends in culinary branding.

The frequent use of localized terms such as "cita rasa" or "rasa otentik" underscores the hybridized nature of these advertisements. By blending Thai cultural markers with Indonesian linguistic elements, advertisers effectively navigate cross-cultural boundaries, creating a sense of both exoticism and familiarity. This approach aligns with Al-Badawi (2024), who discusses the role of linguistic adaptation in Southeast Asian food marketing to appeal to regional consumers. Similarly, Roux and Potgieter (2024) emphasized that integrating localized terms enhances consumer relatability while maintaining cultural authenticity, a strategy that is increasingly prevalent in transnational food advertising. Such hybridized language forms not only promote products but also contribute to the construction of a shared cultural identity between the source and target cultures, reinforcing the brand's market position (Yan & Hyman, 2020). By blending Thai cultural markers with Indonesian linguistic elements, advertisers create a bridge between the two cultures, making Thai cuisine both exotic and relatable to Indonesian audiences. It aligns with Al-Badawi's (2024) findings on the dual appeal of modernity and tradition in Southeast Asian food advertisements.

Moreover, sensory language, such as "crispy texture" or "sweet aroma," taps into universal sensory experiences, thereby enhancing the persuasive power of the advertisements. Sensory descriptions such as these are crucial in eliciting emotional responses and triggering mental imagery among consumers. Sensory language in advertisements creates a vivid mental simulation of the product, which enhances consumer recall and engagement (Chakravarty, 2014). Sensory appeals, particularly those that emphasize texture and aroma, are especially effective in food advertising as they connect to innate human experiences (Roux & Potgieter, 2024). Sensory language also bridges cultural gaps by focusing on universally appreciated qualities, such as crispness or sweetness, which transcend linguistic and cultural barriers (Chakravarty, 2014). This approach aligns with Fairclough's (1995) theory, which posits that language in advertising serves both a persuasive and a cultural function, embedding products within a narrative of sensory pleasure and quality. Lexical choices are ideologically motivated, shaping not just consumer preferences but also perceptions of cultural identity and authenticity (Fairclough, 1995).

B. Discursive Patterns

The analysis of discursive patterns reveals recurring themes of storytelling, cultural framing, and sensory appeals. Table 2 summarizes the primary discursive strategies identified in the data.

TABLE 2
DISCURSIVE PATTERNS IN THAI FOOD ADVERTISEMENTS

Discursive Strategy	Examples	Frequency (Occurrences)
Storytelling	"A journey through Thai taste," "Experience Thailand"	20
Cultural Framing	"Rooted in Thai tradition," "Inspired by Thai festivals"	15
Sensory Appeals	"Indulge in rich flavors," "Savor the perfect blend."	25
Modern-Authentic Blend	"Tradition meets innovation," "Modern Thai classics"	18
Health and Freshness	"Fresh ingredients," "Healthy Thai delights"	12

Discursive patterns in Thai food advertising construct narratives that strike a balance between exoticism and relatability. The storytelling strategy, as evident in phrases like "a journey through Thai taste," positions Thai cuisine as an experience rather than merely a product. Argue that such multimodal narratives integrate text and visuals to create a cohesive and immersive promotional strategy (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2002).

Cultural framing highlights Thai cuisine's roots in tradition, appealing to the growing interest of global consumers in authenticity. Thai food advertisements often highlight cultural heritage to differentiate their products in competitive markets (Roux & Potgieter, 2024). For Indonesian audiences, this framing is often localized by drawing parallels between Thai and Indonesian culinary traditions.

Sensory appeals remain a cornerstone of food advertising, as they directly engage the consumer's imagination and emotions. Descriptive phrases like "rich flavors" and "perfect blend" are ideologically loaded, presenting Thai cuisine as both a sensory delight and a cultural artifact. Fairclough's (1995) framework supports this interpretation, suggesting that sensory language serves to naturalize the cultural and ideological messages embedded in advertisements.

The blend of modern and authentic themes reflects the dual nature of Thai cuisine, which is rooted in tradition yet adaptable to contemporary tastes. This strategy aligns with global culinary trends, as observed by Belch (2017), who emphasizes the importance of modernity in appealing to younger, urban consumers.

Ultimately, the emphasis on health and freshness aligns with current consumer preferences for wholesome and sustainable food options. This trend, noted by Jocuns and Jocuns (2023), reflects broader societal shifts towards health-conscious consumption, which Thai food advertisers adeptly incorporate into their narratives.

V. CONCLUSION

The strategic use of lexical and discursive patterns in Thai food advertisements effectively bridges cultural boundaries while constructing compelling narratives that resonate with consumers. The combination of descriptive adjectives, sensory language, and cultural references not only enhances the appeal of Thai cuisine but also reinforces its authenticity and heritage. By incorporating localized terms such as "rasa otentik" and "cita rasa Thailand," advertisers create a hybridized marketing approach that appeals to Indonesian consumers, emphasizing both cultural familiarity and exoticism. Furthermore, sensory appeals, such as "rich flavors" and "crispy texture," establish an emotional connection with consumers, enhancing engagement and recall. This analysis aligns with global trends in food advertising, where the balance between tradition and modernity, authenticity and innovation plays a crucial role in shaping consumer perceptions. The incorporation of health and freshness, alongside narratives of cultural tradition and culinary experience, reflects broader societal shifts towards more conscious and immersive consumption. Ultimately, the lexical and discursive strategies in these advertisements demonstrate how language functions not only as a tool for persuasion but also as a mechanism for cultural storytelling and identity construction, influencing both consumer behavior and cultural narratives.

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Structural Case Assignment in the Arabic Control Embedded Clause: The Role of Mood Beyond Agreement and Tense

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Abstract—This paper aims to demonstrate how Structural Case (SC) is assigned within the Control Embedded Clause (CEC) in Arabic. It illustrates that the partial agreement feature cannot assign case in configurations like verb-subject-object and post-verbal subject order, as they only exhibit number and gender features. This is clear evidence that there is a disassociation between the agreement feature and CEC case assignment. When considering tense, the absence or inadequacy of tense presents a significant obstacle to nominative SC assignment. Despite the expectation for a CEC tense event to coincide with the tense of the matrix clause, the data indicates that this is not the case, as the tense in the embedded clause does not occur at the same time as the matrix clause event. Thus, a genuine tense is not encoded in the control subjunctive clause, unlike in the tensed indicative control embedded clause. Therefore, mood can assign SC in the CEC. The researcher proposes that the existence of the subjunctive verb and the complementizer creates agree relation between v^0 and mood⁰. This enables the inheritance of features, resulting in the valuation of verb and mood. In this context, moodP is proposed to be selected by Fin⁰, and an agree relation takes place, resulting in a valued Mood⁰ by Fin⁰. The embedded subject and object are assumed to enter agree relation with mood⁰ and v^{*0} , resulting in the subject and object getting assigned for nominative and accusative cases.

Index Terms—case, mood, Arabic, control clause, subjunctive

I. INTRODUCTION

The study of syntax within Arabic presents a compelling landscape where the roles of agreement and tense to assign the case of noun phrases (NPs) of embedded clauses become pivotal. Recent studies have introduced these grammatical features to carry significant implications for understanding sentence structure in Arabic, especially in contexts where embedded clauses interact with matrix subjects and verbs. Thus, a central inquiry arises: How do agreement and tense in Arabic control embedded clauses that do not optimally account for assigning structural case? This question opens avenues for examining the association between syntactic mechanisms and their functional outcomes in control embedded clause structures.

The objective of this literature review is to show the structure of the control embedded clause in Arabic grammar and relate this topic to the existing studies, elucidating the differences of agreement and tense as they manifest in Arabic syntax. By navigating through various theoretical perspectives, this paper aims to clarify the implications of these grammatical features and their impact as it regards case assignment, particularly in the embedded control clause, showing how these two features cannot assign a control embedded clause structural case.

The Arabic language exhibits a complex system for licensing the structural case of embedded clauses, particularly when agreement and tense are deficient. This investigation delves into how mood, specifically the subjunctive, plays a pivotal role in this process, drawing on insights from various linguistic studies.

A control embedded clause is a dependent (subordinate) clause where the subject is controlled by the subject of the matrix clause. Standard Arabic (SA) has various embedded clause constructions. Control embedded clauses are often used to express relationships where the subject of the embedded clause is controlled by the subject of the matrix clause. This type of control clause is known as obligatory control. It resembles that of English, where the subject of the infinitive is understood or identified with the argument (subject or object) of the main verb. This clause exhibits an agreement feature that indicates co-reference between the subject of the matrix clause and the subject of the embedded clause. Thus, the subject of the matrix clause should control the subject of the embedded clause through certain features of verbs that provide an expectation that the subject of the main clause is also the one performing the action (or bearing the state) like that of the embedded clause.

In Arabic syntax, embedded clauses are complex structures that serve various functions within sentences. Usually, they function as complements to verbs or adjectives, offering essential information while remaining subordinate. The formation of these embedded clauses may vary from that of main clauses, particularly in terms of agreement and tense. Therefore, understanding their frameworks is significant for understanding structural case assignment, especially in light of questions regarding how certain finiteness features interact to impact case assignment.

II. CASE ASSIGNMENT IN EMBEDDED CLAUSES

The embedded clause's noun phrase is assumed to have a nominative case. However, in certain contexts, Standard Arabic demonstrates a subject-verb-object complement structure where the subject determiner phrase (DP) is assigned an accusative case (ACC) (Fassi Fehri, 1993; Shlonsky, 1997). A specific type of context involves a subject preceded by complementizers such as *inna*, *?anna*, *ka'anna*, *layta*, and *la'alla*. In this form, the embedded clause is headed by such a complementizer and must exhibit an overt subject that is assigned as an accusative case after the complementizer, as illustrated in (1a). In Arabic grammar, the sentence is ungrammatical if the subject is assigned a nominative case in such construction, as seen in (1b).

- (1) a. attalib-u ?axbaran-i ?anna Ali-an kassar-a ?shubak-a
 The student. NOM told 1sm-me that Ali. ACC break. perf the window.
 'The student told me that Ali broke the window.'
- b. * ?limt-u ?anna ?l-walad- a zar-a ?l-madienat-a
 know.pst. I that the-boy. NOM visit.pst the-city
 'I knew that the boy visited the city.'

Example (1a) demonstrates that the subject *Ali-an* appears in the accusative case when preceded by a complementizer.

Another context of the CEC subject accusative case is in a construction when a preverbal subject is followed by a tenseless verb of a non-finite clause, such as in an embedded subjunctive clause that has a tenseless verb in which the subject of the embedded non-finite verb receives accusative case (2a). Additionally, this phenomenon also happens when the post-verbal embedded subject receives a nominative case (2b).

- (2) a. ?radt-u ?l-mu?lim-a ?an yulqi muhadarat-an
 Wanted. I the-teacher. ACC Comp deliver a lecture
 'I wanted the teacher to deliver a lecture.'
- b. talabt-u ?an yaktub-a ?ttalib-u qissat-an
 request. I Comp write.3.sm the-student. NOM story. ACC
 'I requested the student to write a story.'

According to these examples, the accusative subjects in Standard Arabic can be assigned case by the functional elements (e.g., a complementizer). Various linguistic studies support this proposal, including those by Fassi Fehri (1993) and Benmamoun (2000), who suggest that complementizers and negation particles assign accusative case to a determiner phrase. Still, linguists like Chomsky (1995), Rizzi (1997), É. Kiss (2002), and Haegeman (2004) argued that a DP following a complementizer or negation particle is not a subject but rather a topic that has moved from its base position within the verb phrase shell. A topic—a DP that has moved from its base position within the verb phrase to a higher position in the clause, such as Spec-CP or a topic position in the left periphery—would mean the DP is not receiving its nominative case; rather, it is a topic in the accusative case. The real subject is represented by a null pronoun (*pro*) located lower in the structure. In the construction *?anna Ali-an*, *Ali-an* is a topicalized element in the left periphery, assigned accusative by *?anna*.

The complementizer can also occur as the head of verbless sentences, or what is known in traditional grammar as "the nominal sentence" (Ryding, 2005) or topic-comment construction. Likewise, the DP that follows the complementizer is assigned an accusative case, as demonstrated in (3a). Furthermore, the embedded clause may feature a null complementizer of the strict subject-verb order, with the subject assigned to the obligatory accusative case, as shown in (3b).

- (3) a. ?nna ?tta?ir-a jamil-un
 comp the-bird. ACC beautiful. NOM
 'Indeed, the bird is beautiful.'
- b. danant-u ?l-walad-a gad-a ?ssayarat-a
 pst.think.I the-boy. ACC drive.3sm the-car. ACC
 'I thought the boy drove the car.'

The hypothesis suggested in this topic posits that the embedded clause is a tense phrase (TP) where the accusative case on the preverbal subject is assigned by the association of the probe of the matrix verb. This proposal has two shortcomings. First, it is possible to insert an overt complementizer in contexts, as demonstrated in (3a). Second, adverbial phrases may occur between the matrix verb and the embedded clause (Costa, 1997; Cinque, 1999; Belletti, 2004). They demonstrated that in such constructions, the verb is unable to probe the subject of the embedded clause, as illustrated in (4). Consequently, the occurrence of the adverb in this position blocks the matrix verb from probing the subject of the embedded clause. This adverb, intervening between the matrix verb and the embedded complementizer phrase (CP), can be a barrier to agree relation in such a structure.

- (4) dhanant-u sarahatan ?nna ?rrajul-a ghadar-a bakiran
 think.pst. I frankly that the-man. ACC leave. pst earlier.
 'Frankly, I thought that the man had left earlier.'

Standard Arabic manifests some particles that indicate negation, such as *lam*, *lan*, and *la*. Typically, the negation particles appear at a sentence-initial position followed by the verb (5a). However, according to scholars such as Fassi Fehri (1993), Benmamoun (2000), and Ryding (2005), if these negation particles are followed immediately by a subject determiner phrase, then the sentence will be rendered ungrammatical (5b).

- (5) a. *lam taktub ?lbint-u ?ddars-a*
 neg-pst write. the-girl. NOM the-lesson. ACC
 'The girl didn't write the lesson.'
 b. **lan ?lbint-u taktub ?ddars-a*
 neg.fut the-girl. NOM write.fem.pre the-lesson. ACC
 'The girl didn't write the lesson.'

The important issue in this discussion is that the subject determiner phrase that immediately follows a negation particle such as *la* should receive the accusative case. In Arabic syntax, a subject DP comes right after this negation particle and typically receives the accusative case instead of the expected nominative case. When *laa* negates a verb (often in present tense or imperative/jussive mood), it may trigger a structure where the verb does not fully assign the nominative case. The negation particle disrupts the verb's ability to assign nominative. Instead, the subject DP following *laa* gets the accusative case (marked by a final *-a* or *-an* suffix). If the subject DP is not case-marked accusative, the sentence will be ungrammatical. Thus, a typical control embedded clause non-finite context in SA in which the subject appears in the accusative case in the subjunctive complement. This type of subjunctive clause is introduced by a specific functional particle such as *?an*, *kay*, *li*, *likay*, and *hatta*. It is observed that the verb following the particle lacks tense. This subjunctive complement can be negated by using the particle *la*, as shown in (6), and these subjunctive clauses are primarily non-finite, having an embedded temporal tense. To advocate tense by relating both the matrix and embedded clause events' occurrence simultaneously will revive tense, as a case assigner would be unconvincing. The control embedded clause event is expected to occur after that of the matrix event but not before. In this paper, the analysis reveals that the tense feature cannot assign a case in certain constructions because the embedded event has been noticed in some constructions to occur before the matrix clause event. This instantiates that tense [T] cannot assign case to the embedded subject of CEC (see Section 5).

- (6) *?lfariq-u la yuhriz ?hadaf-an*
 the-team neg.pre score goals. ACC
 'The team doesn't score goals.'

In discussing the subjunctive embedded clause subject structure, it is important to note that the clause appears in three forms. One of these forms in the control structure that contains a subject of the embedded clause is *pro*, which is co-referential with the subject of the matrix clause (7).

- (7) *qultu lah-u ?ureed-u ?an ?arhala*
 said. I to-him 1.sg.want. I that *pro* leave.
 'I said to him that I want to leave.'

Second, the subjunctive complement clause displays an obviation structure where the nominative subject appears after the embedded verb. In this structure, the subject should not precede the particle (8).

- (8) *?ttaman-a ?an yanam-a ?ttifl-u*
 1.sg.wish that sleep.3.sg.msc the-child. NOM
 'I wish the child would sleep.'

The third type of the subjunctive embedded clause is the Exceptional Case Marking (ECM)-like type. It has a surface subject that can occur in two positions, either following the embedded verb (9a) or preceding the functional particle *?an* (9b).

- (9) a. *?mart-u ?an yahdur-a ?ttalib-u*
 order.I that to come.3.sg.msc the-student. NOM
 'I ordered that the student come.'
 b. *?mart-u ?ttalib-a ?an yahdur-a*
 order. I the-student. ACC that to come.3.sg.msc
 'I ordered that the student come.'

In sentence (9), the embedded subject in both sentences displays two distinct case markers. In (9a), the pre-verbal subject is assigned a nominative case as a result of following the embedded verb and has an accusative case, like (9b), when the subject precedes the particle *?an*. This indicates that the preverbal subject DP can exhibit a nominative or an accusative case depending on its syntactic position. Therefore, the researcher assumes that functional categories like negation particles and complementizers can assign case. For instance, the complementizers are proposed to assign an accusative case to a subsequent DP, and similarly, a negation particle can assign an accusative case to that DP as well.

III. CONTROL EMBEDDED CLAUSE VERB FINITENESS

Finiteness, a morphosyntactic feature studied by linguists concerning force (Matthews & Rizzi, 1997), is the focus of our research on verb inflection. In this work, the researcher studies verb finiteness as relevant to verb inflection manifested through [number, person, and gender] features. Moreover, a fully inflected verb for tense is crucial for case

assignment to the noun phrases. This research posits that a verb is inflected for the functional features including tense, agreement, and mood, which are determined by the verb's features within its inflectional domain (Al Balushi, 2011, p. 128). Drawing on cross-linguistic research, the linguistic studies on finiteness focused on two main domains: clausal finiteness, where a finite verbal form occurs in an independent declarative clause, and non-finite verbs, found in dependent clauses. The second domain of finiteness is closely associated with verb inflection, which is considered the central feature that indicates person, number, gender, and tense. This involves agreement in clausal finiteness through ϕ -features. Therefore, a finite verb is assumed to be inflected for tense and agreement. However, in certain languages, like Arabic, there is inconsistency in the full inflection or real inflected tense of the finite verb. In certain paradigmatic forms of Arabic verb-subject-object order, the verb inflects for tense, not for the full form of agreement. In contrast, the Portuguese infinitival clause is inflected for agreement but not for tense. This contrasts with the findings of Nikolaeva (2007), who argues that neither tense nor agreement can be considered universal categories responsible for determining finiteness. This variability in verb finiteness across languages leads to the classification of verbal inflectional morphology. The status of the clausal head is constructed through clausal finiteness, with tense and agreement inflection heads referring to the finite clause.

Complement finiteness is presented in the complement domain in which both inflection (INFL) and complement (C) heads coordination result in the emergence of a new form of finiteness. Platzack and Holmberg (1989) argued that finiteness functions as an operator in C^0 , which must be realized to assign the nominative case. Therefore, the correlation between I^0 and C^0 is crucial for case licensing. From a similar perspective, Kayne (1994) argued that the realization and integration of both I^0 and C^0 are necessary for finiteness, with C^0 encoding tense as proposed by Stowell (1982). Rizzi (1997) offered a groundbreaking idea in the field about the Split-Comp-Hypothesis, suggesting that the C^0 domain serves as a Fin^0 head of force⁰ and Top⁰. Additionally, he argued that agreement and tense compose a new form of finite feature that can be analyzed through functional heads in an IP main domain. Thus, comp-finiteness varies from inflectional finiteness since it includes the feature-containing tense, agreement, and mood.

Briefly, the researcher contends that the concept of finiteness, when viewed in its inflectional form, is distinguished by markers such as [T], [AGR], and [mood]. The presence or absence of these features determines whether a verb is finite or non-finite. Our proposition further extends to provide I^0 of I-finiteness to have [$\pm$ tense], [$\pm$ mood], or [$\pm$ AGR] by ϕ -features. This substantial inflectional finiteness can be projected as XP, thus leading to the projection of a TP, MoodP, and AGRP. For example, the instantiation of a T^0 as a head of [T] projects as TP where the structural case licensing is possible.

The researcher concluded that having a verbal category in CEC is essential to receiving a structural case assignment based on the previously provided information. Verifying that the verb satisfies the AGR, tense, and mood properties necessary for inflectional finiteness is crucial. An agreement feature that connects the reference of the matrix clause NP and the embedded clause's subjects is thus observed in an embedded finite clause.

IV. AGREEMENT AND CASE

Agreement serves a fundamental role in the architecture of Arabic syntax. It establishes the grammatical relationship between different elements in a sentence, such as subjects and verbs or nouns and adjectives. It ensures that these elements correspond in phi-features (gender, number, and person), creating a coherent syntactic structure. In the context of controlling embedded clauses, agreement is typically intertwined with the syntactic function of verbs. The main clause agreement has an impact on embedded clauses, which are subordinate constructions inside sentences. Many scholars have observed that these elements interact to create a variety of syntactical outcomes across different sentence structures. For example, Saeed (2015) sheds light on how agreement operates within subjunctive complements, positing that the nuances of agreement can dictate the nature of relations established within these constructs. Likewise, Alatawi (2016) presents a minimalist analysis of the left periphery in Arabic, offering insight into how agreement frames the boundaries and interpretations of embedded structures. He contends that the traditional roles of agreement and tense cannot fully account for case assignment in embedded clauses, as these aspects appear to function independently in some circumstances. This approach suggests the possibility that case assignment is influenced by factors other than matrix clause features.

Arabic has two potential word-order agreement patterns: verb-subject-object and subject-verb-object, each corresponding to distinct agreement patterns. The pre-verbal subject order displays complete agreement for both nominal and pronominal subjects, as seen below.

- (10) a. Ahmed kasar-a ʔl bab-a Full ϕ - SVO
 Ahmed.3.sg.msc pst.break.3.sg.msc the- door
 ‘Ahmed broke the door.’
- b. huw-a kasar-a ʔl bab-a Full ϕ - SVO
 he.3.sg.msc. pst.break.3.sg.msc the door
 ‘He broke the door.’

In contrast to the full agreement pattern in subject-verb-object order, the post-verbal subject shows both full and partial agreement. It triggers partial agreement on the verb and only includes gender and person, while the number feature of verb-subject-object verbs is invariably singular, as shown below.

- (11) a. qarʔ-a-t ʔl ban-t-u ʔl-kitab-a Full ϕ - VSO
 pst.read.3.sg.fem the.girl.3.sg.fem. NOM the-book. ACC
 ‘The girl read the book.’
 b. qarʔ-a-t ʔl-bana-t-u ʔl-kitab-a Partial ϕ - VSO
 pst.read.3.sg.fem the.girls.3.plur.fem. NOM the-book. ACC
 ‘The girls ate the bread.’

In (11b), the verb *qarʔ-a-t* is inflected for the third singular feminine, showing agreement with the subject *ʔl-bana-t-u* in person and gender but disagreeing in number. This incomplete agreement leads to a defective agreement because the verb *qarʔ-a-t* does not fully agree with the subject *ʔl-bana-t-u*. This observation challenges the proposals made by Soltan (2007), Schutze (1997), and Chomsky (2000) regarding the assignment of nominative as a reflection of ϕ -features valuation on I^0 . The incomplete nature of ϕ -agreement in this context highlights a disassociation between case assignment and ϕ -features as shown.

The pronominal subject, on the other side, is exhibited in two forms: lexical and suffixal. The lexical form aligns perfectly with subject-verb agreement (12a). The suffixal form includes the suffix –a attached to the verb (12b), where it exhibits a match and tendency to agree with the verb. The suffixal pronoun does not demonstrate partial agreement because the verb is selected as singular, and the attachment of the suffix at the end of the verb serves to pluralize the verb, similar to the suffixal subject pronoun.

- (12) a. how-a rabih-a ʔl-jaa'zat-a
 he.3.sg.msc.NOM pst.win.3.sg.msc the.prize.sg.fem. ACC
 ‘He won the prize.’
 b. rabih-a ʔl-jaa'zat-a
 pst.win.3.sg.msc (-u.he).3.sg.msc the. prize.sg.fem. ACC.
 ‘He won the prize.’

The previous examples present the argument that deficient agreement cannot assign case in embedded clauses that have gained traction in recent syntax research. Saeed (2015) argues that rather than being assigned in these subordinate structures, the case in Arabic is often governed by the higher clause. This contention challenges the idea that agreement can provide direct influence, as the features from the matrix clause do not consistently result in case assignment within the embedded structure. Instead, the embedded clause case assignment may rely on alternative syntactic mechanisms, such as mood as a functional head and the agree operation, whereby the case assignment relationship is established to ensure that the control embedded clause subject receives the appropriate case.

In a broader context of agreement and case, verb-object agreement plays a significant role in ensuring that defective agreement can also be observed in verb-object constructions, where there is a mismatch in [gender and number] features between the verb and object in post-verbal subject forms (see example 13, below). However, example (14) demonstrates some level of agreement in the verb-subject-object form, specifically in terms of the [person] feature. The subject can be overt, as shown in (13), or it can be null, appearing at the beginning as in (15a), typically exhibiting full agreement between the verb and object in terms of [number and gender] features. In contrast, when the object suffix is attached to the verb (14b), zero agreement is observed. This highlights the challenges posed by limited contexts in the presence of verb-object agreement.

- (13) Ali-un kalam-a ʔl-banata-a Partial ϕ - V-O
 Ali.3.sg.msc. NOM pst.talk.3.sg.msc the girls.3.plur.fem. ACC
 ‘Ali talked to the girls.’
 (14) qad-a Ali-un ʔssayara-t-a
 pst.drive.3.sg.msc Ali.3.sg.msc. NOM the.cars.3.plu.fem. ACC
 ‘The man drove the cars.’
 (15) a. (ʔnna) nadait- hu
 (I.1.sg.msc. NOM) pst.call.3.sg.msc. him. 3.sg.msc. ACC
 ‘I called to him.’
 b. (ʔnna) nadait-u-huna
 (I.1.sg.msc.NOM) pst.call.3.sg.msc. them. 3.plur.fem. ACC
 ‘I called to them.’

These examples demonstrate that object-verb agreement is typically partial, regardless of the subject and object represented by the lexical, pronominal, or suffixal form. Clearly, I-finiteness in these clauses is not achieved through ϕ -features. The subject and object verb agreement is impoverished because the verb disagrees fully NPs. This supports the argument that the embedded clause, as in (15), demonstrates a verb that only agrees with the subject in terms of the [number] feature (see 16, below).

- (16) wafaq-a ʔlmʕlim-u ʔnn yaTHhab-a ʔttulab-u ʔrihlat-an
 pst.approve.3.sg.msc the.teacher.NOM comp pre.go.3.sg.msc the.students.3.plur.msc trip.3.sg.fem.ACC
 ‘The teacher approved the students to go on a trip.’

It should be noted that the verb selected in these clauses does not exhibit full agreement either with subjects or with objects. While certain structures in both orders demonstrate full agreement,¹ other evidence and structures indicate that agreement cannot be optimally incorporated into the process of structural case licensing of the CEC. The idea is that ϕ -features on the embedded I^0 are typically incomplete in most word-order forms. This, consequently, gives rise to ϕ -defectiveness, as argued by Chomsky (2001), where the ϕ -defective probe ϕ -incomplete on I^0 results in an unassigned case to the NP goal.

V. CASE BEYOND TENSE COMPETENCE

Tense situates events or states in time, informing readers when events occur—whether in the past, present, or future—and plays a key role in verb conjugation. There seems to be certain evidence from the literature that tense [T] is an inherent I-finiteness feature of the control embedded clause besides agreement association with nominative case assignment. This research tested Chomsky's (1995, p. 368; 2001, p. 6) proposal that tense carries an intrinsic feature that must be checked to assign the nominative case. Accordingly, the full inflected tense can assign the nominative case. According to the proposal, the case in the control embedded clause of the T-bar modified by *to* is assigned to PRO as nominative at the *to*-tense phrase. The situation gets more complex when an infinitival construction is considered as a [-T] clause despite efforts to suggest a complement clause to indicate temporal time relations. Likewise, Pesetsky and Torrego (2000, 2004) put forward the uninterpretable tense feature *uT* proposal, stating that structural case is assigned as a reflex to *uT* on D. To clarify, [T] is assumed to have interpretable tense [*iT*] and [*uT*], and nominative case is assigned under the features matching between the probe and goal that results in case valuation. Stowell's (1982) work shares many similarities with current proposals considering infinitival complements as either tensed or tenseless, depending on various syntactic structures and properties. It is argued that the future *irrealis* infinitive inherently possesses a tense feature. The time of the infinitival event may occur either before or after the utterance time (*uT*). Stowell's study made a distinction between control infinitival clauses as [+tense] and raising and ECM infinitives are characterized as lacking tense [-tense]. This distinction is associated with the PRO case being unvalued when full tense is required. These proposals worked on tense reduction on the semantic aspect of [T] for satisfying the case assignment requirement of I-finiteness, specifically in rescuing tenseless structures. This is necessary due to the presence of defective tense in Arabic, which is linked to the presence of the verb. In this regard, the researcher finds that PF of small clauses, such as imperative and equational, poses a significant challenge to the [T] feature when represented by a non-finite clause like the imperative infinitive. Additionally, the absence of lexical and auxiliary verbs in equational structures complicates the issue further in terms of encountering the tense feature.

Tense in Arabic displays similarities to the English infinitival clause, presenting a theoretical challenge of tense realization and representation. It is argued to have an intrinsic feature that contributes to assigning nominative case. However, the Arabic [T] feature is primarily realized through the verbal category. As a result, the absence of a verb, as seen in equational sentences, results in the absence of tense. Consequently, case assignment cannot be obtained as the result of defectiveness or absence of [T] at Phonetic Form. This is evident in imperative and equational sentences, as shown in the examples below.

- (17) ?ftah- Ø ?l-bab-a
 impr.open.pre.2.sg the-door.3.sg.msc. ACC
 '(You) open the door.'
- (18) ?ttalib-u muTHabir-un
 the.student.3.sg.msc. NOM hardworking.3.sg.msc
 'The student is hardworking.'

These are examples where the [-T] feature responsible for case licensing is completely absent. This situation in Arabic reveals various forms of the manifestation of tense. The [T] element is primarily seen in lexical verbs, which are inflected for both present and past tense. Additionally, the tense is realized through the auxiliary verbs. Further, it is encoded in some particles such as *lan* and *lam*. All the occurrences are expected to project tense phrases. However, the efficacy of these particles to carry tense may be questionable due to their semantic denotations and inconsistent inflections. Such particles tend to be stative, lacking consistent inflections to signify past, present, and future forms. Therefore, considering the complexities surrounding tense, the researcher agrees with Al-Balushi (2011, p. 30) that tense absence in the sentence creates a significant challenge for nominative case licensing.

The CEC verb exhibits a distinct verbal form from that of the matrix clause. The embedded clause contains a temporal tense that is dependent on the tense of the matrix clause. It is important to interpret the tense of the embedded clause in relation to the tense of the matrix clause. The event/action of the embedded clause is anticipated to occur after the event or action of the matrix clause (19a), and not before it (19b).

- (19) a. qarrara-Ø ?l-muzariʿ-u ?l-aan-a [ʔan yazzraʿ-a *pro* ?l-arda gadan]
 pst.decide.msc-Ind the-farmer.NOM now. Comp Impf-cultivate.msc.sub ec the-land. ACC tomorrow.

¹ In both orders, SVO and VSO, Arabic exhibits ϕ -complete I^0 but is still impoverished because verb selection is variable in the same structure paradigm, which could select a verb that shows ϕ -incomplete with the subject. The selection can also occur in the subject paradigm, where a singular or plural can be selected for the same singular verb (11b), where the plural subject *?l-bana-t-u* could be replaced by a singular subject, *?l-bint-u*, and the sentence still remains grammatical.

‘The farmer decided today to cultivate the land tomorrow.’

- b. *qarrara-Ø ?l-muzari-ʕu ?l-aan-a [ʔan yazzraʕ-a *pro* ?l-arda ?l-bariha]
 pst.decide.3.sg.msc-ind the-farmer. NOM now Comp impf- cultivate.msc.sub ec the-land. ACC yesterday.
 ‘The farmer decided today to cultivate the land yesterday.’

Sentence (19b) is ungrammatical after the substitution of the event carrier *?l-arda* of (19a) with *?l-bariha*. This is due to the matrix clause verb *qarrara* -decide, which indicates a lack of an independent tense operator. The tense of the embedded clause appears semantically odd, providing clear evidence that the subjunctive verb distinctly encodes perfect and imperfect tense. Therefore, it is expected that the control embedded clause tense event is to occur at the time of the event/action in the matrix clause. Both sentences in (19) provide evidence that CEC has defective tense. This is, simply, because the embedded subjunctive clause does not occur at the same time as the matrix clause event or after. This state has been demonstrated by Cowper (2005, p. 27), who has illustrated this point by discussing the temporal tense of the embedded clause lacking a clear temporal index, indicating dependency on the governing clause for temporal reference. Cowper also noted that the Arabic subjunctive clause I⁰ has the missing precedence.² The existence of the feature indicates whether the verb in the clause is marked for [$\pm$ past]. To put it more simply, the previous discussion demonstrates the event in the embedded control subjunctive clause is not understood to happen before the action of the main verb. As a result, it does convey a specific or a real tense. In this regard, it is important to compare subjunctive constructions to their indicative counterparts, which can distinguish between perfect and non-perfect tense distinctions, as shown in (20) below.

- (20) qal-a-Ø ?l-muʕlim-u ?l-yawm-a [ʔnna-hu sharah-a ?ddars-a bil-ʔmsi]
 pst.say.3.sg.msc-ind the-teacher. NOM today Comp-he pst-explain. msc-ind the- lesson. ACC
 with-the-yesterday. GEN
 ‘The teacher said today that he explained the lesson yesterday.’

The event encoded in the embedded clause can be interpreted as the action/event occurring before the event in the matrix clause. Therefore, the indicative verb in (20) serves as strong evidence that the "I-finiteness" feature of this clause includes a genuine [T].

Despite the discussion of that CEC having defective [ϕ] and [T], the subjunctive CEC verb still maintains its finite feature property. This assertion is backed by Cowper's (2002, 2005) Feature Geometry proposal regarding inflectional features. She proposed the subjunctive verb form incorporates both [proposition] and [finite] features. According to her proposal, the subjunctive verb clauses should exhibit agreement and structural case assignment. In this context, Cowper revises the status of subjunctive finite verb status, regardless of its lack of connection to the temporal moment of speech, to be valued for tense. Based on this proposal, the subjunctive verb is considered finite and cannot be exclusively interpreted in the moment of speech like the indicative verb. Instead, it should be interpreted concerning the events of the matrix clause following the geometry of inflection. The subjunctive verb may lack deixis but still maintains a T-deixis relation with that of the matrix clause.

Synthesizing these arguments and analyzing pertinent structures reveals a complex landscape where conventional theories of case assignment are subject to significant scrutiny. It is evident that while agreement and tense play important roles in syntactic structure, their role in assigning structural case within control embedded clauses is constrained. This intricacy challenges the existing approaches and prompts further investigation into the distinctive feature or mechanism the researcher accounts for CEC structural case assignment.

VI. TOWARDS MOOD FEATURE

This section explores the subjunctive mood, which establishes a relationship between the main clause and the embedded clause, enabling the embedded clause subject to receive the appropriate case. Mood as an I-finiteness feature will be discussed, while also suggesting that control embedded clause verbs have [Mood]; thereby, structural case can be checked for the CEC noun phrases. The proposal is based on two key ideas of Rizzi's (1997) and Landau's (2004). Rizzi (1997, p. 284) posits that the finite verb forms exhibit distinctions not only in tense and agreement but also in mood. Further, he posited that the Comp domain has similar finiteness feature properties that the INFL domain has. Thus, based on this insight and drawing from Cowper's (2002, 2005) proposal that subjunctive clauses consist of finite verbal forms, it can be argued that the subjunctive verbal form of CEC in Arabic carries a subjunctive mood feature. This property instantiates the clause to be finite, as seen in (21), where the verb *yahdur-a* conveys subjunctive verbal mood.

- (21) lam yahdur-a ?-rraʕeis-u ?l-ʔdʒtmʕ-a
 neg-pst impf-attend.3.sg.msc.sub the-president. NOM the-meeting. ACC
 ‘The president did not attend the meeting.’

In sentence (21), the particle *lam* indicates and assigns the subjunctive mood to the CEC. This particle is merged in Fin⁰, where it functions as a subjunctive mood marker, as seen in (21), to denote a past event. The use of the particle in this construction is proposed to provide a clear indication of mood rather than tense (Cowper & Hall, 2007).

² “Reference” means that the requirement for the verb is to indicate a distinction between past vs. non-past. In other words, a verb in Arabic must be inflected to show either a perfect or imperfect tense. Through this process of tense realization, an I⁰ carries a virtual [T] feature that can contribute to assigning case.

The second idea is based on facts from Hebrew and Balkan languages of the obligatory control clause in which Landau (2004) argued that such languages exhibit finite control, where control extends into finite clauses. Finiteness, according to Landau, is evident in both tense and agreement markers. His analysis revolves around checking [T] and [AGR] on I⁰ and C⁰. This argument of obligatory control finite clauses contrasts with English constructions, which involve non-finite obligatory control clauses. In Hebrew and Balkan languages, the obligatory control clause is in the subjunctive mood. Likewise, Aygen (2002) proposes a significant shift from the traditional view that nominative case is inherently related to tense or agreement. Instead, she posits that nominative case can be assigned by mood and modality. Aygen argues that Turkish subjects can receive nominative case in non-finite clauses, such as nominalizations or subjunctives, even when tense is not overtly marked and agreement might not be fully inflected. Therefore, she contends that the nominative case is assigned by mood, rather than solely on finiteness. Mood, whether subjunctive or indicative, can independently trigger the assignment of nominative case, regardless of tense and agreement status. In some languages, mood is located in higher functional projections (e.g., MoodP or ModP) above TP, or potentially within the CP domain. Aygen suggests these heads can assign the nominative case to the subject, particularly in non-finite or modal contexts. Thus, these studies support the researcher's idea that the embedded verbs of CEC are in the subjunctive mood. In some constructions, mood is exhibited by specific particles regarded as mood indicators. Furthermore, in these languages, the obligatory clause uses the subjunctive complementizer, which is obligatory in the existence of an embedded topic/focus. These two structural features are also clear in Arabic CEC, as seen below.

- (22) *haawal-a*-Ø *?ttalib-u_i* [*?nn* *yatahadTH-a* *pro_i*]
 pst.try.3.sg.msc.ind the-student. NOM comp Impf-talk.3.sg.msc.sub ec
 'The student tried to talk.'

This sentence shows the imperfect tense as indicated by the verb *haawal-a*, which is associated with the presence of the particle/ (Comp) *?an* in the embedded clause. However, this particle also performs as a mood marker. Conversely, the embedded verb *yatahadTH-a* is in a subjunctive mood, which is assigned by the complementizer. This demonstrates the argument that Arabic has another intrinsic feature of the finite control clause represented by [Mood]. This mood feature on the verb instantiates Mood⁰, projecting MoodP.

Arabic verb tense, particularly imperfective, can occur in the subjunctive mood, which carries syntactic relation and allows for head projection, the position where case can be checked and assigned. According to Wright (1967), Standard Arabic verbs relating to tense can be classified into two patterns: perfective and imperfective. The perfective pattern has one form: the past suffixal verb form, while the imperfective includes five forms of mood: indicative, subjunctive, jussive, imperative, and energetic. However, Wright's classification appears to be inconsistent, as the indicative mood can imply present tense through the perfective form, and the subjunctive form carries subjunctive and optative moods in addition to other functions. In light of this, the researcher refers to Fehri's (1993) proposal of modality that is expressed by independent morphemes such as *qad* and *sawfa*. These mood particles include various classes of temporal and syntactic context. The mood markers are thus morphological elements that convey syntactic dependency relations between verb/tense negatives and their complements. Consequently, such mood elements can be interpreted as head projection in the syntactic representation.

The Arabic subjunctive mood is used to express intent, purpose, expectation, permission, and necessity through various functions of verbs. Syntactically, subjunctive mood verbs typically follow specific particles such as the subordinating conjunction *?an*, the negative particle *lan*, and the subordinate particle *likay*, which indicates an optative mood (Benmamoun, 2000). This can be observed in the examples (23a, b, c), respectively.

- (23) a. *howa* *yurid-u* *?an* *ya?t-i*
 he.3ms want.ind comp 3.sg.msc.come.sub
 'He wants to come.'
 b. *lan* *yaktub-a* *?ddarss-a*
 neg.fut Impf.write.3.sg.msc the. lesson.3sm. ACC
 'He will not write the lesson.'
 c. *yadrus-u* *?ttalib-a* *likay* *yanjah-a*
 impf. study.3.sg.msc the. student.3.sg.msc so that 3sm. pass.sub
 'The student studies so that he will pass.'

A key distinctive feature of the subjunctive mood is its requirement for a specific particle, as seen in (24a, b). The absence of this particle results in a non-subjunctive mood sentence.

- (24) a. *?ttalib-u* *?an* *ya?ti* *?l-madrasat-a*
 the-student.NOM comp impf. come.sg.msc.subj the-school. ACC
 'The student will not come to the school.'
 b. *?ttalib-u* *lan* *ya?ti* *?l-madrasat-a*
 the-student. NOM neg come.sg.msc. subj the-school. ACC
 'The student will not come to school.'

The subjunctive verb indicates a future action or event in association with the tensed negative particle as in (23b), or in an embedded non-finite clause following the subjunctive complementizer *?an*, as in (24a). This construction is subordinate to the information provided in the matrix clause and is governed by various particles.

VII. CASE CHECKING IN CEC

In the preceding section (6), it was shown that CEC has MoodP; hence, a structural case is proposed to be assigned in the clause structure. Now, we see how the CEC case-checking process takes place, as illustrated in sentence (25) and its incorporation into the clause structure in (26).

- (25) hawal-a-Ø ?ttalib-u_i [ʔan yaqra-a *pro*_i ?nnass-a
pst.try.3.sg.msc.ind the-student. NOM comp impf-read.3.sg.msc.sub ec the-text. ACC
'The student tried to read the text.'
- (26)

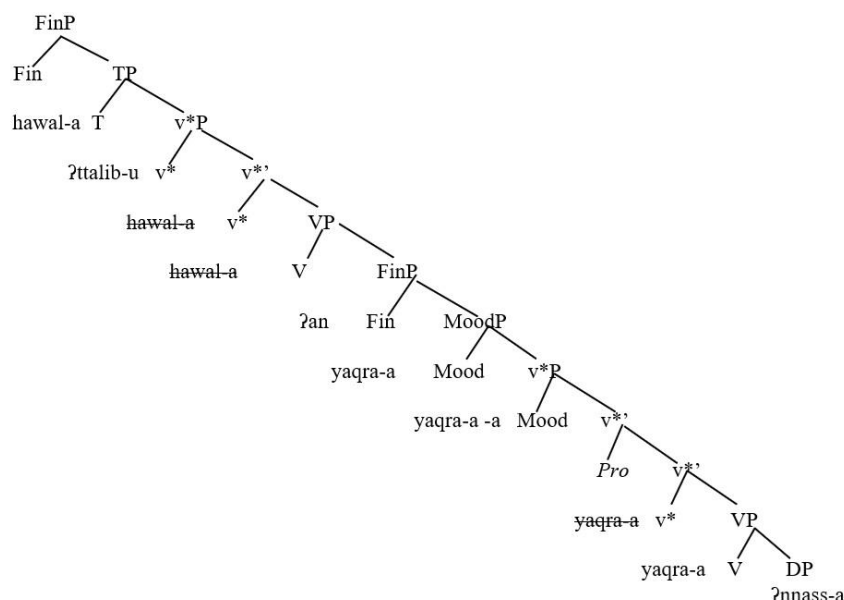


Figure 1. Tree Diagram: CEC Structural Case Assignment by Mood

To explain the process of case assignment, merge operation, and case checking within an embedded clause, the following sequential steps can be followed. Firstly, the embedded verb *yaqra-a* is merged in V^0 with the valued finite verbal feature and with the unvalued case object *?nnass-a* within the complement. The v^{*0} is merged at the verbal position with VP to form a v^*P projection. The external *pro* is merged in Spec- v^*P . The valued [V] feature is associated with v^*P selection by Mood⁰. The agree operation³ (which involves the valuation of uninterpretable features) takes place in v^*P , where v^{*0} enters an agree relation with Mood⁰, resulting in a valued verbal category and valued [Mood] feature. Now, with the mood feature valued, the MoodP is selected by Fin⁰. Now, the agree relation takes place between Fin⁰ and Mood⁰, resulting in valuing [Mood] by Fin⁰, consequentially valuing [Mood] on v^{*0} . Subsequently, the embedded subject *pro* is co-referential with the matrix subject *?ttalib-u*, while the object *?nnass-a* enters in an agree relation with mood⁰ and v^{*0} , respectively. As a result, the embedded subject and object get the case feature valued as nominative and accusative, respectively.

After explaining how the case is checked and assigned in the control embedded clause, the subsequent inquiry revolves around how the case is checked in the matrix clause. While the same procedure for case checking in the embedded clause can be applied, there are some distinctions in the matrix clause. The main clause is typically in the indicative mood and thus possesses the [T] feature. As suggested by Chomsky (1993, p. 7), T⁰ is proposed to raise independently to AGRS, forming [T-AGRS], where agreement and case features of DP are checked. The [T] feature, now, can assign the case as a nominative to the lexical DP subject *?ttalib-u* in sentence (25). However, an important consideration in CEC is that it could be an obligatory clause where the embedded clause subject *pro* is obligatorily co-referential with the matrix subject *?ttalib-u*, as seen in (27). Alternatively, the CEC may demonstrate non-OC features, illustrated in (28), where the embedded clause subject *?bnah-u* is referentially dependent on the lexical NP. In this scenario, the DP is assigned a nominative case from the embedded mood⁰.

- (27) haawala-Ø ?-ttifl-u_i [ʔan ya-msik-a *pro* i/*j ?l-koora-t-a]
pst.try.3sm-ind the-child. NOM Comp impf-catch.3sm.sub ec the-ball-fem. ACC
'The child tried to catch the ball.'
- (28) qarrara-Ø ?l-falah-u [ʔan ya-hruTH-a ?bnah-u ?l-?rda-a]
pst.decide.3sm-ind the-farmer. NOM Comp impf-plow.3sm.sub son.NOM-his the-land-fem.Acc
'The farmer decided that his son plow the land.'

³ The agree operation plays a central role in licensing the structural case of embedded subjects. In Arabic, the operation entails the valuation of uninterpretable features on both the probe (e.g., T or v) and the goal (e.g., the embedded subject). This operation ensures that the embedded subject is assigned the appropriate case, even in the absence of complete agreement and tense features.

VIII. CONCLUSION

This paper explains how ϕ -incomplete serves as clear evidence of the disassociation between case assignment and ϕ -features. It also illustrates how subject and object verb agreement is impoverished because the verb disagrees completely with the NPs. Likewise, the limited realization of tense through the verbal category presents a significant challenge to CEC case licensing, as it encodes intrinsic features that are meant to interpret and assign case, as proposed by Chomsky (2000). Tense, typically following a regular timeline occurrence, presents an issue in CEC construction, as the event occurs before that of the main clause. This discrepancy primarily impacts the embedded clause rather than the matrix, where the indicative mood is associated with [T] occurrences with v^{*0} , forming [T-AGRS] that assign nominative structural case to the DP subject.

The study also provides insight into particles such as *lan* and *lam* that are associated with the subjunctive mood. This mood is attributed to the embedded verb to validate mood⁰ to project moodP, in which case it can be assigned. The research demonstrated how a CEC construction particle indicating the future is associated with the event/action of the embedded clause that is governed by the matrix clause. Consequently, it is assumed that matrix and embedded events occur separately. Notably, a remarkable feature of co-referentiality between the matrix and embedded NP subjects is highlighted in the CEC context. The obligatory embedded clause subject *pro* is considered co-referentially independent of the subject of the matrix clause. This status is contrasted with the non-obligatory clause that is coreferential with the subject of the matrix clause. The nominative case is assigned to both the *pro* and DP of such clauses by mood⁰. Our research revealed a distinction in mood between the matrix clause, which features the indicative mood, and the embedded clause. This mood is associated with [T] and forms T⁰, allowing for [T-AGR] where the DP is assigned for the nominative case.

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Chess, Conspiracy and Crime: Unpacking the Intrigue in Ronan Bennet's *Zugzwang*

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Abstract—Chess functions as both a powerful metaphor and a structural element. It is more than just a game - it is a layered metaphor in which minds wage an invisible battle within and against one another. In literature, it is used as a metaphor, narrative device, and symbolic tool. It has been incorporated to represent the battle of intellect, power play, and strategic planning. This resonates with entrapments beyond the board, capturing the tensions in character dynamics, narrative pacing, and symbolic representations. This paper explores the intricate dynamics of Chess, Crime and Conspiracy in Ronan Bennett's *Zugzwang*. Set in pre-revolutionary Russia of 1914, the narration follows Dr. Otto Spethmann, a psychoanalyst and chess enthusiast who becomes entangled in political intrigues and power plays of various factions. This paper examines the exemplary employment of the chess motif to illuminate the complex tapestry of power politics, moral tensions, and shifting loyalties. It highlights how Bennett uses chess moves to metaphorically intertwine them with crime and conspiracy through impossible choices and dilemmas faced by individuals caught in the machinations of forces beyond their control.

Index Terms—chess, moves, strategies, investigation

I. INTRODUCTION

How impossible for human prudence to foresee and guard against every circumvention! It is even as a game of chess, where, while the rook, or knight, or bishop is busied forecasting some great enterprise, a worthless pawn exposes and disconcerts his scheme. (Fielding, 1743, p. 66)

Fundamentally, chess is a clash between two thought processes. It is a board game that is paradoxically both open and mysterious in nature. It is played on a grid-like board, where all the pieces are open for the players to see, but their moves are always mysterious. It is an exemplar activity that represents the impossibility of human judgement in foretelling and shielding oneself against all forms of evasion. This paper investigates the intriguing aspects of crime and conspiracy set against the background of chess games in Ronan Bennett's *Zugzwang*. It explores the historical settings, political conspiracies, crime components, and character dynamics that are interwoven with both chess elements and elements of chess.

In literature, chess is mostly presented as an allegory for life, war, and clashes of ideologies, etc. It is metaphorically used to portray the horrors of war, life, and death, the conflict between ego and integrity, and the realistic struggle of innocent lives against forces beyond their power and lives lost to protect others. Here, the characters represent chess pieces. Their actions are unpredictable; the 'game' they play is entwined with intelligence, risk, even at the cost of unsuspecting lives. Literary representations of chess can be found in works such as Ovid's *Metamorphosis*, Chaucer's *Book of Duchesse*, and Shakespeare's *The Tempest*. Writers like Isaac Asimov, Agatha Christie, Edgar Allan Poe, Walter Tevis, and Ronan Bennett have used the concept of chess in their works effectively.

Ronan Bennett is a writer and screenplay author from Ireland. He is well known for the drug and gang crime television series *Top Boy*. He has written screenplays for movies and series, such as *Face*, *Love Lies Bleeding*, *Rebel Heart*, and *Lucky Break*. His novel *The Catastrophist* (1997) won him the Irish Post Literature Award and the Belfast Arts Award for Literature, and was shortlisted for the Whitbread Novel Award. *Zugzwang* (2007) was initially published as a series in the British Sunday newspaper *The Observer*. It contains illustrations from Mark Quinn. For the narrative reference Bennett replicates the 2000 Swiss Team Championship tussle between Daniel King and Andrei Sokolov.

Zugzwang is a German chess term that explains a particular position on a chess board. Here, in order to avoid defeat, the player must constantly move, even though it might be disastrous. Bennett uses this move with exceptional mastery for the progression of the plot. The narration is set in 1914 Russia, a country in the midst of political turmoil and on the brink of revolution. The police struggle with increasing crime, and conspirators take the guise of both friends and foes. The narration unfolds through the eyes of Dr. Otto Spethmann, an eminent psychologist who is tied in a literal and metaphorical chess game with his friend Reuven Kopelzen. As the World Chess Championship approaches, the intensifying political tensions and growing public dissatisfaction render each move, both on the chessboard and by the characters, a source of conflict, intrigue, and anticipation.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

In literature, Chess is frequently applied to represent the battle for control, struggle for dominance, and complexity of the human psyche. Steven Poole in his *The Great Game* (2007) outlines the connection between the term Zugzwang and its implication to the plot structure of the novel. He provides a brief summary of the narration, highlighting the political intrigue, plot holes, and rushed pacing, which weaken its literary effect.

In *Chess Fret Ronan Bennett's Zugzwang* (2008), Scott Bradfield examines Bennett's fifth novel. He discusses the entangled political conspiracy and the power struggle between various political factions. He compares Bennett's narrative skill to that of Graham Green and Brian Moore. He highlights the brilliant usage of the chess metaphor, which explores the endless game of power.

Damian Da Costa in *Checkmate: Chess Genius and Shrink team up in Fine Thriller* (2007) categorizes Zugzwang as a political thriller. He reviews the plot, highlighting Bennett's recurring pattern of presenting 'dispassionate thinkers dragged into political commitment' by external forces. He applauds Bennett's meticulous historical research and character development within the novel. He comments that although the text is less literary than the author's previous works, it effectively uses the concept of chess to reflect the revolutionary backdrop of Russia.

An Honorable Heir to Joseph Conrad (2007) by Nick Greenslade lauds the complexity of the narrative, psychological nuances, and strategic incorporation of chess as both a narrative framework and a symbolic element. It considers the novel as an effective reflection of Conrad's *Secret Agent*. In the review *Zugzwang* (2007), Nicole Leclerc provides a concise summary of the plot. He commends the clear historical background, well-defined characters, and an intriguing plot with unexpected twists and turns. It notes that even though the narrative style has descriptions of elements of chess, it remains navigable to readers unfamiliar with the game.

Based on previous research, it has been inferred that the text is widely appreciated for its classy employment of chess as a symbol of political conflicts, power dynamics, and psychological intricacies. These reviews emphasize the historical background, character framework, and narrative techniques and structures. However, it lacks exploration of the pivotal role played by the elements of chess in connecting the narrative action with the chess moves depicted as the story unfolds. This provides the required gap for this research to connect the presented chess maneuverers with the crime and conspiracy that form the core of the narration.

III. METHODOLOGY

This study uses the Qualitative Methodology of Textual Analysis to connect the chess motif with the structure of the plot. It employs multiple literary analysis methods listed below to amplify how chess elevates the novel's analytical concepts.

(a). Symbolic Analysis: Chess is examined as an impactful metaphor to understand the interplay of power and strategy, political intrigue, and character conflicts.

(b). Narrative Analysis: This approach examines how chess moves are closely synced with the structure of the events in the plot, with each move correlating with pivotal decisions and actions.

(c). Thematic Analysis: This method analyses the link between chess, crime, and conspiracy by focusing on both symbolic and actual relevance to the narrative setting of 1914 Russia.

(d). Historical Contextual Analysis: This establishes the novel against the background of the era before the Russian Revolution, aligning its political instability with its struggle for power, and using chess as a vehicle for understanding its historical complexities.

IV. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

A. Conspiracy

In 1914, Russia was engulfed in an atmosphere of rising revolutionary sentiments among laborers and students. It began to experience a tug-of-war for dominance among different political factions, such as pro-Germans, pro-France, Tsarist, Bolsheviks, Loyalist, Jews, and original Russians. Within this chaotic world, Dr. Spethmann – a man of science, logic, and behavior analysis–endeavors to find a semblance of sense to protect himself and his loved ones. He is a highly regarded psychoanalyst and an avid chess player. Moreover, being Russian but of Jewish origin, his loyalty and allegiance are persistently questioned.

The central conspiracy of the narration involves a plot to assassinate Tsar Nicholas II. The mastermind behind this dramatic plot is Colonel Gan, the Director of the Okhrana, Russia's secret police. He connives with his set of supporters, such as Peter Zinnorov, the richest businessman in St. Petersburg, Berek Medem, a Polish terrorist, and Reveun Koplezon, a world-renowned violinist, who rally behind his objective. "Gan is pro-German reactionary," Lychev went on. "He is conspiring with his friend Zinnurov and the Baltic Barons and their pro-German allies to kill Nicholas, who is pro-French autocracy. It doesn't matter how many mistakes Koplezon and Medem make. They are given a free hand" (Bennett, 2007, p. 219). Lychev interprets Gan's scheme as an attempt to eliminate the Tzar and install an underaged king in power who will be a mere puppet for his schemes. This will provide him with the power required to crack down on all rebellions and dissent against him.

Each principal conspirator had their own personal agenda to orchestrate this scheme. Financial considerations play a crucial role in Reuven Kopelzon's life. His Polish background and sympathetic demeanor had elevated him to a heroic status among Polish émigrés. He manipulates this trust to spy for the Okhrana. "Why is he doing it? What does Kopelzon get out of it? 'Money,' Lychev said simply. Your friend likes to live well - or hadn't you noticed" (Bennett, 2007, p. 219). Kopelzon's flamboyant lifestyle drove him to work for General Gan. Berek Medem, a terrorist in the eyes of the Russian police is celebrated as a revolutionary by his people. His mission is to liberate Poland from Russian rule, a goal he pursues in alliance with Gan. The motive behind each perpetrator might be different, but their ultimate goal is to assassinate the Tzar.

The entire plot to eliminate the Tzar appears too implausible to be true. As Medem declares, "Those are the plans that tend to succeed," Medem said smoothly, a smile playing around his lips. "They take people by surprise," (Bennett, 2007, p. 206). It is, on the whole, an idea designed by Gan. "It isn't Kopelzon's plot. He didn't dream it up. Gan did" (Bennett, 2007, p. 218). The plot is too fantastical to be achieved, which actually provides the conspirators with confidence in its success. Furthermore, Gan eliminates any individual who investigates or obstructs the advancement of his secret.

The entire scheme begun with the announcement: "The winner of the final section, the winner of the 1914 St. Petersburg tournament, will have the inestimable honour... Saburov paused for dramatic effect. 'Of being presented at the Peterhof to His Imperial Highness Tsar Nicholas II to be created the first Grandmaster of Chess'" (Bennett, 2007, p. 195). Gan then sets his eyes on the possible favorite, 'the great Avrom Chilowicz Rozental' (Bennett, 2007, p. 4). "He had defeated Lasker in 1909, Capablanca in 1911. The year 1912 was his alone: his spectacular run of triumphs... made him one of the most talked about celebrities of the age" (Bennett, 2007, p. 5). Rozental, originating from an impoverished Polish Jewish background, was the most suitable candidate for this task. Kopelzon, with his empathetic and kind-hearted approach, befriends and subsequently manipulates the shy Rozental. The plan to execute the Tzar was simple and straightforward. After winning the tournament, Rozental would assassinate the Tzar during the ceremony where he is made the Grandmaster of Chess.

After the assassination, Lychev went on, 'Gan and his friends will install a puppet on the throne. They'll close the Duma, break the alliance with France, ally with the Kaiser and unleash a patriotic crusade. You have to admire their creativity; Gan is plotting a coup which they will pass off as a revolutionary uprising. (Bennett, 2007, p. 220)

Gulko, the editor of a liberal newspaper becomes the initial victim for uncovering this secret of Gan resulting in his murder. This triggers events that set forth the spark for the narration.

B. Crime

St. Petersburg of 1914 is a city gripped by political friction and social strife. The storyline unfolds from the first-person perspective of Dr. Otto Spethmann. The central crime that connects the beginning and end of the plot is murder. "On a raw March morning, on the Moika Embankment near Politseisky Bridge, two men accosted the respected liberal newspaper editor O.V. Gulko. Witnesses later told the police that the taller of the two appeared to berate Gulko in an agitated manner... the same young man then produced a knife and his companion a revolver. A shot was fired" (Bennett, 2007, p. 3). The murder of Gulko, which begins as a simple transgression, slowly opens up a complex web of political assassinations, power abuse, and anti-government factions.

Gulko was murdered in cold blood on March 14, 1914. He was both shot and stabbed several times. As a prominent social figure and a Jew in Russia, there is much speculation about his murderers. Suspects ranged from the Socialist Revolutionary Party, Black Hundreds, and German agents to a jealous husband.

Three days later, another murder occurs. Alexander Yastrebov, a student at the Technical Institute, is "bludgeoned to death. His killers put his body in a carriage, then pushed it into the canal near Leinner's Restaurant" (Bennett, 2007, p. 3). With the St. Petersburg chess tournament around the corner, the police are pressured to apprehend the culprits. It is into this investigation that the innocent Dr. Spethmann gets mixed up, unprepared, and unaware.

On the fifth day after Gulko's murder, Dr. Spethmann is visited by the investigation office of St. Petersburg Police Department, Minitimer Lychev. He is interrogated regarding the identity of Yastrebov, as Dr. Spethmann's visiting card has been recovered from the corpse. Despite his vehement denial of any knowledge, he is summoned to the police station the next day, along with his daughter, Catherine.

Within a few hours of the policeman's visit, Dr. Spethmann is assaulted in his own office by two assailants. Kavi and Tolya who appear to be Cossacks by look and speech, but have uncertain identities and affiliations. They probe him regarding his political allegiance. "Are you a revolutionary, Otto? A Socialist Revolutionary? A Bolshevik perhaps? Or a member of the Jewish Bund?" "No, 'I protested. 'I certainly am none of those things.'... 'I have no political allegiance of any kind" (Bennett, 2007, p. 35). Spethmann at several junctures is repeatedly questioned regarding his loyalty and allegiance, which highlights the political turmoil of that era. As he waits for a fatal attack, the assailants spare him but steal the file of a patient, Avron Rozental. At this point, he does not understand that his simple life has been compromised, leading to murkier events.

Desperate to avoid a visit to the police station, Dr. Spethmann enlists the help of Anna Petronova, one of his three principal patients. The other two were Avron Rozental and Gregory Petrov. Anna is the daughter of Zinnora, who has political connections with General Maximilian Gan, the director of the Okhrana. His best efforts are futile against Lychev's relentless pursuit to apprehend the culprits. A couple of days later Lychev arrives at Dr. Spethmann's office

with the latter's daughter Catherine. He presents a jar containing the preserved head of Yastrobov. Catherine denies any knowledge of the individual's identity. On seeing it, "The colour had drained from Catherine's face like water from a sink. We were looking at a human head pickled in formaldehyde" (Bennett, 2007, p. 66). However, both Spethmann and Lychev know that she has lied. "I was thinking not of Anna but of Catherine. She had lied to me. She had recognized Yastrobov's pickled face. I saw it in her reaction. And Lychev was too observant of human nature not to have seen it too" (Bennett, 2007, p. 70). Catherine's involvement imposes further complications to Spethmann's life.

The next morning, Spethmann and his daughter are arrested at their home. During his subtle interrogation, Lychev reveals that Catherine is acquainted with Yasterbov's real name and identity. They were romantically involved and utilized Spethmann's office after hours for their encounters. Additionally, there have been reports of Berek Medem's presence in his office. Lychev's primary objective is to uncover the real name of Yasterbov, to trace his network and identify the individuals to contact whom, he had arrived at St. Petersburg from the interiors of Urals. Ultimately, Catherine's stubbornness wins the day. After a fortnight in prison, Dr. Spethmann is released with a warning: unless he helps Lychev find the perpetrators, he will be under constant surveillance. There will be nowhere he can hide and no one he can trust to help him. "As the bolts were pulled back, Lychev said, 'I need Yastrebov's real name, and I'm going to get it—one way or another'" (Bennett, 2007, p. 95).

His time in prison has its own ramifications for Dr. Spethmann, as events begin spiraling out of control. He is pulled into a web where the identity of his foe, friend, and acquaintance becomes blurred and questionable. Semevshy, the security guard of Dr. Spethmann's office apartment, turns out to be an operative planted by General Gan to surveil on Dr. Spethmann and his patient Rozental. This is revealed when Rozental has a mental breakdown during one of his sessions and flees the office. He is pursued by Dr. Spethmann and, to his surprise, Semevshy. During Semevshy's assault on Spethmann, he is rescued by Lychev and, to the latter's disbelief, Kavi, the Cossak. They disclose themselves as members of the Duma Party. Semevshy is killed, and his body is thrown into the river. When Dr. Spethmann protest, Lychev explains, "... – because I am the only person standing between you and Colonel Gan." 'I've done nothing wrong, I am a psychoanalyst -' 'With no time for political affairs -yes, we know,' Lychev cut in. 'However, your daughter has managed to implicate not just herself but also her in Yastrebov's plot' 'The minute Catherine spoke to Yastrebov, the very second, both she and you became implicated. As soon as Colonel Gan gets the Chance, he will order your arrest....'" (Bennett, 2007, p. 126). Spethmann soon realizes that his life has been inadvertently taken over by forces against which he has little control. Each move he makes is challenged by crimes and conspiracies that are unfathomable to his faculties.

In a state of desperation, Dr. Spethmann confronts his daughter to ascertain the truth. Catherine gives a comprehensive confession regarding her knowledge of the identity of Yasterbov and his activities and how she has become embroiled with him.

His name, he told her, was Leon Pisker. He had left his small village beyond the Urals two years before to go to Moscow, driven by a passionate desire to do something meaningful with his life, which for him meant writing poetry... Catherine, charmed by his romantic idealism, poverty and good looks, proposed temporary solutions to two of his most pressing problems... (Bennett, 2007, p. 151)

She also furnishes a contact address mentioned by Pisker, '19 Kirochny Street, Near the Preobrazhensky Barracks' (Bennett, 2007, p. 153). Spethmann, trying to extricate himself, decides to help Lychev with his investigation. As the investigation progresses, he is confronted with unsettling truths. He is outraged to discover that his friend Kopelzon is a frequent visitor to the address Catherine mentioned. "Kopelzon was in good form, beaming smiles at friends and admirers, but it was hard for me to look at him without feelings of anger and hurt. If he knew about the house on Kirochny Street, then he knew about Yastrebov, which made his pretended concern for me and Catherine and his outrage at our arrests a hypocritical fiction" (Bennett, 2007, p. 195). He slowly pieces together the underlying causes of the crimes he has been implicated in, uncovering a major political conspiracy centered around the gullible Avrom Rozental.

By this point, Dr. Spethmann has gradually perceived the reasons behind Rozental's psychological breakdown. He explains to Lychev, "Away from the chessboard, he's an innocent, he doesn't understand the world he lives in. I can't help feeling that he is always in danger of being harmed by it" (Bennett, 2007, p. 172). In the process of saving Rozental, Dr. Spethmann puts everything that he holds dear at risk, namely his life and reputation. The more he attempts to disentangle himself from the web woven around him, the deeper he gets embroiled.

The major flaw of Dr. Spethmann is that as a psychoanalyst, he relentlessly tries to bring everything hidden to the surface. This leads him to be implicated in crimes in which he has no involvement. He ultimately finds himself pushed to the corner, cut off from all those who helped him, forced to flee the country of his birth. But, before he leaves, he eliminates the instigator on whom the whole plot hinges – Kopelzon. "He blanched. I did not wait for an answer. I am not sure that he had one. Even as the bullet struck him, he did not believe it" (Bennett, 2007, p. 263). Through this decisive action, Dr. Spethmann completes the circle of events that began with Gulko's murder.

C. Pawns and Players

The tale of Zugzwang – as its term suggests – is about the constant moves made by the characters as they helplessly try to extract themselves from the problems that surround them. Dr. Spethmann, through whose eyes the narration unfolds, is unwittingly caught in a tangled web of Chess, Crime and Conspiracy orchestrated by forces beyond his control. As he tries to extricate himself, he is faced with the conflict of differentiating between allies and adversaries. The following figure provides a comprehensive idea about the role each character play as the political drama unfolds.

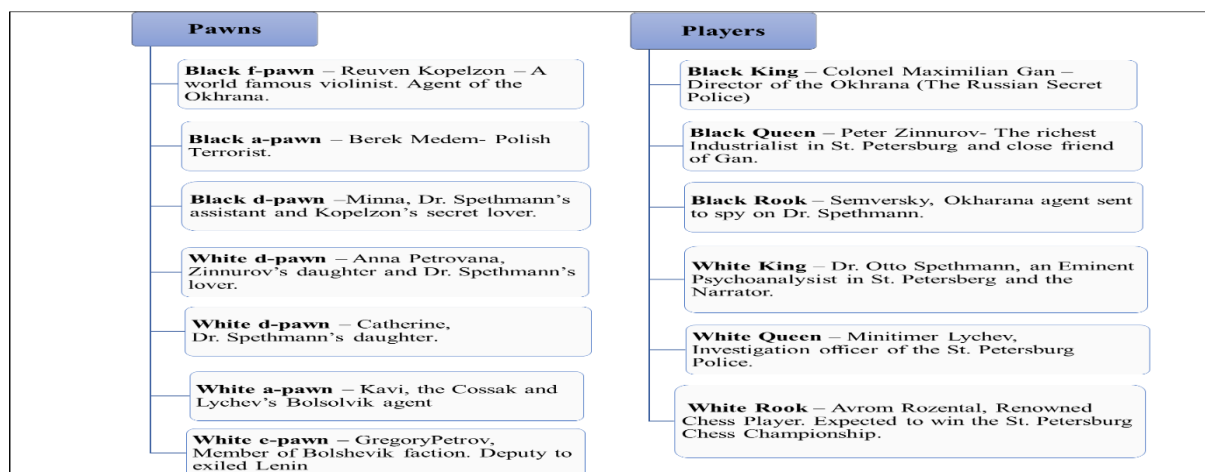


Figure 1

D. Chess

Chess is often associated with reason and, by extension, with intelligence, especially of the mathematical variety (Seidel, 2017).

Chess serves as a double-edged sword with a unique quality: while all the moves are visibly made on the board to create drama, the real drama is unraveled through the analysis, hesitations, and maneuverers inside the mind of each player. Bennett skillfully uses both the chess elements like pieces, board, rules etc. and the elements of chess like patterns, strategies, psychological break downs to merge the themes of conspiracy, crime and chess. Dr. Otto Spethmann is an avid chess player, who constantly plays with his friend, Reuven Kopelzon. Until the beginning of the narration, he had never once bet him. As the story unfolds, he is engaged in a partially competed game in which he has an edge to win for the first time.

In all the years we had been playing chess together I had never beaten Kopelzon, but in this game I had come out of the opening with a slight advantage. My rather surprised opponent then decided to give up a pawn in return for an attack. defending accurately, I had not only weathered the storm but held on to my extra pawn. However, by the time we reached the present positing I had run out of ideas and my hopes of a first win over Kopelzon were evaporating; I was on the point of offering a draw. (Bennett, 2007, p. 13)

Just before the events began to unfold, Kopelzon has played the following move, a counter for which Dr. Spethmann was not confident in deciding.

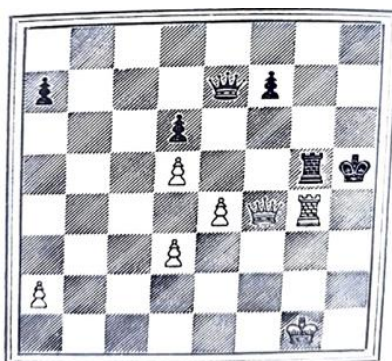


Figure 2. Kopelzon has just played 34...Kh5, attacking the white rook. Exchanging on g5 gives White nothing. What should Spethmann play to keep alive his chances of a win? (Bennett, 2007, p. 12)

With each move Dr. Spethmann and Reuven Kopelzon make on the chess board, a significant twist and turn occurs, which will be unpacked in the subsequent table. The former uses white pieces, and his moves are placed initially, and the latter plays with black pieces, and his moves are placed subsequently.

TABLE 1

Aspects	Chess moves	Crime moves	Textual representation
<i>Preliminary move</i> 34. Rxg4 Kh5	The white Rook has eliminated the pawn. This creates a threat to the Black Rook. The Black King is compelled to move in order to protect its Rook.	Rozental has started therapy under Spethmann. Gulko and Yasterobov are murdered. Lychev, having started his investigation has narrowed down the identity of the culprits. He arrests Spethmann and his daughter, Catherine. During his tenure in prison, Spethmann	“Lychev...held a large revolver in his left hand. He looked us over with his baleful, pale eyes and said, ‘Get dressed, Miss Spethmann. You too, Doctor. You are under arrest.’” (Bennett, 2007, p. 77) “She has betrayed you, Spethmann – your own daughter...your daughter and

		processes the information he had received and the conspiracies he had been unwittingly involved in.	Yastrebov would wait until you finished for the day before entering your office and using it.” (Bennett, 2007, p. 79)
<i>Game Changer</i> 35. Rg2 Rxg2 36. Kxg2 Qc7 37. Qf5 Kh6	White is in an offensive position, and Black is in a defensive position. The White Rook retreats two squares. It is captured by the Black Rook. Which, in turn, is taken by the White King. The Black Queen attempts to find positions to save its King. Its counterpart moves forward to checkmate the Black King, forcing it to retreat one square	Rozental’s exceptional intellect had enabled him to pieced together the subterfuge being woven around him, leading to his psychological breakdown. This unexpected development created an unforeseen glitch in the scheme, resulting in the conspirators selecting a doppelgänger to go on with the plan. During his session with Spethmann, Rozental flees, unable to express his turmoil. Semversky, who follows him, is eliminated by Lychev while trying to protect Spethmann. Lychev tries to tighten his grip on Colonel Gan through his investigation. Zinnurov confuses Spethmann by falsifying Anna’s story about a murder at Kazan to protect Gan. In response, Gan dispatches agents to investigate Semversky’s murder.	“Now it was Zinnurov’s turn to stare. Was it possible Anna had imagined the trip... He shook his head as a deluded imbecile. ‘All women tell stories.’ He said, adopting the confidential, knowing tone men employ when together they generalise about women... Anna is no different” (Bennett, 2007, p. 113) “How many flies are there, Avrom? What are there two of? You keep saying two, Avrom! What do you mean by two?’ he began to bat the air violently with his hands, as though swatting away a black cloud of flies, all the time crying and moaning” (Bennett, 2007, p. 117) “You should return to your post,’ I said to Semevshy. He gripped me by the arm. Gone was the ingratiating. ‘Let’s just see where your patient goes,’ he said.... ‘What do you want with Rozental?’ I said. ‘Let see where he goes and who he talks to.’ Semevsky threw me forwards, the better able to defend himself. I did not fall but recovered my balance in time to see him pull a pistol from his pocket...Only then did I take in the insubstantial presence of Lychev standing over Semevsky’s body.” (Bennett, 2007, pp. 120-121)
<i>Double Attack</i> 38.Qf6 Kh7 39. Kg3 Kg8 40. Kh4 Qb6	Both the White Queen and King relentlessly push the Black King to a corner by trying to block all legal moves. The Black Queen steps in to form a protective shield for its King, which is too late at this stage. Spethmann gets time from Koplezon to contemplate his subsequent move.	Spethmann has two choices to proceed with: assist Lychev with the information collected from Catherine and bring Gan to justice. Or remain silent, leading to Gan’s rise to power and suffering the consequences. He chooses the former by disclosing to Lychev details from Catherine’s confessions. He also makes a deal to recover details about a murder that took place in Kazan, which may implicate Zinnurov.	“I concentrated on two specific variations, two lines. One: co-operate with Lychev. Tell him what Catherine had told me... The second line: refuse to help Lychev. What would be the consequences?... there would be another raid, more time in the cells of the Peter and Paul fortress. The interrogation would be more brutal.” (Bennett, 2007, p. 155) “I will do what you want,’ I told him, ‘But first you have to do something for me.’...I want you to find out about something that may have happened in Kazan in 1889.” (Bennett, 2007, p. 156)
<i>Castling</i> 41. Kh5 Kf8 42. Kh6	The White King closes on the Black King, reducing his chances of victory. Koplezon for the first time requests time to contemplate his next move.	Lychev continues his investigation trying to find evidence to frame Gan and uncover his involvement in various crimes including Gulko and Yastrobv’s murder. Simultaneously, Spethmann tries to bring Petrova’s hidden memory regarding the murders at Kazan to the surface. This is crucial for understanding the connection between Zinnurov and Gan.	“He smiled as at an inward joke. ‘Colonel Gan planned and ordered Gulko’s Murder. Don’t you think justice dictates he brought to account?’... Gan is powerful, as you say, but he has enemies in the government and at court, especially among the Pro-French faction. If I can produce evidence that he was behind Gulko’s murder, Gan will fall.” (Bennett, 2007, p. 174)
<i>King Hunt</i> 42. Ke8 43. Kh7 Qc5 44. Qg7	The Black King tries to evade checkmate. Its escape options are blocked by its own pawns at d6 and f7, respectively. The White Queen controls the board and effectively blocks the Black King.	As Spethmann probes Anna, he reconstructs a tale of deceit and murder. Even when her story is contradictory, he understands that at the age of 13, Anna has encountered a murder scene involving her father, grandmother, and a mysterious person. This resulted in lifelong trauma and sudden bouts of numbness in her hands. He is also informed by Lychev about Koplezon’s deception and his knowledge of the address Yastrebov had. This links him directly to Berek Medem, General Gan, and the plot to assassinate the Tsar.	“Koplezon was in good form, beaming smiles at friends and admirers, but it was hard for me to look at him without feelings of anger and hurt. If he knew about the house on Kiorchny Street, then he knew about Yastrebov, which made his pretended concern for me and Catherine and his outrage at our arrests a hypocritical fiction.” (Bennett, 2007, p. 195)
<i>Blockade</i> 44. Ke7 45. Qg5+ Ke8 46. Kg8 Qc7	The White Queen successfully checkmates the Black King as it attempts to move squares and evade defeat.	As Spethmann tries to rescue Rozental, he encounters Koplezon and Medem. Lychev intervenes and rescues him. He reveals Koplezon’s	“Whose idea, was it?’ I said, looking between them. Koplezon was the first to speak, ‘When I heard the tsar would be receiving the winner of the tournament at

	The White King and Queen maneuver to capture the f-pawn, which will lead to the defeat of the black pieces.	involvement as an Okhrana agent. This ultimately clears the confusion in Spethmann's mind regarding Gan's plans. The entire outcome now relied on Kopelzon. Before any action can be taken, both are framed for a blast and declared as fugitives.	the Peterof.' he said, 'it set me thinking. The winner all alone in a room with the great tyrant? It's the perfect opportunity.' (Bennett, 2007, p. 206)
<i>Zugzwang</i> 47. Qh6 Qe7 48. Qg7 a6 49. a3 a5 50. a4 Kd8 51. Qf8+ Qe8 52. Kg7 -	Black is in Zugzwang, while White is in complete control. By targeting the f-pawn, the White King can win the game. Kopelzon initially feels that it is a dead draw. However, Spethmann is confident that it is a forced win and ultimately wins the game.	During Spethmann's rescue, Kavi stops Medem, allowing Lychev to save the former. Framed as a fugitive, Spethmann is requested by his well-wishers to leave the country and save himself. As a psychoanalyst, Spethmann has successfully connected the dots, piecing together the conspiracy and the role of the players. He perceives that the whole plot now hinges on Kopelzon, who is scheduled to perform during the Tsar's meeting with the Grandmaster. Kopelzon is intended to assassinate the Tsar, thus fulfilling Gan's scheme. As a last resort, Spethmann reaches Kopelzon's home prior to his performance before the Tsar. It is not only to stop him from assassinating the Tsar but also to finish the game of chess that they had been playing. He shoots and kills Kopelzon, the supposed assassin and secret f-pawn in the political intrigue. Consequently, he not only wins the game but also foils the conspiracy to kill the Tsar.	"You're in zugzwang, Reuven," I said. He stared at the board, not wanting to believe what he was seeing. He had no choice but to move the king away from the defense of the f-pawn. His hand trembled as he moved the king to d8. I played at once, moving my queen to f8. 'Check,' I said quietly." (Bennett, 2007, p. 261)

V. CONCLUSION

Chess – as a game – is an ideal example for logic and unpredictability. While all the elements are laid bare, it still creates unexpected upsets owing to multiple factors such as arrogance, analytical miss calculation, and unforeseen outcomes. This study validates how Bennett develops an intricate and highly technical narrative framework, mapping chess elements such as pins, forks, skewers, and zugzwang and elements of chess like king, queen, and f-pawn onto the novel's shadow politics, underhand dealings, and psychological struggles. It illustrates how each strategic move on the chessboard corresponds with key decisions, pivotal reversals, and escalating political tensions. As Spethmann says, "Strong players lose to weaker ones. If you need proof, look at our game. I've never beaten you before, Reuven – you're a much better player than I – but I'm winning, on this occasion at least" (Bennett, 2007, p. 207). Zugzwang adopts this inference to create end of the seat thriller. By using chess and its moves, it flawlessly interweaves a connection between the crime, conspiracy, and political intrigue of a turbulent nation.

These findings offer significant insight into how chess can be effectively integrated into a narrative as a symbolic and structural device. In addition to literal chess moves, chess elements like Zugzwang can be applied as a psychological state that influences and impacts the psyche of various characters. Chess – with its rule-bound nature – can be aptly used to parallel political conspiracies and counterplots orchestrated by several factions.

Future research could be expanded to comparative analyses with other literary works using chess motifs. This aids in identifying emerging patterns in chess narratives. It also provides rich insights into various chess patterns. Chess and its symbolism can be employed to provide psychological, thematic, and historical depth to plot designs and character development. It can also explore the psychological angle using Freudian analysis to develop the conscious and unconscious motives of characters and events that mirror chess strategies.

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Mindfulness-Based Intervention and Its Effect on Working Memory in Gifted Students With Special Learning Needs in Language Education

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Abstract—This study examines the effect of mindfulness training on improving executive functions—especially working memory and attention—among gifted students with special educational needs in learning English. The sample consisted of 46 gifted students with special educational needs, who were randomly divided into an experimental group and a control group. The study included an experimental phase during which a training program based on mindfulness strategies was implemented over 8 weeks. The results show that training children in mindfulness practices contributes to increased focus and reduced symptoms associated with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), such as impulsivity and hyperactivity. Moreover, the results revealed a significant improvement in working memory capacities, which play a central role in behaviour regulation and learning. Additionally, the study indicates that mindfulness interventions not only enhance cognitive performance but also help reduce stress and anxiety levels among students, thereby improving their overall mental health. The study highlights that regular mindfulness training helps children acquire skills to recognise and manage their emotions, thereby supporting the improvement of social relationships and daily task performance. The study emphasises the integration of these programs into comprehensive treatment plans that include psychological and behavioural support to ensure optimal outcomes. In conclusion, the study affirms that mindfulness represents a promising and beneficial approach as part of treatment strategies for attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, contributing to enhanced executive functioning, improved mental health, and strengthened academic and social performance in children and adolescents with the disorder.

Index Terms—mindfulness, executive functions, working memory, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, gifted students with special learning needs

I. INTRODUCTION

Some children may suffer from problems or other disorders that somehow affect the child's ability to acquire and increase their vocabulary, hindering their linguistic ability and communication with others. Among these disorders is Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD). Signs of this disorder that can appear in preschool children or younger children include developmental problems such as delayed language skills and vocabulary. Language is one of the most important factors for developing a child's various skills, giving him the ability to express his needs, starting to

orient towards others, and communicating with them verbally and socially. Without language, the child faces many problems in communicating with those around him. The preschool child goes through different stages of language development, starting from the stage of word formation and linking them to their meanings, up to a sentence composed of several words (Al-Almsbhiheen et al., 2023; Rababah et al., 2024).

Children acquire many language skills in childhood, gaining more vocabulary, dialogue, and social communication, which are tools that help the child interact socially with the rest of the community. Children with poor vocabulary are exposed to social and emotional problems that affect their interaction with others, which makes these children exhibit unacceptable behaviors that express their linguistic and social suffering (Amer et al., 2025; Al-Habies et al., 2024; Al-Hawamdeh et al., 2024; Rabab'a et al., 2023).

When children face difficulties in using language efficiently in interactive contexts, this indicates for their relationships, acceptance by peers, learning, and their ability to satisfy their needs. Children with ADHD also suffer from language problems, which hinder them from providing appropriate responses and cause difficulties in clarifying their point of view to others. Such difficulties are linked to the extent of their vocabulary due to weak executive functions associated with language development. These functions include working memory, attention maintenance, and response inhibition (Al-Bdour et al., 2025; Malkawi et al., 2023).

There is a relationship between the phonological component of working memory and sentence comprehension in children with language impairment. Children with language delay also show slower growth in acquiring vocabulary and learning new words due to difficulty encoding or storing new phonological materials in the phonological component. Language problems appear in children with ADHD across all age stages, negatively affecting all daily activities and learning, and indeed all processes that require proper language acquisition (Brites, 2020). If this disorder leads to emotional regulation disorder and weak executive functions, then many children with ADHD suffer from language and speech problems. The phonological buffer is a neural and cognitive mechanism for language composed of skills that interconnect with each other and affect language retention and integration of linguistic sensory stimuli, helping children in the process of reading, writing, and speaking (Harara et al., 2024; El-Ebiary et al., 2024; Rababa'h et al., 2024). The child with the disorder suffers from a deficiency in the phonological store in addition to working memory and executive functions in general, which negatively affects language and speech development in the early years of life because they simply depend on phonological awareness (Alorani et al., 2025; Aldowkat et al., 2024; Al Rousan et al., 2025).

Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder is a deficiency in attention span and increased motor behaviors of the child compared to the performance of children of his age stage, as well as impulsive behaviors that are not appropriate for his developmental stage. These symptoms must be observed and monitored in more than one social environment such as home, school, and nursery (Aljedayah et al., 2024; Melhim et al., 2023).

The child with ADHD is characterized by a deficiency in the social use of language and in perceiving rhymes and rhythms, in addition to an inability to shift from one conversation topic to another, weak ability to sustain attention throughout the conversation period, inability to organize and sequence what he wants to say, and forgets quickly. He also suffers in learning basic reading and writing skills, and he is delayed in speech processing and spelling. Also, he has an inability to interpret and produce language negatively and difficulty in recalling concepts and rules (Abumelhim et al., 2023; Abu Omar et al., 2025; Brites, 2020).

Since vocabulary acquisition is an essential part of language learning, indeed it is the basic component of language learning, and the development of vocabulary in the preschool stage, especially for children with ADHD, should be taken into consideration. This is because mastering and proficiency in vocabulary helps in developing all language skills (listening, speaking, reading, and writing). Through it, the child can use language correctly (Alorani et al., 2025; Rababah et al., 2023).

The term "mindfulness" describes an ongoing awareness of experiences and an emphasis on the here and now rather than on the past or the future. It entails focus, awareness, self-monitoring, accepting current experiences, and dealing with events as they genuinely are. Instead of concentrating on the next instant, mindfulness is rooted in the person's actual experience, which facilitates better engagement with reality and lessens attachment to the past or hurrying towards the future. As a result, it is regarded as one of the best techniques for enhancing memory. In order to keep attention rooted in the present, mindfulness emphasises focussing on ongoing activities—even if they deviate from one's automatic behavior—verbalizing inner experiences, paying attention to both internal and external experiences, avoiding evaluative judgements, and avoiding internal distractions (Alazzam et al., 2024; Amer et al., 2025; Melby-Lervåg & Hulme, 2013).

In order to detach from cognitive centralisation and see ideas as fleeting mental occurrences that do not reflect reality, mindfulness is purposefully focussing attention on the present moment without passing judgement on thoughts, feelings, or personal experiences. This has a favourable impact on how people view life's circumstances (Alazzam et al., 2024).

It has been demonstrated that mindfulness increases self-efficacy, which enables people to effectively assess decision needs, genuinely evaluate options, and trust their ability to make well-informed judgements free from cognitive and emotional biases. Meanwhile, cognitive learning models place considerable stress on creative self-efficacy as a fundamental characteristic that helps students to deal with academic problems and inspires them to choose effective solutions to the situations they face.

Thus, education ought to be a creative process that directs learning. Creativity is a deliberate human behaviour and type of intellectual activity that depends on a person's creative qualities and talents, which show up as inventive, fruitful work.

The degree to which a person feels they can do novel and unfamiliar activities is determined by their creative self-efficacy. It represents individual perceptions about one's capacity to manage unclear circumstances and social interactions successfully rather than just being a generic emotion (Alorani et al., 2025). It relates not the talents a person possesses but to their ideas about what they can do—essentially making cognition the engine of mental processes. Creative self-efficacy produces strong, effective beliefs that improve perseverance, directing individuals towards activities that eventually strengthen their confidence in their creativity (Malkawi et al., 2023).

Children's imagination is greatly enhanced by their creative self-efficacy, particularly brilliant kids with special education needs. Many pupils struggle not because of a lack of aptitude but due to feeling they cannot accomplish innovative jobs. As a result, they need assistance to gain self-assurance in their creative abilities. Teachers and the general public must work together to foster an atmosphere that encourages creativity and fosters the growth of artistic abilities (Alghazo et al., 2023). According to the aforementioned, creative self-efficacy and mindfulness are essential for fostering creativity, particularly in talented kids with special education needs. Both may be increased via supportive circumstances, teacher encouragement, and society understanding of the significance of mindfulness and creativity. This serves as the basis for the current study, which investigates the connection between creative self-efficacy and mindfulness in talented adolescents with special education needs.

Among the most significant cognitive processes that affect daily life and academic success are executive functions. They include a variety of higher-order cognitive skills as working memory, planning, organisation, emotional regulation, and cognitive flexibility (Alazzam et al., 2024; Al Rousan et al., 2025). Working memory is particularly significant among these processes because it plays a critical role in temporarily processing and storing information while conducting various cognitive activities. The efficiency of working memory is intimately connected to scholastic accomplishment, problem-solving abilities, and creative thinking.

In the educational setting, a separate group of kids described as "gifted students with special educational needs" arises, who are talented in one or more areas but also have learning challenges or developmental concerns (Al-Gayam et al., 2025). They have focus Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), and confront specific obstacles due to the gap between their high intellectual ability and issues with focus, and self-regulation (Rababa'h et al., 2024). ADHD greatly disrupts their academic and social performance, notably working memory, which is regarded one of the executive functions most impaired by this illness. These individuals show a wide variety of cognitive talents, excelling in verbal and visual-spatial thinking but struggle with working memory (Aljedayah et al., 2024). In this field, mindfulness has become one of the maybe beneficial treatments. In order to improve self-regulation and cognitive control, mindfulness focusses on a number of exercises that increase awareness of thoughts and bodily sensations (Abumelhim et al., 2023; Abu Omar et al., 2025). In both individuals with ADHD and those who grow normally, mindfulness interventions may generally improve executive performance (Bachmann et al., 2018).

A. Statement of the Problem

Due to its substantial effects on the cognitive, behavioural, and emotional aspects of afflicted children and adolescents, Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder is one of the major issues facing educational systems globally. Although there are several pharmaceutical therapy options for this disease, there is a rising tendency towards non-pharmacological approaches that concentrate on helping persons who are affected improve their cognitive and self-regulation skills. The research dilemma stems from the need to determine the effectiveness of these therapies in enhancing executive functions, notably working memory and attention, among ADHD children. Furthermore, the issue is made worse by the paucity of research on this subject in the Arab setting, underscoring the need for field studies that clarify how well mindfulness training improves these kids' cognitive and behavioural skills. This research can give practical choices that assist to obtaining greater academic and social integration.

In light of this problem, the study aims to answer these questions:

1. What is the impact of mindfulness-based cognitive intervention on improving working memory efficiency in gifted students with special learning needs in intermediate school?
2. Are there statistically significant differences at the level of ($\alpha \leq 0.05$) between the mean scores of the experimental group across the three measurements (pre-, mid-, and post-tests) of working memory efficiency?
3. What are the students' perceptions of the mindfulness-based cognitive intervention program and its effect on their working memory?

B. The Significance of the Study

The study enriches the academic literature on the impact of mindfulness on working memory among a special group of students who have received limited attention in previous research, helping to fill an important knowledge gap. It also provides a training program based on mindfulness strategies that can be used to improve the working memory efficiency of gifted students with special learning needs, potentially enhancing their academic and social performance. It sheds light on a group of exceptionally capable students who face unique academic challenges, raising awareness of their characteristics and needs and supporting the development of educational programs suited to them.

C. Definition of Terms

Mindfulness is described as self-regulating attention with an open, curious, and accepting attitude towards present-moment events. Maintaining a moment-to-moment awareness of one's thoughts, emotions, physiological sensations, and surroundings helps improve emotional control, cognitive flexibility, and psychological well-being (Melby-Lervåg & Hulme, 2013).

Working Memory is characterised as a cognitive system with limited capacity that holds and manipulates information required for complicated activities such as learning, reasoning, and understanding. It is crucial to executive function and is required for goal-directed behaviour and decision-making (Baddeley, 2000).

Gifted Students with Special Learning Needs are those who are recognised as brilliant or talented in one or more areas but also have one or more impairments, such as learning difficulties, ADHD, autism spectrum disorder, or emotional and behavioural issues. This dual identification creates unique educational obstacles since their talents might conceal their limitations and vice versa, resulting in underidentification or misdiagnosis (Baum & Owen, 2014).

Cognitive intervention is a planned set of methods used to enhance cognitive processes such as attention, memory, reasoning, and executive functions through targeted exercises and mental training programs. These treatments seek to improve cognitive functions that have been weakened by developmental, psychological, or neurological diseases (Melby-Lervåg & Hulme, 2013).

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

A. Theoretical Framework

Baddeley and Hitch (1974) proposed the most influential model of working memory, which consists of three main components: Central executive (an attentional control system responsible for coordinating and directing cognitive processes and allocating attentional resources to subordinate components), phonological loop (processing of verbal and auditory information), and visuospatial sketchpad (processing of visual and spatial information).

Baddeley (2000) later added a fourth component, the episodic buffer, which acts as an interface between the subsystems of working memory and long-term memory, allowing for the integration of information from different sources into coherent representations.

Working memory plays a critical role in a wide range of cognitive abilities, including:

- Reading Comprehension: it allows for the retention of read information and linking it to prior knowledge to understand the text.
- Reasoning and Problem Solving: it facilitates holding data and applying rules and strategies to reach solutions.
- Learning and Skill Acquisition: working memory is essential for encoding new information and storing it in long-term memory (Alloway et al., 2009).
- Attentional Control: it is closely related to the ability to focus attention and resist distractions.

Working memory is typically assessed using a variety of tasks that require temporary storage and simultaneous processing of information.

The term "gifted students with special learning needs" refers to individuals who possess exceptional abilities in one or more areas while simultaneously experiencing learning difficulty, or developmental disorder. These students present a particular challenge for educators as the disability may mask the talent, or vice versa, or neither may be properly identified (Baum & Owen, 2014). Gifted students with ADHD exhibit a range of contradictory characteristics that make it difficult to understand and meet their needs. On the one hand, they have excellent intellectual talents, cognitive curiosity, and the ability to think creatively and solve complicated problems. They do, however, suffer with attention and focus, hyperactivity, and deficiencies in self-regulation and executive functioning.

These youngsters may exhibit inconsistent conduct, such as paying close attention to items that pique their interest but struggling to concentrate on routine or dull activities. They may also show significant variation in academic success, excelling in some subjects while struggling in others. Melhim et al. (2023) found that children who face specific learning challenges have working memory and processing speed that are lower than their gifted peers without attention deficit hyperactivity disorder.

B. Previous Studies

Jha et al. (2007) revealed that mindfulness training program improved the working memory of healthy individuals. Gifted children with ADHD have a deficiency in executive functions such as working memory. Zylowska et al. (2008) discovered that mindfulness training enhanced working memory and attention in both adolescents and adults. Similarly, Malkawi et al. (2023) found that a 10-day mindfulness treatment improved working memory while decreasing rumination. Bachmann et al. (2018) discovered that an 8-week mindfulness intervention enhanced working memory ability and associated brain activity in people with ADHD. Alloway et al. (2009) discovered that gifted children with learning issues performed worse on working memory tests than their gifted classmates without such difficulties.

Kretschmer (2022) examined mindfulness therapies for ADHD and discovered that they help improve executive functions, particularly working memory, in patients with ADHD. Diéguez (2024) assessed the effects of a classroom-

based neuroeducation program that included mindfulness methods on executive functions. The study found that students who participated in the program improved their executive functioning, particularly working memory.

Pourtaieb and Mousavian Alenjagh (2023) investigated how well mindfulness-based training affected students with certain learning problems in terms of reaction inhibition and selective attention. The current study used a control group and a pretest–posttest in a quasi-experimental design. All students with particular learning difficulties who were referred to the Tavana Learning difficulties Centre in Ajabshir were included in the research population. Thirty of these students were selected using a census method and randomly divided into two groups: the experimental group ($n = 15$) and the control group ($n = 15$). The Stroop Colour and Word Test and the Toulouse-Pieron Cancellation Test were used to collect data, and the mindfulness training program created by Jon Kabat-Zinn and Deborah A. Berdick is the basis for the intervention (Kabat-Zinn, 2003). The experimental group attended eight mindfulness training sessions, each lasting about an hour. Multivariate analysis of covariance (MANCOVA) was used to analyse the data. After mindfulness training, there was no significant change in response inhibition between the experimental and control groups, but there was a significant difference in selective attention. Taking everything into consideration, children with certain learning difficulties may benefit from mindfulness training as an intervention to help them develop selective attention.

In a meta-analysis of 25 trials (number of participants = 1439), Im et al. (2021) examined how mindfulness meditation programs affect four different areas of cognition: executive function, working memory, long-term memory, and attention. According to the summary effect sizes, MBIs had a minor impact on executive function ($SMD = 0.29$), but non-significant impacts on attention ($SMD = 0.07$), working memory ($SMD = 0.16$), and long-term memory ($SMD = -0.12$). The authors included sample characteristics, age, number of treatment sessions, length of treatment, kind of intervention, type of control group, and research design in their meta-regression analysis due to the substantial heterogeneity across the studies. They discovered that the type of intervention had moderating effects on executive function and attention. Overall, the results indicate non-significant findings for attention, working memory, and long-term memory, despite the fact that the current study shows early signs of improvements in executive function. More study is required to address the limitations of previous studies and methodological issues in meta-analysis in order to reach a definitive conclusion (Rababah et al., 2024).

The effects of mindfulness intervention administered immediately upon school admission were examined by Soltani and Pourmohammad (2025) in comparison to a control group. The study included 61 first graders from four classes at a primary school in Budapest (Mage = 84.95 months, $SD = 5.21$). To investigate the impact on cortisol levels and executive functioning abilities, repeated-measures ANOVA was used. Although morning salivary cortisol levels did not change, the intervention greatly enhanced the girls' working memory abilities. The results indicate that a brief mindfulness intervention based on stories might enhance first-graders' working memory skills, which may help them perform better academically and adjust to school life. Attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) is characterised by deficiencies in working memory, executive skills, and impulsivity. The necessity for focused psychological therapy is highlighted by the fact that many adults with ADHD only partly react to pharmaceutical treatments. The effectiveness of mindfulness-based cognitive treatment (MBCT) in lowering impulsivity and enhancing working memory and executive functioning in individuals with ADHD was assessed in this study.

With a control group, this quasi-experimental study used a pretest-posttest approach. Adults with an ADHD diagnosis in Iran. Convenience sampling was used to choose 30 patients from two Tabriz mental outpatient clinics. They were then divided into two groups at random: the experimental group ($n = 15$) and the control group ($n = 15$). The experimental group adhered to the guidelines developed by Bowen and Marlatt and took part in eight weekly MBCT sessions. The SPSS program, version 23, was used to analyse the data using analysis of covariance. The findings showed that MBCT substantially enhanced impulsivity and total executive functions and their subcomponents. In adults with ADHD, it did not, however, substantially improve working memory ($F=3.57$, $P=0.070$). For adults with ADHD, MBCT is a successful strategy for enhancing executive functioning and lowering impulsivity.

The effects of a mindfulness intervention administered immediately following the start of school were examined by Koncz et al. (2021) in comparison to a control group. The study included 61 first graders from four classes at a basic school in Budapest (Mage = 84.95 months, $SD = 5.21$). To investigate the impact on cortisol levels and executive functioning abilities, repeated-measures ANOVA was used. Although the morning salivary cortisol levels did not change, the intervention significantly enhanced the working memory abilities of the girls. The results suggest that a short story-based mindfulness intervention may enhance working memory skills in first-grade students, which could help them perform better academically and adapt to school life.

Similarly, in Romano's (2024) study, it was found that 85% of the gifted individuals in their sample could be classified as gifted students with special educational needs after a comprehensive diagnostic assessment. The study included these kids' cognitive issues, such as working memory problems. A review of past studies suggests a rising interest in the influence of mindfulness on executive processes and working memory. Many studies have proven the usefulness of these therapies in enhancing working memory across many demographics, including healthy adults and those with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder. However, there is a clear lack of studies examining the effect of mindfulness interventions on the working memory of gifted students with special learning needs, especially gifted students with ADHD at the middle school level.

III. METHODS

A. The Population and Sample of the Study

The research cohort included all gifted students with special learning needs enrolled in Jordan's general education middle schools in Irbid during the academic year 2023/2024. A purposive sample of gifted students with special learning needs was selected. The sample size was 46 students, who were randomly assigned to two equal groups: the experimental group which included 23 students and the control group which included 23 students. The sample was selected according to the following criteria:

- The student must be classified as gifted according to the officially adopted identification criteria in Jordan, which includes scoring at or above the 95th percentile in a cognitive abilities test.
- The student must be nominated by teachers based on a behavioral characteristics rating scale for giftedness.
- The student must be diagnosed with ADHD according to the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Fifth Edition (DSM-5), by a certified specialist.
- The student must be in middle school (grades 7 to 9).
- The student's guardian must consent to their participation in the study.

Equivalence between the experimental and control groups in demographic variables (age, grade level) and in working memory levels before the experiment was verified using an independent samples t-test.

B. Study Instruments

The study used the Working Memory Assessment Test (WMAT) developed by Alloway (2009), after translating and adapting it for the Jordanian context. The scale includes four subtests that measure different components of working memory:

- *Backward Digit Span Test*: Assesses the phonological loop in working memory by presenting a sequence of digits, which the student is then asked to repeat in reverse order.
- *Word Span Test*: Also measures the phonological loop, where the student repeats a sequence of words in the same order.
- *Visual Matrix Test*: Measures the visuospatial sketchpad. A matrix of squares is shown to the student, with some shaded and others unshaded. The student is asked to recall the locations of the shaded squares.
- *Operation Span Test*: Measures the central executive.

C. Techniques Used

A range of techniques were used to implement the training program, including:

- Short lectures: to present theoretical information on mindfulness and working memory.
- Presentations: to visually explain concepts and ideas.
- Practical exercises: to train students in mindfulness practices.
- Group discussions: to allow students to share experiences and ideas.
- Homework assignments: to encourage students to practice mindfulness at home.
- Audio recordings: to assist students in practicing mindfulness exercises at home.
- Feedback: to provide guidance and support during mindfulness practice.

D. Program Validation

Presenting the training program to a panel of special education, educational psychology, and mindfulness specialists verified its efficacy. Based on their comments, the required changes were implemented. In order to verify the activities and content are appropriate for the target group, to identify potential implementation issues, and to make the required modifications prior to the final application, the program was also experimentally tested on a sample of 28 students who were not included in the research population.

E. Statistical Methods

The statistical methods used in quantitative data analysis are as follows:

- Independent samples t-test: This test was used to compare the mean scores of the experimental and control groups in the pre-test and post-test for working memory efficiency.
- Repeated measures ANOVA: Used to compare the experimental group mean scores across the three measurements (pre, mid, and post) of working memory efficiency.
- Effect size: Used to evaluate the extent of the training program's impact on improving working memory efficiency.

IV. RESULTS

Regarding qualitative data, it was analysed using content analysis through the following steps: To verify the equivalence of the experimental and control groups in working memory efficiency before implementing the training program, an independent samples t-test was used as shown in Table 1.

TABLE 1
THE MEAN SCORES OF THE EXPERIMENTAL AND CONTROL GROUPS ON THE PRE-TEST FOR WORKING MEMORY EFFICIENCY

Variable	Group	N	Mean	SD	t	df	p
Backward Digit Span	Experimental	23	4.25	0.87	0.68	22	0.42
	Control	23	3.92	0.79			
Word Span	Experimental	23	4.08	0.90	0.71	22	0.38
	Control	23	3.83	0.72			
Visual Matrix	Experimental	23	4.33	0.98	0.66	22	0.51
	Control	23	4.17	0.83			
Arithmetic Span	Experimental	23	3.67	0.65	0.36	22	0.72
	Control	23	3.75	0.64			
Total Score	Experimental	23	16.25	2.34	0.47	22	0.64
	Control	23	15.75	2.56			

Table 1 reveals that there are no statistically significant differences between the mean scores of the experimental and control groups on the pre-test of working memory efficiency, whether in the subtests or the total score, as the t-values were not statistically significant. This indicates that the two groups were equivalent in terms of working memory efficiency before the implementation of the training program, reinforcing the reliability of attributing any post-test differences to the program itself.

A. The Impact of Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Intervention on Improving Working Memory Efficiency

The first question states, “There are statistically significant differences at the level of $\alpha \leq 0.05$ between the mean scores of the experimental and control groups in the post-test of working memory efficiency, in favor of the experimental group.” To verify this question, an independent samples t-test was used as presented in Table 2.

TABLE 2
THE MEAN SCORES OF THE EXPERIMENTAL AND CONTROL GROUPS ON THE POST-TEST FOR WORKING MEMORY EFFICIENCY

Variable	Group	N	Mean	SD	t	df	p	Effect Size (d)
Backward Digit Span	Experimental	23	6.58	0.90	2.40	22	0.000	2.40
	Control	23	6.25	0.87				
Word Span	Experimental	23	4.42	0.90	2.50	22	0.000	2.50
	Control	23	4.08	0.79				
Visual Matrix	Experimental	23	6.67	0.80	2.42	22	0.000	2.42
	Control	23	5.93	0.98				
Arithmetic Span	Experimental	23	4.50	0.79	2.65	22	0.000	2.65
	Control	23	4.08	0.79				
Total Score	Experimental	23	25.58	2.47	3.64	22	0.000	3.64
	Control	23	16.92	2.19				

Table 2 reveals significant differences between the mean scores of the experimental and control groups on the post-test for working memory efficiency. Additionally, the effect sizes were all very large, with Cohen’s d values ranging from 2.40 to 3.64, indicating that the training program had a strong positive impact on the working memory efficiency of the students in the experimental group.

B. Results of the Second Question

The second question states that, “There are statistically significant differences at the level of ($\alpha \leq 0.05$) between the mean scores of the experimental group across the three measurements (pre-, mid-, and post-tests) of working memory efficiency.” To verify this question, repeated measures ANOVA was used as presented in Table 3.

TABLE 3
RESULTS OF REPEATED MEASURES ANOVA COMPARING THE MEAN SCORES OF THE EXPERIMENTAL GROUP ACROSS THE THREE MEASUREMENTS (PRE-, MID-, AND POST-TESTS) OF WORKING MEMORY EFFICIENCY

Variable	Source of Variance	Sum of Squares	Degrees of Freedom	Mean Square	F Value	Significance Level	Effect Size (η^2)
Backward Digit Span	Between Measurements	32.72	2	16.36	78.94	0.000	0.88
	Error	100.32	22	4.56			
Word Span	Between Measurements	34.06	2	17.03	82.17	0.000	0.88
	Error	100.32	22	4.56			
Visual Matrix	Between Measurements	33.39	2	16.69	80.45	0.000	0.88
	Error	100.32	22	4.56			
Arithmetic Span	Between Measurements	32.72	2	16.36	78.94	0.000	0.88
	Error	100.32	22	4.56			
Total Score	Between Measurements	91.34	2	45.67	264.69	0.000	0.92
	Error	45.76	22	2.08			

Table 3 clearly shows significant differences between the mean scores of the experimental group across the three measurements (pre-, mid-, and post-tests) of working memory efficiency, across all sub-tests and the total score. The effect size was also very large for all variables, with η^2 values ranging between 0.88 and 0.92. These values indicate a substantial change in working memory efficiency across the three measurements.

To define the direction of the variances between the three measurements, the Bonferroni post hoc test was utilized as presented in Table 4.

TABLE 4
BONFERRONI POST HOC COMPARISONS BETWEEN THE MEAN SCORES OF THE EXPERIMENTAL GROUP ACROSS THE THREE MEASUREMENTS (PRE-, MID-, AND POST-TESTS) OF WORKING MEMORY EFFICIENCY

Variable	Comparison	Mean Difference	Std. Error	Significance
Backward Digit Span	Pre - Mid	-1.33	0.19	0.000
	Pre - Post	-2.33	0.19	0.000
	Mid - Post	-1.00	0.19	0.000
Word Span	Pre - Mid	-1.42	0.19	0.000
	Pre - Post	-2.33	0.19	0.000
	Mid - Post	-0.92	0.19	0.000
Visual Matrix	Pre - Mid	-1.33	0.19	0.000
	Pre - Post	-2.33	0.19	0.000
	Mid - Post	-1.00	0.19	0.000
Arithmetic Span	Pre - Mid	-1.33	0.19	0.000
	Pre - Post	-2.33	0.19	0.000
	Mid - Post	-1.00	0.19	0.000
Total Score	Pre - Mid	-5.42	0.59	0.000
	Pre - Post	-9.33	0.59	0.000
	Mid - Post	-3.92	0.59	0.000

Table 4 demonstrates that differences are statistically significant at the 0.05 level between all three measurements (pre-, mid-, and post-tests) of working memory efficiency for the experimental group, in all sub-tests and the total score. The differences were in favor of the mid-test compared to the pre-test, the post-test compared to the pre-test, and the post-test compared to the mid-test.

C. Qualitative Analysis Results

The qualitative data were analyzed using NVivo software, where the data were coded and classified into main and sub-themes. Below is a presentation of the most prominent themes that emerged from the interview analysis:

Theme 1: Students' Experience With the Training Program

The majority of students had a productive experience with the training program. One student stated that the training helped him manage with stress and anxiety: "The program assisted me in coping with the tension I used to experience before tests. I got more focused and calmer. Another student stated, "I learnt to concentrate on the current moment and avoid distractions. "Some students also stated that the curriculum was entertaining and distinct from usual ones. He reported, "I loved the activities, particularly the breathing and body scan routines".

Theme 2: Changes in the Ability to Focus and Pay Attention

Almost all of the participants (Ps) reported an increase in their ability to concentrate after participating in the program stating that they became more aware of distractions: "I've become more aware of the distractions that affect my focus, and I'm now better returning to the task I'm working on." They also reported that improving their focus and attention had a good influence on their academic performance as revealed by P2: "I noticed an improvement in my grades, especially in subjects that require a high level of focus." Another participant stated, "I've improved my ability to focus in class and while I'm studying too. Before the program, I was often easily sidetracked and often struggled to keep up with the lessons".

Theme 3: Changes in Working Memory

The majority of students felt that the training improved their working memory and capacity to assimilate material. One student reported improved comprehension and retention of crucial information while reading. He stated that, "Prior to the application, I would forget the beginning of the material by the time I got to the conclusion." Another student expressed the progress as follows: "I've improved my ability to remember. Prior to the application, I would forget the processes or data provided during issue solving".

Students reported improved working memory, which improved their ability to organise and compose essays. Prior using the software, I struggled to remember the primary idea while writing the specifics.

Some students mentioned that the improvement in their working memory helped them organize their thoughts and write essays, "I've become more capable of organizing my ideas and writing essays. Before the program, I had difficulty keeping the main idea in mind while writing the details".

Theme 4: Challenges Faced by the Students

Despite the overall favourable experience, several students reported encountering difficulties throughout their participation in the program. The difficulties included:

- **Difficulty Maintaining Daily Practice:** Some students struggled to continuously practice mindfulness activities at home. One student explained: "It was difficult to commit to daily practice at home due to the pressure of school assignments and other activities." Some students find it difficult to concentrate during mindfulness activities at the beginning of the program.
- One student commented, "At first, it was difficult to focus on the mindfulness exercises." My thoughts would easily wander. But with practice, it became easier. Some students reported that they felt bored during some activities, especially at the beginning of the program. One student said, "At first, I felt bored with the various activities, especially the breathing exercises." But over time, I started to like it more.

V. DISCUSSION

The results are addressed in light of the theoretical framework and previous research to clarify their scientific and educational implications.

A. Question One

The results showed significant variations in working memory efficiency between the experimental and control groups. The mindfulness-based training program enhanced the working memory efficiency of the experimental group. The results may be interpreted in terms of the processes by which mindfulness strengthens executive functioning, in particular working memory. The findings are consistent with Jha et al.'s (2007) and Wolor et al.'s (2025) results which revealed that mindfulness exercises improve focus, which increases a person's capacity to fend off distractions. Also, Bachmann et al. (2018) and Alazzam et al. (2024) observed that mindfulness intervention enhanced working memory performance and brain activity in ADHD patients.

B. Question Two

The results demonstrated statistically significant changes in the mean scores of the experimental group across all three measures of working memory efficiency (pre, mid, and post). This indicated that training program significantly enhanced working memory efficiency among the participants. This result goes on line with Segal et al.'s (2020) and Bani Yassien et al.'s (2023) results, who revealed that for mindfulness exercises they should be used consistently over time to have the greatest effects. Also, Holzel et al. (2011) and Alorani et al. (2025) and Sakarneh et al. (2023) pointed out that mindfulness exercises may alter the function of the brain, especially in regions linked to working memory.

C. Qualitative Analysis

The qualitative analysis revealed that participants in the experimental group had positive opinions of the training program since it enhanced their working memory. Thus, it improved their academic achievement. Kiani et al. (2017) results indicated improvements in attention and working memory. However, the program had obstacles, such as its daily practice and early concentration. These difficulties correlate with Segal et al. (2020) recommendations, who highlighted the necessity of individualised mindfulness programs of offering instruction and assistance to individuals throughout the practice of mindfulness.

VI. CONCLUSIONS, LIMITATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The results indicated statistically significant differences between the mean post-test scores of the experimental and control groups, indicating that the experimental group did better. Noteworthy changes were observed in the pre-test, mid-test, and post-test. These results suggest that mindfulness-based cognitive intervention increases working memory efficiency in among gifted students with special educational needs. By concentrating on among gifted students with special educational needs and have not gotten enough attention in earlier research, this study contributes to the body of knowledge.

The results indicated statistically significant differences between the mean post-test scores of the experimental and control groups, indicating that the experimental group did better. Statistically significant changes were also observed within the experimental group in the pre-test, mid-test, and post-test, where the scores of the pre-test and post-test were higher than the pre-test scores. These results suggest that mindfulness-based cognitive intervention increases working memory efficiency in talented individuals with unique learning challenges. These results correspond with recent research that showed the effectiveness of mindfulness therapies in boosting executive functions, notably working memory, across varied groups.

The study recommends that teachers incorporate mindfulness exercises into their regular classroom activities to enhance attention and working memory. It is also advised that teachers be trained in mindfulness techniques to improve their teaching methods and mental health. Teaching methods should target gifted children with special learning requirements, creating an environment that meets their high cognitive needs and also helps them overcome challenges associated with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD). Effective teaching strategies include presenting knowledge in various forms, breaking down content into smaller parts, and providing opportunities for practice. Awareness campaigns, workshops, conferences, and scientific publications should be used to raise awareness about gifted children with special educational needs and their requirements.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The authors are grateful to the Deanship of Research at the University of Jordan and Jadara University for providing financial support for this publication.

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Culinary Metaphors as Cultural Symbols in Riau Malay Food Naming: A Pragmatic Analysis

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Abstract—Food traditions not only fulfill biological needs but also serve as powerful mediums for cultural communication, reflecting the social values of a community. This study explores the use of metaphors in the naming of traditional foods and beverages in Riau Malay culture through a pragmatic approach. By employing linguistic ethnography and critical discourse analysis, the research identifies the conceptual

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metaphors used and examines their socio-cultural functions. The findings highlight that Riau Malay culinary metaphors represent values of history, aesthetics, religion, and social harmony. This study contributes significantly to the field of pragmatic cultural studies and the preservation of Riau Malay local wisdom. It offers a novel perspective by bridging pragmatics with cultural inquiry, analyzing Riau Malay culinary metaphors not only as linguistic constructs but also as cultural signifiers that embody ethnic identity, preserve culinary heritage, and transmit shared social values.

***Index Terms*—culinary metaphors, cultural communication, Riau Malay culture, pragmatic approach, socio-cultural functions**

I. INTRODUCTION

Food traditions serve as more than biological sustenance; they embody cultural memory, social identity, and emotional expressions deeply rooted in everyday practices (Iflazoglu et al., 2025). In contemporary cultural linguistics and pragmatic studies, food metaphors have emerged as a critical site where language, cognition, and culture intersect, often revealing how abstract concepts are shaped through sensory and embodied experiences (Jurafsky, 2014). These metaphors not only reflect cultural values but also function as tools for social interaction and meaning-making. While numerous studies have explored the symbolic and semiotic functions of food metaphors in Western and East Asian contexts (Barthes, 1977; Tan, 1993), relatively little scholarly attention has been paid to how these metaphors operate pragmatically within Southeast Asian societies. In particular, the Riau Malay culture—with its rich culinary heritage and nuanced linguistic expressions—provides fertile ground for inquiry. Several studies highlight the culinary diversity of Riau Malay cuisine, which reflects a blend of local and global cultural influences, embodying identity, social function (Ghilda Nisa, 2023), and cultural symbolism. Dishes like *nasi lemak* are tied to the coastal Malay identity, shaped by interregional trade and distinct spices (Soh et al., 2021). The social function of Riau Malay food is emphasized, especially in communal meals during *Kenduri* or *Hajatan*, which strengthen community bonds. Furthermore, the symbolic meaning of coconut milk, representing softness and togetherness, is discussed (Sundari, 2024), while *asam pedas* reflects life's dynamic challenges (Amanda & Yasnel, 2025). These studies aim to fill the gap by analyzing the pragmatic roles of culinary metaphors in Riau Malay food naming practices, uncovering how language encodes cultural knowledge and communicative intent.

Metaphor is a fundamental mechanism through which humans conceptualize abstract experiences via concrete domains (Lakoff & Johnson, 2008). Among the various metaphorical domains, food serves as a particularly rich source due to its deep integration into daily life and cultural practice. Food metaphors offer a fertile ground for exploring how societies narrate historical consciousness, express moral judgments, articulate social hierarchies, and preserve collective values. In Malay societies, food naming practices—often infused with metaphorical and symbolic elements—act as communicative tools that convey nuanced meanings, reflecting social identities, cultural norms, and traditional wisdom beyond their literal gastronomic functions (Anderson & Ingram, 2020; Goddard, 2005; Izhar et al., 2023; Jeong & Lee, 2021; Koerich & Müller, 2022; Rojas-Rivas & Cuffia, 2022).

Despite the recognition of the richness of Malay culinary traditions (Djalal et al., 2022; Ramli et al., 2023; Suryani et al., 2023), previous research has largely focused on anthropological or gastronomical perspectives, with limited attention to the pragmatic-linguistic dimensions. These studies have predominantly examined food from the angle of social practices, cultural identity, and symbolic roles, yet overlook the significant role of language in food-related expressions. More importantly, there is a gap in scholarly research concerning how Riau Malay food metaphors function pragmatically. These metaphors are crucial tools for cultural transmission, emotional expression, and social negotiation, yet their linguistic functions remain underexplored in the context of Malay communication.

Addressing this research gap, the present study aims to systematically analyze the types and pragmatic functions of culinary metaphors in Riau Malay traditional foods. By adopting a linguistic ethnography framework alongside critical discourse analysis, this research explores how these metaphors function beyond mere aesthetic elements. It seeks to uncover their role as active agents in shaping, preserving, and communicating cultural values. Through a detailed examination of food-related expressions in Riau Malay, the study will reveal how these metaphors reflect and reinforce social norms, emotional bonds, and collective identity. Ultimately, the research aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of language's role in cultural transmission and social interaction.

This investigation is timely and significant, particularly in light of globalization and modernization, which risk homogenizing indigenous cultural expressions. By focusing on the pragmatic analysis of culinary metaphors, this study contributes to linguistic theory while supporting the preservation of intangible cultural heritage. The research underscores the role of language in maintaining cultural diversity amidst global pressures. The study addresses two primary research questions:

- (1) What types of conceptual metaphors are used in naming traditional Riau Malay foods and beverages?
- (2) How do these metaphors function pragmatically to express social emotions, construct collective identities, and transmit cultural values, thus contributing to cultural continuity?

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

A. Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT)

The Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT), introduced by Lakoff and Johnson in *Metaphors We Live By*, revolutionized the understanding of metaphors as essential cognitive structures in human thought and communication, rather than just rhetorical devices (Lakoff & Johnson, 2008). According to CMT, metaphors map one conceptual domain (source domain) onto another (target domain), making abstract phenomena more comprehensible by relating them to concrete experiences. This mapping process helps individuals understand complex ideas through familiar, tangible concepts, allowing for deeper cognitive engagement.

In the context of food metaphors, the source domain often involves culinary elements that are mapped onto complex cultural, emotional, or social constructs. For instance, the phrase "*Laksamana Mengamuk*" uses the imagery of a chaotic battle to metaphorically express intense emotions, historical significance, and valor. Such metaphors link tangible culinary experiences with abstract ideas, enriching the understanding of cultural identity and social dynamics through familiar, concrete terms.

Following CMT, three primary types of metaphors are typically distinguished:

- 1) Structural metaphors: One concept is structured in terms of another (e.g., "Life is a journey").
- 2) Ontological metaphors: Abstract experiences are given entity or substance (e.g., "She is full of anger").
- 3) Orientational metaphors: Concepts are organized spatially (e.g., "High spirits" vs. "Low spirits").

These categories provide the analytical lens through which culinary metaphors in Riau Malay culture are examined.

B. Pragmatics of Metaphor

Pragmatics studies the use of language in context, focusing on the social function language performs in communication. Metaphors, when examined pragmatically, transcend their cognitive role and are understood as tools that shape social interactions and cultural meanings (Carston & Wearing, 2011; Forgács, 2022; Gibbs Jr, 2015, 2023; Levinson, 1983; Tomlinson Jr & Assimakopoulos, 2013). The meaning of a metaphor emerges through the interaction between the metaphorical expression and its cultural and social context (Black, 2019; Cameron, 1999; Goatly, 2022; Hariyanto et al., 2023; Jakobs & Hüning, 2022; Kövecses, 2010; Nardiati et al., 2023; Shapiro, 1985; Sørensen et al., 2021). This framework is vital for analyzing how food metaphors in Riau Malay culture do more than merely describe; they actively participate in social life by evoking emotions, fostering communal relationships, and encoding societal expectations. For example, a food metaphor in Riau Malay may express respect, affection, or social standing, reflecting the values inherent in the community's social fabric.

Further, scholars argue that metaphors serve as strategic communicative tools (Brugman et al., 2019; Cameron, 2003; Chilton, 2004; Davidson et al., 2004; Ghazinoory & Aghaei, 2024; Macagno, 2020; Putnam et al., 1999; Rossi & Macagno, 2021; Zinken et al., 2016). They are used not only to influence thought and perception but also to construct social identities and negotiate social realities. In the context of Riau Malay, food metaphors function as pragmatic acts that serve several roles, including expressive, identificational, and didactic functions. These metaphors are central to the social negotiation of roles and values, helping individuals understand their place within the community while simultaneously reinforcing cultural continuity.

C. Cultural Linguistics

Cultural Linguistics is a framework that emphasizes the relationship between cultural conceptualizations and language structures (Ashurova & Galieva, 2019; Hariyanto et al., 2023; Palmer, 1996; Sharifian, 2017a, 2017b; Zalmansyah et al., 2023). This approach posits that language reflects the shared cultural schemas, conceptual metaphors, and cultural models that shape meaning-making within a community. In the case of Riau Malay, culinary metaphors are seen as cultural conceptualizations, deeply embedded in the community's collective memory, emotional expressions, and social practices. These metaphors go beyond mere linguistic expressions, encapsulating cultural values, social hierarchies, and identity. By examining food metaphors within Riau Malay, we gain insight into how metaphorical food names serve as vehicles for transmitting culturally significant meanings, acting as bridges between language and culture (Korangy, 2024; Lomotey & Csajbok-Twerefou, 2021; Schröder et al., 2020; Völkel & Nassenstein, 2022; Wierzbicka, 1997; Zalmansyah et al., 2025).

D. Culinary Studies and Food Semiotics

The semiotics of food underscores the idea that food operates as a system of signs, carrying meanings that go far beyond mere sustenance (Barthes, 1977). Food choices, preparation techniques, and naming practices are symbolic acts that communicate social status, cultural identity, and emotional states. Based on this foundation, some opinions on how the language of food menus and culinary naming practices shape consumer perceptions and cultural identity (Cook, 2016; Jurafsky, 2014). However, most studies have overlooked the pragmatic aspects of food metaphors in traditional naming conventions. This gap in research is important because it limits our understanding of how food metaphors function not just as linguistic expressions, but as active agents in communication and cultural transmission—something this study aims to address.

III. METHODS

A. Research Design

This study employs a qualitative research design with a linguistic ethnography approach (Duranti, 2011), blending linguistic analysis with cultural exploration within the community context. The objective is to capture the rich, context-dependent meanings of culinary metaphors in traditional Riau Malay society. The research methods include:

- 1) Participant observation, to study food practices in natural settings such as markets, traditional ceremonies, and community gatherings.
 - 2) Semi-structured interviews with cultural experts, culinary practitioners, and local elders.
 - 3) Document analysis of historical cookbooks, folklore collections, and traditional culinary archives.
- The study applies Critical Discourse Analysis (Fairclough, 2013) along with pragmatic interpretation (Levinson, 1983).

B. Research Site and Participants

The study was conducted in key areas of Riau Province, including Pekanbaru, a hub for urban culinary and cultural activities, and the East Coast of Sumatra, known for its rich maritime culinary traditions. Participants were chosen using purposive sampling to ensure depth and diversity, including 5 cultural scholars specializing in Malay heritage, 7 traditional food vendors, 10 local elders (aged 60 and above) with expertise in oral traditions, and 5 younger-generation culinary entrepreneurs. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, and ethical standards were adhered to following qualitative research protocols (Creswell et al., 2007; Creswell & Poth, 2016).

C. Data Collection Procedures

Data collection for this study took place over six months (January–June 2024) and involved several steps. First, local narratives related to food naming were recorded to capture cultural insights and metaphorical language. Additionally, examples of food menus, promotional materials, and documentation of culinary events were gathered to analyze how food is represented and named in public discourse. Finally, interviews were transcribed and coded, focusing on metaphorical expressions and interpretive commentary. This comprehensive approach allowed for a rich analysis of the linguistic and cultural dimensions of food metaphors in Riau Malay society.

D. Data Analysis Techniques

The analysis proceeded in three main stages:

- 1) Identification of Metaphorical Expressions: Mapping food names containing metaphorical elements.
- 2) Categorization: Classifying metaphors into structural, ontological, and orientational types based on CMT (Lakoff & Johnson, 2008).
- 3) Pragmatic Interpretation: Analyzing the communicative functions (expressive, identificational, didactic) and the cultural values embedded in each metaphor.

Triangulation was conducted by cross-referencing participant narratives, field observations, and document analysis to ensure validity and reliability.

IV. RESULTS

A. Analysis

This section presents a thorough analysis of culinary metaphors within Riau Malay culture, using Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT) as the primary framework to categorize and explore their pragmatic functions (Lakoff & Johnson, 2008). The analysis is organized according to three key types of metaphors: structural, ontological, and orientational. For each type, the study examines its role in conveying cultural meanings and its functions in communication. Specifically, the research explores how these metaphors serve expressive purposes, shape social identities, and perform didactic functions within the community. These metaphors not only reflect societal values but also act as tools for social cohesion and cultural transmission, emphasizing the interconnectedness of language, culture, and identity in the Riau Malay context (Table 1).

TABLE 1
METAPHORICAL STRUCTURES AND PRAGMATIC FUNCTIONS IN TRADITIONAL RIAU MALAY CULINARY NAMING

Name	Literal Description	Cultural Metaphor	Pragmatic Functions	Visual/Expressive Imagery
<i>Laksamana Mengamuk</i>	Beverage made from kuini (wild mango), coconut milk, syrup, and ice.	Represents emotional turbulence, strength, and honor of an admiral (laksamana).	Expressive: Evokes emotional intensity and excitement. Didactic: Transmits historical consciousness about heroism.	Scattered kuini pieces in coconut milk symbolize chaos and emotional fervor. “The Admiral's rage becomes sweet on our tongues, reminding us of our strength and forgiveness” (Interviewed with Dinawati, 2025).
<i>Putri Mandi</i>	Glutinous rice balls filled with sweet coconut, bathed in thick coconut milk sauce.	Symbolizes the purity, beauty, and spiritual renewal of a bathing princess.	Expressive: Symbolizes beauty and joy. Social Identity: Highlights feminine virtues in Malay cultural ideals.	Sweetness and softness visually represent rejuvenation. “The princess bathes not only to cleanse but to renew her spirit—just as we celebrate life in sweetness” (Interviewed with Dinawati, 2025).
<i>Putri Dua Sebilik</i>	Two-colored layered cake representing two entities sharing one space.	Signifies coexistence, tolerance, and mutual respect within shared spaces.	Didactic: Instills values of tolerance and harmonious living. Social Identity: Reinforces communal partnership ideals.	Dual-layered colors visualize harmony and shared identity.
<i>Es Air Mata Pengantin</i>	Colorful beverage with basil seeds, grass jelly, syrup, and ice.	Depicts emotional complexity during marriage—merging joy and sorrow.	Expressive: Conveys complex emotions during transitional rites. Social Identity: Highlights emotional depth in communal ceremonies.	Colorful, layered textures symbolize bittersweet matrimonial emotions.
<i>Sirup Mak Inang Sayang</i>	Sweet syrup drink with pineapple, apple, jelly, and basil seeds.	Embodies maternal affection and the role of women in cultural continuity.	Expressive: Celebrates maternal warmth and caregiving. Didactic: Encourages respect and gratitude toward maternal figures.	Sweet, nurturing flavors represent care and tradition-bearing roles.

Following the categorization proposed by Lakoff and Johnson, traditional Riau Malay culinary naming demonstrates the productive use of structural, ontological, and orientational metaphors to conceptualize cultural experience. Structural metaphors, as seen in *Laksamana Mengamuk*, map historical narratives of heroism onto sensory experiences, embedding emotional intensity and historical consciousness into everyday culinary practices. Ontological metaphors, exemplified by *Putri Mandi* and *Putri Dua Sebilik*, personify abstract cultural values such as purity, harmony, and communal identity through tangible culinary forms. These metaphors allow abstract cultural concepts to be easily understood and embodied through food. Meanwhile, orientational metaphors, represented by *Es Air Mata Pengantin* and *Sirup Mak Inang Sayang*, structure emotional experiences related to life transitions and relational roles, particularly emphasizing the complex affective dimensions of marriage and maternal caregiving. The pragmatic functions of these metaphors reveal expressive, didactic, and social identity-building purposes, suggesting that Riau Malay cuisine is not merely a matter of taste. Rather, it acts as a dynamic, living narrative system that sustains historical memory, imparts moral values, and strengthens communal cohesion.

The traditional culinary names in Riau Malay culture go beyond mere identification of food; they are deeply symbolic expressions that embody cultural values, emotional experiences, and social ideals. Each food name functions within a specific metaphorical type—structural, ontological, or orientational—each offering a unique perspective on how food reflects and shapes the Riau Malay worldview. These metaphors help in communicating complex cultural concepts, preserving traditions, and maintaining communal ties.

(a). *Laksamana Mengamuk*

The name *Laksamana Mengamuk* – ‘The Admiral Rampage’ is a prime example of a structural metaphor, where one conceptual domain (historical heroism and emotional turbulence) is mapped onto another (a sweet, refreshing drink made from kuini, coconut milk, syrup, and ice). The drink symbolizes heroism, emotional dynamics, and local historical narratives. The furious imagery of an admiral in battle is softened into a culinary experience, allowing everyday consumers to relive collective memories of strength, conflict, and forgiveness. Thus, *Laksamana Mengamuk* not only quenches thirst but also reactivates communal pride in historical resilience.

(b). *Putri Mandi*

Putri Mandi – ‘The Princess Bathes’ represents an ontological metaphor, where abstract qualities — beauty, sanctity, and social harmony — are embodied in a tangible culinary form: glutinous rice balls immersed in thick coconut milk. The act of bathing, associated with physical and spiritual purification, becomes a metaphor for celebrating life's sweetness, joy, and renewal. The culinary presentation reflects a culturally idealized vision of feminine virtue and emotional rejuvenation, reinforcing the importance of personal and social purity within Malay traditions, and is also reflected in the cultural practices and social ideals of the community.

(c). *Es Air Mata Pengantin*

Es Air Mata Pengantin – ‘Wedding Tears Ice’ employs an orientational metaphor that links emotional states to spatial or bodily experiences, particularly during significant rites of passage. This colorful beverage, composed of basil seeds,

grass jelly, syrup, and ice, represents emotional complexity in sacred ceremonies such as marriage. It captures the bittersweet blend of joy and sadness that accompanies major life transitions. The layering of textures and colors mirrors the multilayered emotional realities of weddings, where happiness, nostalgia, and hope coexist, reflecting not only the emotional sensitivity of the Riau Malay ceremonial life but also the community's deep reverence for such transformative cultural rituals.

(d). *Putri Dua Sebilik*

Putri Dua Sebilik – ‘Two Princesses in One Room’ is another example of an ontological metaphor that emphasizes balance and tolerance in communal living. The two-colored layered cake physically embodies the concept of coexistence: two distinct yet harmoniously integrated elements occupying a single space without losing their identities. This metaphor conveys a social ideal — the importance of tolerance, empathy, and mutual respect within households and wider communities. It underscores the possibility of unity in diversity, a value deeply embedded in the Riau Malay cultural fabric.

(e). *Sirup Mak Inang Sayang*

Sirup Mak Inang Sayang – ‘Beloved Lady-in-Waiting Syrup’ – employs an orientational metaphor to project abstract notions of affection and the vital role of women in cultural preservation into a sensorial experience. The drink, made from fruits and basil seeds, references *Mak Inang*, a traditional female figure associated with caregiving and nurturing within royal households. Through this culinary expression, maternal affection is spatialized and embodied in sweetness, symbolizing the emotional warmth and sustaining presence of women. It underscores their crucial role as custodians of tradition and emotional stability within the community.

In sum, Riau Malay culinary metaphors function as living cultural texts, encoding values of heroism, beauty, emotional complexity, social harmony, and familial love. Each dish transcends mere sustenance to become a medium for conveying collective memory, transmitting moral values, and reinforcing communal identity, thus preserving its cultural identity across time. These metaphors reflect a worldview deeply rooted in emotional sensitivity, historical consciousness, and social cohesion — core elements of the Riau Malay cultural imagination.

B. Pragmatic Functions of Culinary Metaphors

The naming of traditional foods in Riau Malay culture reflects not only metaphorical creativity but also serves distinct pragmatic functions—ways in which language, through food naming, operates purposefully within its social and cultural milieu. These functions encompass expressive, social identity, and didactic purposes. Expressively, food names convey emotions and shared experiences; socially, they affirm group identity and cultural belonging; and didactically, they transmit moral lessons, cultural values, and historical narratives. Each function contributes to maintaining cultural continuity, fostering emotional resonance, and strengthening communal cohesion across generations.

(a). *Expressive Function: Conveying Collective Emotions*

The expressive function of culinary metaphors is exemplified in names like *Es Air Mata Pengantin* (‘Wedding Tears Ice’), which encapsulate the emotional richness and complexity of marriage rituals—where joy, hope, sadness, and nostalgia converge. Such metaphors provide the community with linguistic tools to articulate deeply felt yet often ineffable emotions during life's transitional moments. In this way, consuming the beverage becomes a symbolic act of participating in collective emotional memory. By transforming affective experiences into tangible, consumable forms, expressive metaphors enable individuals to process, externalize, and affirm emotional states in socially meaningful and culturally resonant ways.

(b). *Social Identity Function: Affirming Roles and Solidarity*

The social identity function is exemplified in names like *Sirup Mak Inang Sayang* (‘Beloved Lady-in-Waiting Syrup’), which metaphorically highlight nurturing and caregiving roles traditionally associated with women, especially in preserving emotional balance, cultural traditions, and communal well-being. By invoking such roles, the metaphor not only honors feminine contributions but also reinforces gendered and generational identities within the cultural structure. Through these metaphorical expressions, food becomes a vehicle for affirming group belonging, sustaining intergenerational respect, and validating social roles. In this way, culinary metaphors help cultivate a sense of solidarity and cultural continuity by embedding social meaning in everyday consumption.

(c). *Didactic Function: Transmitting Historical and Moral Values*

The didactic function is vividly embodied in culinary names like *Laksamana Mengamuk* (‘The Admiral Rampage’), which serve as pedagogical tools for transmitting historical and moral lessons. This metaphor evokes narratives of heroism, emotional control, and moral resilience by linking abstract values to a familiar sensory experience. Through such naming, traditional foods become mnemonic devices that preserve collective memory and encourage reflection on virtues like bravery, honor, and forgiveness. In everyday contexts, these metaphors render cultural teachings more accessible, ensuring their transmission across generations in a form that is both enjoyable and memorable.

C. Representation of Cultural Values

Culinary metaphors in Riau Malay culture are not just linguistic adornments; they function as essential instruments for representing and transmitting fundamental cultural values that shape social life (Manik et al., 2024; Shariff et al., 2022). Through metaphorical naming, food becomes a vessel for preserving and communicating historical narratives (Johnson-Jennings et al., 2020), moral teachings, aesthetic ideals, and religious beliefs. These metaphors encapsulate key cultural values such as local wisdom (Abas et al., 2022; Fusté-Forné, 2022; Hidayat et al., 2019) and historical memory (Fatimah et al., 2021; Lugo-Morin, 2022), aesthetic sensitivity and social courtesy, as well as religiosity and social harmony (Ajina, 2024; Dahiya et al., 2025; García García, 2025). By embedding these values in everyday culinary experiences, Riau Malay food names reinforce communal identity and strengthen cultural continuity across generations.

(a). *Historical and Local Wisdom: Heroic Tales Embedded in Food Names*

Names like *Laksamana Mengamuk* ('Admiral Rampage') pragmatically encapsulate historical narratives and local wisdom (Duarte Alonso et al., 2022). These names recall heroic episodes and valorous figures from the community's past, embedding lessons of bravery, leadership, and emotional mastery into daily practices. By consuming and discussing these foods, individuals symbolically reconnect with their ancestral legacies, making history a living part of their identity. Culinary metaphors, thus, ensure that historical consciousness is not only preserved in texts but actively embodied in everyday life. Food names act as mnemonic devices that preserve and revitalize collective memory, allowing historical wisdom to dynamically persist across generations.

(b). *Aesthetics and Courtesy: The Figure of the "Princess"*

Metaphors involving figures like *Putri Mandi* ('Bathing Princess') reflect Malay cultural ideals of beauty, refinement, and moral propriety. The image of a princess bathing suggests not only physical beauty but also inner purity, grace, and the courtesy expected in social relations. These aesthetic values are closely tied to moral decency and respectful behavior, which are foundational virtues in Riau Malay society. Culinary metaphors, therefore, pragmatically educate and remind individuals of the aesthetic and ethical standards that govern interpersonal conduct. Through metaphors of noble beauty and purity, Riau Malay culinary traditions reinforce societal expectations of decorum, refinement, and moral excellence.

(c). *Religiosity and Social Harmony: Compassion and Gratitude in Communal Meals*

Culinary metaphors like *Sirup Mak Inang Sayang* ('Beloved Lady-in-Waiting Syrup') and *Es Air Mata Pengantin* ('Wedding Tears Ice') reflect values of compassion, gratitude, and emotional togetherness. These values are deeply tied to Malay religiosity, which emphasizes gratitude to God, respect for elders, and compassion within the community. Metaphorical foods served at communal gatherings, such as weddings, religious celebrations, and harvest festivals, act as embodied expressions of these spiritual and social principles, promoting cohesion and mutual care.

V. DISCUSSION

The metaphorical structuring of traditional Riau Malay cuisine reflects a deeply ingrained cultural orientation toward historical consciousness, emotional expressiveness, communal values, and moral education. Through the analysis of structural, ontological, and orientational metaphors, it becomes clear that food naming and presentation in Riau Malay society are not arbitrary but are intentionally embedded with layered meanings, serving as powerful cultural signifiers.

The structural metaphors, particularly as embodied in *Laksamana Mengamuk*, highlight how historical memory is seamlessly integrated into everyday life. By mapping the abstract domain of heroic emotional intensity onto a sensory experience like a beverage, the Riau Malay community maintains a living connection to its past valor and collective resilience. This approach transforms the act of consumption into both an act of remembrance and an emotional reenactment, ensuring that narratives of strength, honor, and forgiveness persist in communal consciousness.

Meanwhile, the ontological metaphors found in *Putri Mandi* and *Putri Dua Sebilik* reflect a worldview that emphasizes the embodiment of virtues such as purity, renewal, tolerance, and harmony. In these examples, food items serve as vessels of idealized human qualities, reinforcing social values through tangible, everyday practices. Ontological metaphors also function as identity markers, particularly concerning the roles of women and the significance of coexistence within a diverse social fabric.

The use of orientational metaphors in *Es Air Mata Pengantin* and *Sirup Mak Inang Sayang* highlights the Riau Malay community's sensitivity to emotional complexity and life transitions. These metaphors map bodily or emotional states onto spatial or sensory experiences, reflecting a culturally significant view that emotions, especially during pivotal rites of passage like marriage, are multifaceted and deserving of recognition. Moreover, these metaphors honor maternal roles and caregiving as essential to cultural continuity, emphasizing affection, gratitude, and respect across generations.

Across all types, the pragmatic functions — expressive, didactic, and identity-forming — demonstrate how traditional food serves not only as a medium for emotional expression but also as a moral guide and a social binder. In Riau Malay society, eating transcends a mere biological necessity; it becomes a culturally significant act, infused with historical, emotional, and ethical dimensions. Culinary metaphors thus function as powerful mechanisms through which values are internalized, emotions are expressed, and collective identities are continually formed and reinforced.

This analysis affirms Lakoff and Johnson's proposition that metaphor is not only central to language but also to thought and action (Lakoff & Johnson, 2008). In the context of Riau Malay traditional cuisine, metaphor serves as an essential medium for transmitting cultural knowledge, negotiating social relationships, and preserving a cohesive, value-driven worldview across generations.

The classification of Riau Malay culinary names into structural, ontological, and orientational metaphors provides valuable insight into how the community encodes complex social values, emotions, and historical narratives into everyday practices. Each metaphor type employs distinct cognitive strategies and serves specific cultural functions, shaping how individuals and communities relate to their identities, emotions, and social environments. These metaphors are not merely linguistic tools but are integral to how cultural meanings are constructed and transmitted within the Riau Malay society.

A. Structural Metaphor: Heroism and Emotional Dynamics

The structural metaphor represented by *Laksamana Mengamuk* illustrates the Riau Malay community's tendency to frame daily life through grand historical narratives. In this case, an abstract domain—heroic emotions, turbulence, and historical valor—is mapped onto the sensory experience of a beverage. This metaphor reflects a worldview where personal and communal experiences are intricately linked to historical memory. By naming a refreshing drink after the intense rage of a *Laksamana* (admiral), the culture symbolically transforms chaotic emotional energy into something pleasurable and sustaining. Structural metaphors thus not only serve to shape abstract feelings but also transform potentially disruptive emotional forces into sources of communal identity and pride.

B. Ontological Metaphors: Embodying Virtues and Social Ideals

Ontological metaphors, as exemplified by *Putri Mandi* and *Putri Dua Sebilik*, represent a distinct cognitive strategy: the embodiment of abstract values in concrete, consumable forms. In *Putri Mandi*, the metaphor of a bathing princess evokes ideals of beauty, renewal, and inner sanctity, reflecting the cultural emphasis on moral and aesthetic virtues. Similarly, *Putri Dua Sebilik* constructs a metaphor of coexistence and tolerance through the image of two distinct entities sharing a single space, thus reinforcing ideals of social balance and harmonious living. Ontological metaphors, therefore, anchor abstract moral lessons in the sensory realm, making cultural values not only more tangible and comprehensible but also emotionally resonant through everyday practices such as eating.

C. Orientational Metaphors: Emotional Navigation and Social Roles

The orientational metaphors in *Es Air Mata Pengantin* and *Sirup Mak Inang Sayang* focus on guiding emotional navigation through life's transitional phases. In *Es Air Mata Pengantin*, the emotional complexity of marriage—an event interweaving joy, sadness, hope, and nostalgia—is rendered tangible through a colorful, layered beverage. The sensory richness of the drink mirrors the emotional intricacies of the rite. Similarly, *Sirup Mak Inang Sayang* metaphorizes nurturing and maternal affection through sweet and refreshing sensory experiences, highlighting the pivotal role of women in maintaining familial and cultural stability. Orientational metaphors in this context enable individuals to emotionally position themselves within the broader communal fabric, guiding appropriate emotional expression and reinforcing social responsibility.

D. Broader Cultural Implications

Overall, the distribution of metaphor types reflects a Riau Malay cultural orientation that is both relational and historically grounded. Structural metaphors link the individual to the collective memory of the past; ontological metaphors connect abstract virtues to concrete daily practices; and orientational metaphors guide emotional states during significant life events. Collectively, these metaphorical systems allow the Riau Malay people to narrate their identity, values, and appropriate emotional responses in various contexts.

In this way, food in Riau Malay society functions not only as biological sustenance but also as a powerful medium for conveying collective memory, moral teachings, emotional regulation, and social identity formation. The richness of culinary metaphors underscores how everyday practices are deeply imbued with symbolic meaning, ensuring the continuity of cultural values across generations through pleasurable, habitual acts of consumption.

Through the pragmatic use of culinary metaphors, the Riau Malay people express and perpetuate essential cultural values that shape their collective identity. Historical memory is preserved through heroic narratives embedded in food names, ensuring that the community remains connected to its past. Aesthetic and moral ideals are reinforced through metaphors of refined nobility, symbolizing virtues of beauty, purity, and grace. Religious values and social harmony are interwoven into the communal act of eating, where food becomes a medium for emotional sharing and mutual respect. In Riau Malay tradition, food transcends mere nourishment, becoming a symbolic script that encapsulates cultural memory, emotional experience, ethical conduct, and shared beliefs.

VI. CONCLUSION

Traditional Riau Malay culinary naming utilizes conceptual metaphors to articulate cultural identity, social emotions, and collective memory. Through expressive, social identity, and didactic functions, culinary metaphors serve as vital media for cultural transmission. This study not only contributes to the fields of pragmatics and cultural linguistics but

also offers valuable insights into safeguarding intangible cultural heritage in the face of modernization. Its novelty lies in bridging pragmatic analysis with cultural inquiry—treating Riau Malay culinary metaphors not merely as linguistic constructs but as cultural signifiers that embody ethnic identity, preserve culinary heritage, and transmit shared social values.

The exploration of metaphor types in Riau Malay traditional cuisine reveals that food is more than a material necessity—it is a dynamic medium of cultural expression, emotional articulation, and moral instruction. Structural metaphors reinforce historical consciousness and emotional resilience; ontological metaphors embody social virtues and communal ideals; and orientational metaphors guide emotional experiences through life's transitions. Metaphors in Riau Malay food naming are pragmatically purposeful: expressive metaphors convey emotion, social identity metaphors affirm belonging and gender roles, and didactic metaphors function as informal moral education. Together, these metaphorical functions reflect a value-centered worldview in which daily acts like eating affirm identity, sustain memory, and transmit cultural wisdom. Future research may expand this inquiry by comparing culinary metaphors across other Malay-speaking regions to explore broader patterns of metaphorical and cultural meaning in the Malay world.

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AI Translation in the Diplomatic Field: A Threat or a Tool for Human Translators?

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Abstract—This research explores the role of artificial intelligence (AI) in the realm of diplomatic translation, specifically highlighting its potential as either a supportive tool for human translators or a threat to the quality of translation. As AI technology continues to evolve, its integration into translation practices raises important questions about its efficiency in the quality of diplomatic communication. This study aims to evaluate how AI tools assist human translators and the challenges they may pose, particularly in maintaining linguistic and contextual accuracy. Through a qualitative comparative analysis of AI-generated translations using Gemini, this research highlights the strengths and weaknesses of AI in translating diplomatic texts. The findings revealed that while AI tools can enhance efficiency, they often struggle with clarity and contextual accuracy in diplomatic communications, as these tools often mistranslate specific terminology and fail to maintain the nuanced tone crucial in diplomacy.

Index Terms—artificial intelligence (AI), diplomatic translation, Gemini, nuanced tone

I. INTRODUCTION

There is growing evidence that AI is beginning to influence various aspects of both professional and daily life, leading to changes in perceptions and practices across different sectors. It refers to "the simulation of human intelligence processes by machines, especially computer systems, which include learning (the acquisition of information and rules for using it), reasoning (using rules to reach approximate or definite conclusions), and self-correction" (Russell & Norvig, 2020, p. 1). The outburst of such technology has led to numerous changes in the execution of tasks and quality enhancement, while raising concerns regarding job displacement, ethical implications and the necessity of the development of new competences (AL-Hemyari, 2023). Translation is one of the fields significantly influenced by advancements in neural machine translation, which is defined as "a type of deep learning that uses large amounts of data to train a neural network model that learns to translate text from one language to another" (Benbada & Benaouda, 2023, p. 16). As a result, many language service providers and professionals in the field are debating whether the integration of AI is a threat to the extinction of the profession, or a tool used to aid translators, especially in sensitive contexts that require careful attention (Bouguesmia, 2020).

Diplomatic translation is one field that has been influenced by AI, which necessitates not only linguistic accuracy but also an understanding of cultural nuances and diplomatic protocols (Akhmedov, 2024). There are various studies conducted to investigate the role or impact of machine translation and AI on academic or cultural translation (Kirov & Malamin, 2022; Mandarić, 2022), yet there is limited research evaluating AI tools in the diplomatic field. Given the geopolitical significance and the unique linguistic challenges of the Arabic language, it is important to stay in sync with the dynamics and urgency of the field. Hence, this study aims to evaluate the role of AI translation tools in the diplomatic field, whether they serve more as benefit for human translators or pose a potential threat to the quality of diplomatic communication. Furthermore, it will try to answer the following questions:

- 1- How do AI translation tools support human translators?
- 2- What ways might they threaten the quality of diplomatic communication?

The significance of the study is to provide valuable insights about the influence of AI translation tools within the context of diplomatic communication, particularly in the Arabic language, where research on this topic is limited. Additionally, the findings will try to highlight the strengths and weaknesses of AI in translating critical diplomatic texts as well as explore effective alternatives and strategies that align with the advancements in AI.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Technology has long played a paramount role in translation, and the integration of artificial intelligence (AI) has

triggered a substantial debate regarding its impact in various translation contexts, including diplomacy. Recent advancements in AI-powered tools, particularly neural machine translation (NMT), have shown a remarkable development in translation quality across various domains (Imamov & Xamidova, 2024). Additionally, it has revolutionized translation practices by increasing accessibility to language service providers worldwide, as well as enhancing speed and adaptability to future advancements (Shahmerdanova, 2025).

As highlighted by Kirov and Malamin (2022) in their study on the attitudes of Bulgarian translators toward AI, such tools are viewed as an opportunity that creates new job roles, namely editors and AI teachers. The impact of AI extends beyond just changing the nature of the profession; it also improves efficiency. This positive influence on efficiency and quality was reflected in Bouguesmia's (2020) study, which indicated that the majority of participants attributed a significant role to AI in facilitating their daily tasks and enhancing the quality of translation. Similarly, Wang (2023) conducted a study to recognize the pros and cons of AI on the translation field. The study involved a diverse sample of 100 participants, both professional translators and non-experts. He utilized a rigorous methodology that involved a comprehensive comparative analysis of translations generated by AI and human translators over various text types, such as business documents and literary works. The results showed that humans outperformed AI in the accuracy of conveying the meaning, yet AI excelled in polished language style. Additionally, the study acknowledged the value of AI in translation by the collaboration between humans and machines to ensure time efficiency and high-quality translation.

However, AI translation tools are not without limitations. Challenges persist particularly in capturing idiomatic expressions, cultural sensitivities and creative works (Shahmerdanova, 2025). According to a case study conducted by Mandarić (2022), machine translation tools are useful in translating technical texts, which can serve as a base for post-editing; however, significant errors were noted in literary texts. Furthermore, it was indicated that machine translation output was less acceptable to native speakers, which implies that the quality of human translation remains evident.

Given the broad implications of AI tools in translation, it is crucial to explore its application in specific contexts. Since there are limited research exploring the use of AI tools in the diplomatic field, the legal field serves as a relevant parallel, as both areas mandate precision and deep understanding of context. While neural machine translation has improved the fluency of translated texts, it frequently produced errors related to words omission, inconsistent use of terminology, inappropriate word choices and inability to recognize essential legal abbreviations (Bajčić & Golenko, 2024).

The need for accuracy in legal translation cannot be overstated, as any mistranslation can lead to significant consequences. This was evident in a study conducted by Hidayat and Hasyim (2024), which investigated the use of Google Translate for translating legal documents. Their findings indicated that Google Translation lacked accuracy in rendering legal terminology and context, which led to serious misunderstandings; thus, they emphasized the necessity of involving expert translators to ensure precise translations, as reliance on machine translation can undermine the integrity and clarity required in legal documents. In legal translation, integrity refers to preserving the original meaning and intent of the document. This is crucial because inaccuracies in translation can lead to serious legal consequences and disputes, as legal texts often contain specific terminology that must be accurately conveyed to maintain their intended effect (Prieto Ramos, 2015). Clarity also ensures that the translated text is easily understood by all parties, without altering the legal implications, which ensures that complex legal concepts are communicated effectively (Hernando-Garreta et al., 2023).

Likewise, Giampieri (2024) critically examined the evolving role of AI tools like ChatGPT and Gemini in legal translation to assess their quality and reliability when translating notice of default. The results showed various shortcomings regarding mistranslations and bizarre phrasing, which created confusion for the target audience; thereof, the author called for careful oversight of AI translations. Despite recent advancements in AI models, such as large language models (LLM), Chen (2024) highlighted that while AI can improve efficiency in legal translation, current models still encounter difficulties with complex legal concepts and terminology, as well as precision and consistency.

The linguistic challenges encountered in translating legal texts are mirrored in diplomatic contexts, where the stakes are equally high. The language used in diplomatic discourse is unique and characterized by its complexity, ambiguity, formality and cultural nuances. These texts encompass various forms such as treaties and official agreements that demand precision to facilitate effective international communications; therefore, translators should possess not only a profound knowledge of language, but also a thorough understanding of the socio-political contexts in which these texts occur (Shahmerdanova, 2025). Additionally, lack of expertise in the diplomatic field can hinder the precise conveyance of meaning as revealed by the researcher Zouba'a (2024) in his study to identify the challenges encountered by translators in the diplomatic contexts. He implied that limited knowledge of diplomatic terms in both source and target languages as well as the complexities of the language used in diplomacy and international relations are key issues for translators. Both studies emphasized the crucial role of collaboration between translators and specialists in the diplomatic field to ensure accuracy and successful communication.

In the realm of diplomacy and AI translation tools, very few scholars have looked into the impact of such tools in preserving the diplomatic context and overall quality of translation. In an investigation carried out by Khasawneh (2023) to explore the possibilities of AI in enhancing global communication through translation, it was revealed that while AI translation tools can significantly enhance translation processes and facilitate communication, they lack the ability to grasp cultural nuances and the subtleties inherent in diplomatic language, which may lead to misunderstanding. This study is considered rigorous due to its mixed methodology that combines qualitative interviews with professional translators and quantitative analysis of AI translation outcomes. The study utilized a diverse sample of diplomatic texts to ensure

that the results are applicable across various types of translation tasks. The comprehensive analysis not only evaluated the technical performance of AI tools but also recognized their cultural limitations which provided a thorough understanding of their effectiveness in diplomatic contexts. Nonetheless, Tohirova (2024) illustrated that although AI tools such as Google translate and DeepL need human intervention to aid in improving translations of complex and subtle texts, they have altered translation practices, especially in e-commerce, politics and media, by translating large volumes of content in a timely manner.

Consequently, this research emphasizes the necessity for ongoing exploration of AI translation tools, particularly in the context of Arabic diplomatic communication. By addressing the challenges identified in this study, my research aims to evaluate the effectiveness of current AI tools in translating sensitive diplomatic texts. This evaluation will focus on identifying gaps in accuracy and context sensitivity, ultimately proposing strategies to enhance the effectiveness of these technologies. Through this investigation, the work seeks to contribute meaningfully to the ongoing discussion about AI translation tools, offering recommendations that can improve their application in diplomatic settings.

III. METHODOLOGY

This study evaluated the role of AI translation in the diplomatic field, specifically examining whether it serves as a threat or a tool for human translators. A qualitative method was employed to investigate the role of AI translation in diplomatic communication. The choice of a qualitative approach stemmed from the complex nature of the research questions, how do AI translation tools support human translators, and in what ways they might threaten the quality of diplomatic communication, of which they require an examination of language, terminology, and context.

Through in-depth comparative analysis of AI-generated translations from the specific tool used in this study, Gemini, the research explored how this tool can assist human translators by enhancing efficiency and providing immediate access to specialized terminology. Additionally, the research assessed potential threats posed by AI translation tools, such as the risk of inaccuracies, loss of nuance, and the challenge of maintaining an appropriate diplomatic tone. These concerns are critical, as minor errors in translation can have significant implications in diplomatic contexts. By analyzing these aspects, the study provided insights into both the benefits and limitations of AI translation in supporting and potentially undermining the quality of diplomatic communication.

The context of this study centered on the analysis of documents from *the General Assembly of the United Nations*, a crucial platform for international relations and diplomacy. The documents selected for this study were important in diplomatic discourse as they addressed significant global and political issues that require careful wording and precision. They were also available in both English and Arabic, which was essential for the comparative analysis. Moreover, these documents contained specialized diplomatic terminology and served as communicative tools. Understanding the language used in these documents was vital, as it reflected the complexities of international relations and the potential implications for translation accuracy.

Purposive sampling was utilized to select two texts that embodied a diplomatic tone and specific terminology relevant to diplomacy and international relations. The criteria for selection ensured that the texts addressed international issues. Additionally, they were required to be available in both English and Arabic to facilitate a comprehensive comparative analysis. For this study, the selected sample included the draft resolution from the United Nations General Assembly titled "The Occupied Syrian Golan" (A/C.4/79/L.15), which was discussed in the Seventy-ninth session of the General Assembly. This resolution was presented by a coalition of countries, which highlighted the collective diplomatic stance concerning Israeli practices affecting the rights of the Palestinian people and other Arabs in the occupied territories. The other sample included the draft resolution "Implementation of the Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples" (A/C.4/79/L.8), which addressed the urgent need for decolonization and the recognition of the rights of colonized peoples.

To conduct the analysis, the AI tool Gemini, developed by Google, was utilized. Gemini is an advanced tool known for its language processing abilities and contextual awareness, which is suited for translating complex diplomatic texts. This tool was employed to generate translations of the selected United Nations resolutions from English to Arabic. The specific prompt used for translation was: "Translate the attached document to Arabic. Consider any cultural references and political or diplomatic terminology". This instruction was designed to ensure that the translation would accurately reflect the intended meaning and context.

The process began with generating translations, where the selected English resolutions were translated into Arabic using the AI tool Gemini. The AI-generated translations were then compared to the English texts to assess accuracy and to the official Arabic version for validity. This comparison was crucial for evaluating the effectiveness of the AI translations and for highlighting scopes where the AI tool could support human translators.

The analysis focused on aspects like assessing the appropriateness of specific terms and phrases that carry significant diplomatic weight. The AI translations were examined to determine whether they accurately conveyed these crucial terms and that the subtleties of diplomatic language were preserved. This aspect highlighted potential risks, such as inaccuracies or loss of nuances. Additionally, the analysis considered the contextual accuracy of the AI-generated translations. This included examining if the translations retained the intended tone of these resolutions. This examination was crucial for understanding how well the AI-generated translations could facilitate comprehension and whether any shortcomings might result in misunderstandings in sensitive discussions.

IV. RESULTS

This section presents the results derived from the comparative analysis of AI-generated translations using Gemini against both the English texts and the official Arabic texts. The results are organized according to two main themes: evaluation of critical terminology and contextual accuracy, in attempt to explore how AI translation tools can support human translators and the potential threats they pose to the quality of diplomatic communications.

A. Evaluation of Critical Terminology

The evaluation of critical terminology highlighted significant differences between AI-generated translations and official texts. The analysis included two key aspects, clarity of terms and precision in legal and diplomatic language.

(a). Clarity of Terms

The findings indicated that while the AI tool generally conveyed meanings correctly, it struggled with clarity, particularly in terms of specificity and intensity.

TABLE 1
ANALYSIS OF CLARITY OF TERMS IN TRANSLATIONS

Official English Resolution	Official Arabic Resolution	Gemini Translation to Arabic	Analysis
"to desist from changing the physical character"	أن تكف عن تغيير الطابع العمراني	أن تكف عن تغيير الطابع المادي	The official Arabic resolution used "الطابع العمراني", specifying the context. The AI translation "الطابع المادي" was broader.
"of the Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons"	لاتفاقية جنيف بشأن حماية المدنيين	لاتفاقية جنيف المتعلقة بحماية الأشخاص المدنيين	The official translation used "المدنيين", which is straightforward. The AI version translated literally (civilian persons) as "الأشخاص المدنيين".
"all others that may be or may have been affected by colonialism"	"جميع الأقاليم الأخرى التي قد تتضرر أو التي تكون قد تأثرت بالاستعمار"	"جميع الأقاليم الأخرى التي لم تنل استقلالها"	The AI translation shifted focus to territories without independence, and omitting affected regions.
has been under continued Israeli military occupation	لا يزال تحت الاحتلال العسكري الإسرائيلي المستمر	لا يزال خاضعاً للاحتلال العسكري الإسرائيلي	The AI translation omitted "المستمر".
expressing grave concern about the stalling of the peace process	وإذ تعرب عن بالغ القلق إزاء توقف عملية السلام	وإذ تعرب عن قلقها إزاء توقف عملية السلام	The AI translation lacks the modifier "بالغ", and diminished the intensity of concern expressed.

(b). Precision in Legal and Diplomatic Language

The findings indicated that while the AI tool demonstrated efficiency in translating legal and diplomatic language, it struggled with precision and specificity as shown in Table 2.

TABLE 2
ANALYSIS OF PRECISION IN LEGAL AND DIPLOMATIC LANGUAGE

Official English Resolution	Official Arabic Resolution	Translation to Arabic	Analysis
to impose its laws, jurisdiction and administration	بفرض قوانينها وولايتها القضائية وإدارتها	بفرض قوانينها وولايتها وإدارتها	The AI translation omitted "القضائية".
"Decides to entrust the Special Committee"	"تقرر أن تعهد إلى اللجنة الخاصة"	"تقرر أن تدفع قدماً"	The AI version simplified the decision but lost the specificity of entrusting a committee with a task.

B. Contextual Accuracy

This theme evaluated the accuracy of AI-generated translations in maintaining the context by examining two key aspects, faithfulness to the original message and reflection of diplomatic tone.

(a). Faithfulness to Original Message

The AI-generated translations showed the ability to generate translations that are faithful to the original message, particularly in straightforward contexts and complex terms as presented in Table 3.

TABLE 3
ANALYSIS OF FAITHFULNESS TO ORIGINAL MESSAGE

English Resolution	Official Arabic Resolution	Translation to Arabic	Analysis
Reaffirming once more the illegality of the decision of 14 December 1981	وإذ تؤكد من جديد مرة أخرى عدم قانونية القرار	وإذ تعيد التأكيد مرة أخرى على عدم قانونية قرار إسرائيل المتخذ	The AI translation maintained the intended meaning.
Recalls its previous relevant resolutions	وإذ تشير إلى قراراتها السابقة ذات الصلة	وإذ تشير إلى قراراتها السابقة ذات الصلة	The AI translation accurately conveyed the intent.
implementation of the Declaration on the Granting of Independence	تنفيذ إعلان منح الاستقلال	تنفيذ إعلان منح الاستقلال	The AI translation accurately conveyed the intent.
"eradicating colonialism in all its forms and manifestations"	"القضاء على الاستعمار بجميع أشكاله ومظاهره"	"القضاء على الاستعمار بجميع أشكاله ومظاهره"	The AI translation maintained.

(b). Reflective of Diplomatic Tone

The analysis of AI-generated translations in terms of diplomatic tone reflection revealed significant findings regarding how different terms can change the meaning or urgency of the message as demonstrated in Table 4.

TABLE 4
ANALYSIS OF REFLECTION OF DIPLOMATIC TONE

Official English Resolution	Official Arabic Resolution	Translation to Arabic	Analysis
aimed at the realization of a just, comprehensive and lasting peace	بهدف إقامة سلام عادل وشامل ودائم	بهدف تحقيق سلام عادل وشامل ودائم	The choice of "إقامة" versus "تحقيق" changed the focus from the process to the outcome.
that purport to alter	بهدف تغيير	التي تدعي تغيير	The AI translation introduced skepticism with "تدعي".
rescind forthwith its decision	بأن تلغي قرارها على الفور	بأن تسحب قرارها فوراً	"تلغي" implied immediate action, while "تسحب" suggested a gradual process.
Calls upon Israel	تطلب إلى إسرائيل	تهيب بإسرائيل	"تهيب" suggested a softer approach compared to "تطلب".
Requests the Special Committee to continue to examine	"تطلب إلى اللجنة الخاصة أن تواصل دراسة"	"تقرر أن تواصل دراسة"	The AI translation removed the request tone.

V. DISCUSSION

This discussion presents the findings of the comparative analysis of AI-generated translations using Gemini tool within the context of diplomacy. The research seeks to evaluate whether AI translation serves as a support instrument for human translators or poses a threat to the quality of diplomatic communication. The results highlighted significant challenges in clarity, precision, and contextual accuracy.

The analysis indicates that AI-generated translations often struggle with inaccuracies that compromise the clarity, tone and precision necessary for diplomatic communication. Such inaccuracies can alter the intended meaning of diplomatic discourse, which raises questions about the reliability of AI tools like Gemini in sensitive contexts. Although, the findings suggest that AI tools can assist human translators by enhancing the translation process, especially in straightforward or less complex texts. Therefore, human oversight is crucial to ensure that diplomatic nuances are conveyed precisely.

These findings align with existing literature on the role of AI in translation, specifically in high-stakes domains like diplomacy. The research by Imamov and Xamidova (2024) emphasizes that while AI tools have improved translation quality, they may not properly capture the nuances required in diplomatic discourse. This is reflected by Mandarić (2022) who found that while AI tools can handle straightforward translations, they struggle with conveying complex meanings and cultural sensitivities. The current study extends these findings by focusing particularly on diplomatic texts, and recognizing the risks associated with relying solely on AI for translating texts that require deep understanding of context, tone, and intent.

The intricacies observed in the AI-generated translations can be referred to the limitations of current AI tools in understanding the subtleties of human language and diplomatic protocols. For instance, Gemini's failure to accurately render diplomatic or legal terms as shown in Table 4 can change the intended tone and urgency of diplomatic messages, which are crucial in conveying the appropriate diplomatic stance. This also aligns with Hidayat and Hasyim's (2024) observations concerning the importance of precise terminology in legal translations, where inaccuracies can lead to serious misunderstandings.

The indications of these findings are significant for translation in the diplomatic field. They emphasize the necessity for human oversight in the translation process, particularly when dealing with sensitive texts that carry ample political weight. As Khasawneh (2023) pointed, AI can facilitate communication yet lack the nuanced understanding required for effective diplomatic discourse. This study advocates a collaborative approach, where human translators alongside AI tools can enhance the translation process to meet the demands of diplomatic communication.

VI. CONCLUSION

This study aimed to evaluate the role of AI translation tools in the diplomatic field and explore whether they serve as a beneficial support for human translators or pose a potential threat to the quality of diplomatic communication. Given the unique linguistic challenges of the Arabic language and the importance of diplomatic language, this research sought to provide insights into how AI technologies impact translation, particularly in sensitive contexts.

The findings of this research highlighted that AI Tools like Gemini can enhance the speed of human translators by providing quick access to specialized terminology, yet the analysis revealed significant issues with clarity, contextual accuracy, and the preservation of diplomatic tone. While AI tools can manage straightforward translations effectively, they struggle with complex diplomatic language and tone, often resulting in inaccuracies and omissions that diminish the urgency and nuance required in diplomatic communication.

The implications of these findings are essential for various stakeholders in the diplomatic field. For translators, the study underscores the importance of evaluating AI-generated translations to ensure that they accurately reflect the intended messages. Policymakers and diplomatic organizations should recognize the potential pitfalls of over-reliance on AI translation, as misunderstandings arising from inaccurate translations could jeopardize international relationships.

The potential limitations of this study may include irrelevance of findings by the time of submission due to the rapid

advancements in AI translation technology, similar to the developments observed with DeepSeek. Additionally, the use of AI tools may raise ethical concerns regarding confidentiality of sensitive diplomatic information.

Future research should explore several key areas to build upon the findings of this study. Conducting comparative analyses of AI translation tools across different languages would provide deeper insights into their effectiveness and limitations. It is also essential for future research to address the ethical considerations linked to AI in translation, specifically in sensitive domains like diplomacy. Concerns about confidentiality, data security, and algorithmic bias must be prioritized as the integration of AI technologies in translation continues to evolve.

APPENDIX

The documents used in this research to conduct the comparative analysis will be provided upon request.

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From Destabilisation to Reparative Connection: A Derridean Reading of Sally Rooney's *Normal People*

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Abstract—This research paper analyses Sally Rooney's *Normal People* through the lens of Derridean deconstruction, focusing on how the novel destabilises meaning, critiques binary oppositions, and subverts traditional narrative closure. The study explores how Rooney's portrayal of vulnerability and emotional openness offers a progressive relational ethic, aligning with Derrida's concept of *différance*. It argues that the text not only destabilises but also offers a reparative model of human connection, embracing ambiguity in an uncertain cultural landscape. The paper contributes to the literary discourse by demonstrating how deconstruction reveals not only fragmentation but also the potential for healing and relational openness.

Index Terms—deconstruction, destabilisation, progression, ambiguity, modern

I. INTRODUCTION

Normal People (2018) by Sally Rooney is a millennial coming-of-age novel in contemporary literary studies. Moreover, it has a brightening effect and is widely acclaimed. Essentially, it is a delicate, cautious, and close examination of the relationships, power and identity formation in the modern era. It has also been referred to as the 'voice of a generation' and is a landmark modern novel. The novel tells the coming-of-age story of two youngsters. Their names are Connell Waldron and Marianne Sheridan. The fiction depicts the life of the changers, particularly the people on the margins of Ireland, that is, their life during the period of transition of Ireland. It is worth noting that this represents social anxieties relating to the collective symbolic selfhood, the wish to belongness and heal a ravaged self in a world that dislocates and alienates. This paper aims to highlight the narrative of emotion as well as the interpersonal relations encountered in the social world brought out in the novel and their complexity in contemporary life. Jacques Derrida's theoretical framework in post-structuralist philosophy primarily transformed the study of language, meaning, identity and ethics in literary theory and criticism. He challenges the structuralist belief in the stability of language and meaning, proposing instead a dynamic system where meaning is perpetually deferred through an endless play of signifiers. Such are the ideas of difference, binary oppositions and the undermining of narrative teleology, which are full of modern literary criticism. It is founded on the assumption, which combines the concept of differing and deferring, meaning the continuous deferment of ultimate meaning in language. This means it is therefore contextual, variable and contingent. In the paper, *Normal People* is placed within the tradition of performative deconstructive texts, which means that the structure of the narrative, not only the inner struggles of its characters, but also thematic concerns, can be seen as the co-performance of the Derridean destabilisation of the language, identity, and binarity of opposites. Structuralist theorists largely maintained that language functioned as a stable system capable of reflecting coherent structures of meaning. Derrida's post-structuralist intervention

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disrupts this assumption by revealing how linguistic systems undermine their own claims to stability, coherence, and origin, thereby exposing meaning as contingent, relational, and perpetually unsettled (Derrida, 1978; Reynolds, n.d.) such an analysis, we can find that the chosen novel is not only a critical text but also a deconstructive text. Besides, the study examines how the novel subverts the traditional male-female gender roles that accentuate a lead over a follower by investing Marianne with conventional masculine traits, such as intelligence and remoteness, traditionally associated with a partner's control in a relationship. Derrida's critique of teleology extends to narrative structures that presume coherence, resolution, and final meaning as necessary outcomes of storytelling. From a deconstructive perspective, narratives do not move toward an inevitable or authoritative conclusion; rather, they remain open to reinterpretation, disruption, and deferral. Meaning is therefore not completed at the end of a text but continues to circulate beyond it, resisting closure and totalisation (Derrida, 1978; Turner, 2016; Royle, 2003) by disrupting narrative closure, problematising language exchange and disassembling hierarchized binaries. It is, however, that it provides progressive ethics of relational openness in that human connecting exists not by affording its differentiation but by its moral commitment to ambivalence. Therefore, the novel addresses the contemporary longing for meaningful attachment with conditions of instability, providing a literary model of relational healing that does not demand resolution but accepts *différance* as an existential given. This research makes a significant contribution to our understanding of how literature seeks to expose and articulate the transition of human connection in the complex social world. In addition, it contributes to literary criticism by analysing the performative aspects of deconstruction in the selected novel. This study also emphasises its deconstructive operations and ethical implications.

The study aims to explore the following aspects using these research questions:

1. How does *Normal People* by Sally Rooney represent the performative characteristics of Derridean deconstruction through language, binary oppositions and character identity?
2. How did Rooney subvert conventional narrative closure, definitive moral positioning, and stable character identity in the select narrative?
3. How are contemporary anxieties and relational healing represented through vulnerability and emotional openness in Rooney's selected novel?

Much like *Normal People*, *Conversations with Friends* involves the relational vulnerability and ambiguity of millennials. What is even better, the novels do not use a clear ending. This invokes the Derrida differential where meaning is deferred, always delayed in the writing and genealogy of text. Essentially, this shows that there is a millennial fiction, in the general sense, that deconstruction resonates with. Deconstruction attempts to dislodge judgment and binaries and the notion that the self is substantial.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

The strengths of identity negotiation in narrative, healing, and relationships between people, as referred to in modern literature, have been given significant consideration in contemporary literary criticism. The chosen novel is a critical document in this discussion, as it has attracted academic criticism due to its portrayal of intimacy, emotional attachment, and social power. This literature review examines some of the top critical theories of thinking that explore these dimensions, providing a contextual framework for the current study. The article by Ferdinal et al. (2025) examines the entangled interaction between mental health, human rights, and capitalism in the select novel. The work of Angelo (2024) is of particular interest because it focuses on two vastly different family backgrounds that influence the lives of the story's protagonists, highlighting how they cope with social anxiety. Connell has a caring family background that stands in contrast with Marianne's abusive and neglectful family background, and this plays a significant role in the cause of her social anxiety and her strife. The secretive love affair is an essential healing ground between them. The paper claims that their relationship serves as a sufficient facilitating condition, enabling them to develop their identities and seek emotional support. In this way, the study highlights the most significant topics in recovery and self-improvement within the context of literary criticism.

Carregal-Romero (2023) assumes that neoliberal culture has influenced the Rooney protagonists, characterised by a background of individualism, self-reliance, and competitiveness. In the selected works, this research employs care ethics and the theory of vulnerability to examine Irish millennials. In the article, the author highlights the development of silence as a form of refusal, where the protagonists shun societal norms to form a proper, close liaison. To make decisions on how to deal with their emotional intricacies, they turn to silence because neoliberal norms strictly restrain them in uncensored communication. Despite neoliberal ethics, the main characters find consolation and meaning in authentic interpersonal relationships. Such a relationship gives opportunities to be vulnerable and admit it to another person, which breaks the paradigm of independent life. The author examines the concept of abnormality dynamics, which reveals the Reality behind social construction, with references to interpersonal relationships and identities. Barros-del Río (2022) reviews *Normal People* as a millennial bildungsroman that exists in post-Celtic Tiger Ireland. It also discusses the role played by neoliberal ideologies, including the commodification of the body, neoliberal consumerism, and materialist success, in the construction of the identity of these crucial players during the economic crisis. It highlights class differences, guilt, remorse, self-harm, inner conflicts and self-hate as a result of individualism and materialism. The research sets the selected novel as a cultural critique of neoliberal values affecting Ireland's millennial people.

Gunkel (2022) proposes a two-step procedure in deconstruction, intentionally designed to subvert Hegelian dialectics,

thereby highlighting its unique approach to critical analysis. The simultaneous existence of challenges and opportunities of deconstruction provides avenues for rich insights and vulnerabilities. It also views deconstruction as a crucial strategy for the challenges of the twenty-first century, while also acknowledging its vulnerabilities and troubles.

Studies done so far have been based on sociological, feminism and contemporary theoretical approaches. The absence of analyses concerning the application of Derridean performative deconstruction to the fiction and theorisation concerning the performance of fiction instead of representation of the instability of language, among other Derridean concepts, clearly shows a gap on the part of the researcher. The study reveals how the development of relations in the narrative, far from mere destabilisation, opens up novel ethical relations, namely the relations of an ethical nature. The study recenters the deconstruction (of totalities) as a critical tool and a framework with which to imagine new relational ethics in a time of uncertainty.

In the present moment of the digital era, the characters are unable to communicate with each other, speak the truth and show any kind of emotion. This helps to elaborate further on the ideological viewpoint of present-day diversity. It provides a careful and sophisticated account of what can be an extremely difficult thing to do in terms of communication for anyone, but we with youth. Expressing yourself is the ability to convey what is going on inside, whether it is “I love you” or telling somebody you are upset. In reference to the aspect of hypermediacy, the novel showcases an institutional reflection of the lives we lead. Our identities on social networks are disjointed and digitised.

III. METHODOLOGY

The method adopted is qualitative and interpretive. It is based on the use of theory and detailed textual analysis. The examination has a predominantly literary-critical character. Derrida's deconstructionism is the theoretical tool; it employs to apply close textual analysis to selected scenes from the text. The study conducts a close reading of selected excerpts of the text. Connell's confession of love (p. 49) and Marianne's emotional isolation (p. 142) are selected as imbued with representational power pertaining to the ambiguity of meaning and emotional response. In the same vein, the two main characters' refusal to identify their relationship, as well as the confusion surrounding the event of connubbing, further demonstrates Derrida's *différance*. These pivotal scenes show how the characters are never able to express themselves clearly. They indicate the instability of meaning and its essential slipperiness. Also, they highlight how language fails in producing tensions between relations. Theoretical mapping emerges from the concepts of Derrida. Above all, they exposure of binary oppositions and *différance*. Close textual analysis involves a detailed analysis of chosen words, passages, dialogues and the narrative architecture that appears in the text. The notion of ambivalence (the individual not having a fixed 'place' or 'role') as a site of connection and strength is emphasized. It also shows how the healing and ethical becoming of the protagonist can be replicated through relational vulnerability and openness. The findings of the paper are situated within present-day anxieties. This enables us to read the novel both as a culturally responsive text and as a performative deconstructive text. This analysis mainly uses primary fictional works as data. It also draws on secondary critical literary readings on Derridean deconstruction. The struggles of the protagonists of the novel being so ambiguous on several emotional levels, readers can perceive them differently. An individual's life experience or cultural context would determine this. Connell and Marianne's relationship may be interpreted in different ways since this book does not provide closure. Derrida suggests that there is no single, stable, comprehensive meaning or reference in the text, as meaning is always deferred. It focuses on critiquing the structuralist faith in meaning, closure, the end of the text, and binary opposites. The potent structuralist belief in language as capable of reflecting a coherent, objective reality was undermined primarily by Jacques Derrida, a major representative of post-structuralist thought.

He asserts that language's meaning is not fixed or present but is perpetually deferred through a chain of signifiers. This provokes the structuralist presumption that signs function within a closed, internally constant system. Derrida challenges the structuralist assumption that meaning is stable or transparently accessible through language. Instead, he proposes that meaning is continuously produced through differences between signs and is endlessly postponed within a relational system of signifiers, rather than anchored in any external or transcendental reality (Derrida, 1967, 2016). His well-known assertion that there is “nothing outside the text” should therefore be understood not as a denial of reality, but as an insistence that meaning emerges through textual and linguistic relations rather than through direct reference to an objective presence (Royle, 2003; Turner, 2016). Derrida introduces the concept of *différance* to explain how meaning is generated not through fixed correspondence between signifier and signified, but through an ongoing process of differentiation and postponement within language itself. Meaning, in this framework, is never fully present but is continuously shaped by what it is not and by what is yet to come, rendering interpretation provisional and open-ended (Derrida, 1967, 2016; Mambrol, 2024; Vasanthan, 2023), not through a stable correspondence between signifier and signified, but through differences from other signs and the perpetual deferral of definitive meaning. The nature of perpetual deferral destabilises the relationship between signifier and signified, offering language an inherent ambiguity. The signifier is considered the physical form of the sign, such as a word, image, etc. The signified is the conceptual idea that represents the signifier. Instead, meaning emerges from a complex interplay of differences and is always subject to change. It explores that interpretation is always provisional and incomplete. The pursuit of meaning is an ongoing and never-ending process (Vasanthan, 2023). It challenges the structuralist view that meaning can be stable by analysing fixed relationships between signifiers and signifieds. Deconstruction interrogates the hierarchical binary structures that have traditionally organised Western philosophical and cultural thought, including oppositions such as male/female, self/other,

and public/private. Derrida demonstrates that these oppositions are not natural or self-evident but are culturally produced systems in which one term is routinely privileged over the other. Crucially, each term depends on its counterpart for meaning, revealing the instability and mutual contamination of binary categories (Derrida, 1978; Kavula Sikirivwa, 2020; Rahim, 2021).

He exposes that these binaries are not natural but constructed, with one term often privileged over the other. He points out that the hierarchy of dual oppositions always assumes the subordination of one term to the other. Binary oppositions are not merely contrasting pairs, but form evaluative social hierarchies where one term is considered more significant than the other. To deconstruct these hierarchies, one must dismantle them and reveal their mutual interdependence (Kavula Sikirivwa, 2020). Binary oppositions emphasise how meaning in texts is developed through differences and that a single word can carry multiple, sometimes contradictory, interpretations. Moreover, actual deconstruction is exploring outside the oppositional structure to seek new meanings (Turner, 2016). The select binary oppositions in the novel reveal the inherent instability and fluidity of an individual's social identity. Furthermore, the study examines the narrative teleological expectations of narrative structures, which traditionally feature resolution and narrative closure, characterised by stable meaning and character development. According to Derrida, Supplementarity can be seen as a notion that the meaning is produced in the absence, deferral and internal difference. The protagonists of the chosen novel are constantly caught in a cycle of emotional swings and delayed choices, resulting in a convoluted narrative conclusion. Identity and relational meaning are not a destination but a flowing situation, which is created in what is left out. This is highlighted by the open ending of the narrative, which neither offers a reunion nor a separation, but rather a point of interpretative incongruity. This shows us that Derrida claims that the meaning or so-called 'Origin' is divided into the presence of absence and the presence of difference. In this way, it undermines the concept of specific relational meaning. Nonetheless, in the chosen novel, a non-standard storyline and character journey, along with a lack of narrative resolution, are introduced. It does not endeavour to rectify interpersonal differences between the protagonists, thereby undermining the integrity of the closure as an indicator of narrative consistency and semiosis. Therefore, *Normal People* (2018) by Sally Rooney turned out to be a fertile field of research. It is narrative disintegration, ambivalence of character communication, and theme obsession with miscommunication and unresolved relationships place it in a theatre that is comfortable with Derridean deconstruction performance.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A. *The Destabilisation of Meaning and Language in Intimate Communication*

Rooney's minimalist style, which lacks quotation marks and punctuation, erects a wall between discourse and narration. The conceptualization to read this type of writing can be made through the use of an analytic approach, injected with deconstructionist Derrida, who says that the metaphysics of presence. Rooney calls into question the idea that language transparently conveys meaning. Marianne's incapacity to articulate her psycho-affective state – "I do not know what is wrong with me," says Marianne – challenges the idea that language has unimpeded access to meaning, says Rooney. I do not understand why I cannot be like normal people" (Rooney, 2018, p. 142). Rooney indicates, in other words, that presence can not be accessed through language at the point when Marianne cannot express her psycho-affective state in words. Besides, the lack of meaning encapsulated in language is represented by the characters' incapacity for self-knowledge and socialrudiness, toward utopian self-knowledge as articulated in the assertion "Life is the element you bring with your inner head" (Rooney, 2018, p. 142). Connell's line strongly conveys how personal our experience of the world becomes, and how difficult it is to translate that into shared language. Rooney portrays Connell's obsession with language and experience as being provided in minimalistic language: "It feels strength to him to put an experience down in verbal aspect like he is trapping it in a jar and it can never fully leave him" (Rooney, 2018, p. 112). The language writing is considered both empowering and limited, and the metaphor is downplayed to maintain its minimalistic language choice.

In the narrative, the protagonist's language fails to convey true meaning in key dialogues. When Connell and Marianne have a conversation about their future life, they admit,

Then we would both be in Dublin, he says. I bet you would pretend you did not know me if we bumped into each other. Marianne says nothing at first. The longer she stays silent, the more nervous he feels, like maybe she really would pretend not to know him. The purpose of being beneath her notice gives him a panicked feeling, not only about Marianne personally but about his future, about what is possible for him. She says: I would never pretend not to know you, Connel. (Rooney, 2018, p. 32)

This scene depicts how boastful silence and self-comforting declaration highlight the tension between speech and utterance. It portrays how neither of them is capable of speaking properly, on top of their emotions. The constant misunderstandings that take place in the relationship damage the love that the couple shares. It shows that Derrida's idea of reality is always mediated by something beyond itself. This analysis destabilises traditional notions of truth and representation. It opens up space for alternative readings and interpretations. Thus, the instability of language becomes a source of creative possibility. In addition, in the early stage of a relationship, when Marianne has a sense of low self-worth about herself, Connell says,

I do love you. I am not just saying that. Her eyes fill up with tears again, and she closes them. Even in her mind, she will find this moment intolerably deep, and she is aware of this now, while it is happening. (Rooney, 2018,

p. 49)

Despite his sincere verbal dialogue, her response is non-verbal, with tears in her eyes, and she closes them in silence. Derrida contends that linguistic systems are inherently self-subverting, as the same structures that enable meaning also expose the limits and contradictions of that meaning. Discourse, in this sense, simultaneously depends upon inherited conceptual frameworks and destabilises them from within, making critique an internal rather than external operation of language (Derrida, 1967, 2016).

TABLE 1
KEY INSTANCES OF LANGUAGE'S FAILURE IN DIALOGUES

Sl. No	Key Scene	Failure of Language	Emotional Outcome
1.	Connell fears social neglect from Marianne in Dublin (p. 32)	Marianne's silence delays meaning and words' inadequacy for reassurance	Emotional Tension; Mutual Insecurity
2.	Connell's confession of love (p. 49)	Verbal confession met with tears	The intensity of emotion surpasses verbal expression
3.	Marianne's inability to articulate her emotional state (p. 142)	Failure of verbal expression, when she admits, "I do not know what is wrong with me."	Emotional alienation and inability to self-expression
4.	Connell's reflection on language's power (p. 112)	Language 'traps' experience but never fully captures it.	Awareness of language's limitation

B. Class, Gender, and the Subversion of Traditional Social Roles

The contrasting social backgrounds have a significant impact on the bond between Marianne and Connell. Connell is the son of a single mother, who is a housemaid from a lower-class background. On the other hand, Marianne is from a wealthy family, but is socially ostracised at school. The upper-class identity has never helped her in social belonging. Despite being rich, she has a sense of detachment,

Marianne had the sense that her life was happening somewhere very far away, unfolding without her, and she did not know if she would ever discover where it was and become part of it. She often has that feeling in school, but it is not accompanied by any specific images of what life might look like. (Rooney, 2018, p. 16)

Rooney uses various ways to achieve the above statement through the defiance of the characters against gender constructions. Marianne, the main character, is depicted as masculine. Through the characterization of the protagonist, a woman of intellectual dominance, emotional detachment and sexual autonomy, subversive femininity is shown. According to the author, men want to control women's mutiny rather than exercising their own bands (Rooney, 2018, p. 104). This also positions her as an overriding presence. Connell's expression of vulnerability and sensitivity, which are typically feminine traits, positively portrays him with a subversive masculinity in contrast to this. He confesses, "He had a sense of being two people, and one would have to emerge as a full-time choice" (Rooney, 2018, p. 174). The depiction of fluidity demonstrates how identities do not always conform to expectations of gender. The emotional conflicts depicted in the films illustrate how binary oppositions are unstable and can be subverted. In addition, while Marianne's fantasies often revolve around something surprisingly submissive, Connell is very careful and considerate in their intimacy. This questions the powerful and powerless binaries. This proves that gender identity does exist. Connell's plea for secrecy reveals a social pressure and a set of preconceived illusions that they carry into their relationship. Their relationship creates a blurring of the social and private. Their heart-to-heart talks often say more than words. Often, knowing what is not said is just as important as what is. Marianne will ask 'What?' if he quietly makes a decision not to say something as they talk (Rooney, 2018, p. 30). This indicates intact, which does not orient around the utterance. Instead, the meaning is generated from what is not said. At school, Connell mostly feels the urge to be his public self, who wants to please his peers. The public spaces are considered a regulatory element for behaviour and relationships through internal codes, and characters are free to act upon private emotions without consequences. Similarly, the so-called private spaces are considered an illusion, where Marianne's home is the space for emotional and physical abuse. Moreover, their relationship breaks stereotypical labels. Their bond defies categorisation and existing external traditional norms of platonic or romantic relationships, thereby deconstructing societal norms surrounding intimacy. This reveals Derrida's assertion that the oppositions cannot exist independently but are mostly contaminated by their counterpart.

C. Deconstructive Performativity Using Narrative Ambiguity, Character Fluidity, Open-Ended Character Arcs

The research examines the author's defiance of conventional narrative closure by refusing to provide definitive character arcs, instead opting for a more nuanced approach that avoids precise closure or a complete transformation of the protagonists. The fantastical aspect of the fiction renders their future and their identity both unfixed and open-ended. The text incorporates a performative rejection of narrative closure. The fact that the fictions do not end the characters' trajectories speaks to the fictionality of narrative closure itself and so suggests that real intimacy could be thought through existing negotiate, not narrative closure. Marianne has ascertained that both of them have been the two plants growing in the same pot of soil, contorting and taking unlikely positions to make room for the other (Rooney, 2018, p. 280). The idea expresses a continuous increase of living beings, in continuity, over time, without any intention or predetermined end. The character's refusal of closure is an instance of *différance* for Derrida, where an identity is not presence or absence,

presence to itself or absence from itself, but something always-beyond-itself. As such, the protagonists exhibit this *différance*. The English study does not seem to offer final answers and is more ambivalent about narrative teleology. Essentially, the fiction's very ending had a denial of authorial closure. At the end of the novel, Connell gets ready to leave for New York for his occupational advancement, and the relationship between the two is one of honesty: "You should go, she says. I will always be here. You already have this knowledge. 281 Although it has an unclear fate, the enduring love of these two characters remains open to multiple interpretations. This is also given as "She closes her eyes. She thinks that he will probably not return. "Or, he will, wondrously, have what they have now, then it is something they can never have back again" (Rooney, 208, p. 281). It offers an ambiguous ending instead of the traditional "happily ever after." That said, it sows doubt. Furthermore, Derrida's absence of presence of meaning in texts is also in tune with: "The signified concept is never present in and of itself." According to the select theorist, nothing is inscribed in a term. He has contended that stories are always open-ended in some way – that stories always defer meaning; that a text's end is never fully achieved. The subversion of teleology interrupts the end of a text's resolution or finality. Then it emphasizes that storytelling is often a work in progress. The story itself becomes a site of interpretation and resignification. The denial of conclusive closure creates endless def. of conclusive closure.

The examination focuses on the narrative framework of the book. The novel disrupts linear and teleological narratives. The narrative structure undergoes a disruption due to a timeline and less use of quotation marks. Through it, we uncover the story structure of the novel. Derrida doubts the existence of a fixed structure and meaning. The structure of a signified is the same thing as the signified. Nothing exists beyond the text. Also, we see that the narrative framework of autobiographies such as *Diary of a Wimpy Kid* remains inside the text—the Story Community Structure of the Novel. An author writes a novel with a fixed structure at first, usually with a beginning, rising action, climax, falling action and resolution. However, the chosen novel does not have that. It includes the life events of Connell and Marianne, but these are not connected. This gives us disjointed and episodic glimpses of it. The events do have consequences. So, they are episodic in nature, but not per se. By doing so, it fragments the text in a certain way. Therefore, the illustration of deconstruction allows for the endless possibilities of derailing the meaning. Fragmentation helps to disseminate messages of impossibility in the text during the reading. The transformation of individual characters without finality is revealed in the novel as a performative deconstructive text. It is suspended in a place where closure is infinitely deferred, representing a textually deconstructive aestheticism.

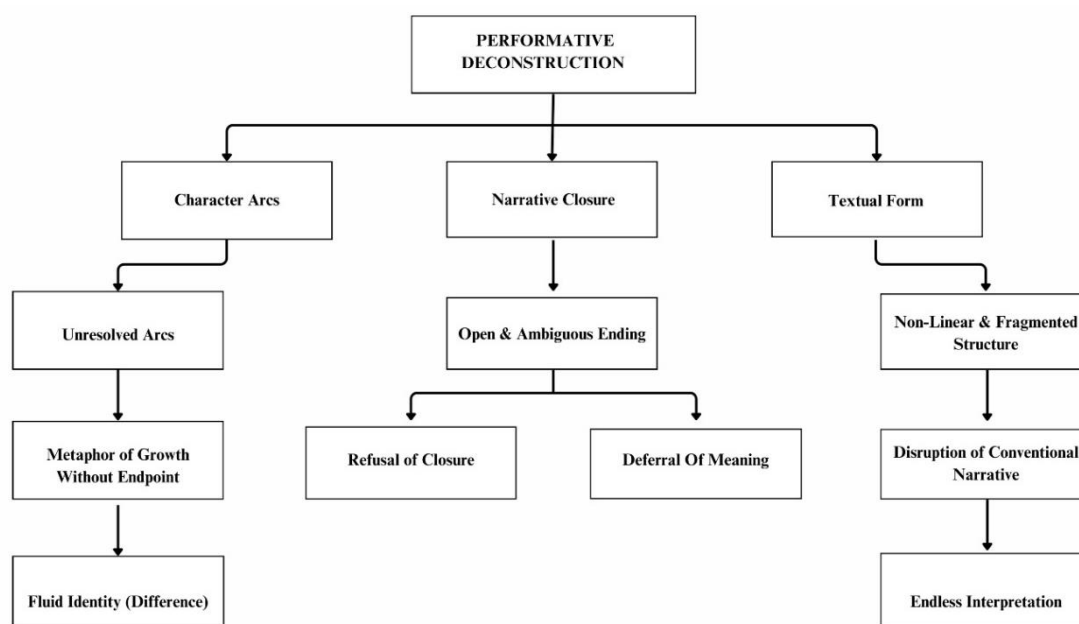


Figure 1. Performative Deconstruction in Sally Rooney's *Normal People*

D. Embracing Vulnerability, Healing and Narrative Ethics Beyond Deconstruction

Connell and Marianne's relationship is marked by moments of profound vulnerability. There is a disconnection that focuses on his internal struggle. However, as their bond intensifies, Connell finds solace in Marianne's love,

Being with her is like opening a door from everyday life and then closing it behind you. He is not afraid of her, actually; she is a pretty relaxed person. However, he fears being with her because of the confusing way he finds himself behaving, the things she says that he would never say. (Rooney, 2018, p. 12)

The conversation seems to have therapeutic qualities where elements of the self that no longer get scripted overtly by one's own personal script under social conditioning begin to emerge. The phrase "opening a door away from normal life" refers to taking the subject away from the normal social plays. It also implies taking him to a liminal space where this openness can "make something clear or possible, perhaps a form of recognition" (O'Douthwaite, 2011, p. 26). Connell

admits he can tell her anything about himself, and she will never repeat it; he knows that (Rooney, 2018, p. 12). Mutual trust and relative openness to vulnerability make the claim of Derrida concerning the impossibility to open up without being hurt or hurting others resonate. “I will never hurt you, okay?” He consoles her. He stated. “Never” (Rooney, 2018, p. 273). The emotional exchange shows that healing comes from connection when people open and engage in vulnerability. Above all, the novel evokes contemporary fears concerning how fluid identity may be. The main characters are pressured by themselves and society to self-define within strict parameters. The phrase aptly captures Marianne’s discomforts “He had that feeling at school many times. However, there was no particular picture which accompanied it of what life might look” (Rooney, 2018). Perhaps it also evokes the dislocation of a person, someone misjudging the position of another person within a social field, which he or she is terribly unsure about. The in-between life interactions that the key characters have with each other support their development, and later, all heal from their internalised trauma. According to Marianne, she has never felt that “People are a lot more knowable than they think they are” (Rooney, 2018, p. 271). Through Connell, she realizes this, and there is no denying that he knows too. He mentions,

I am not sure why I struggle to make people like me. I think there was something wrong with me when I was born. Lots of people love you, Marianne. Okay? Your family and friends love you. (Rooney, 2018, p. 194)

The relationship disrupts the main characters’ usual state of self-ignorance. In other words, this relationship creates a space, an interstitial space where things can happen. In such a space, repressed feelings, original and foreign desires, and suppressed memories surface—this connection, which may appear to cause dread, aids in healing. The self encounters and is shaped by itself, achieving real-time presence. The genuine healing of the soul entails an opening that raises questions about itself. Moreover, it entails an ethical exposure, which connects with human relations. Findings in the paper indicate that deconstruction creates uncertainties of meaning, and the understanding implies that the moral growth of the character can be reached by accepting rather than denying this uncertainty. In a similar vein, Connell highlights the importance of emotional honesty: “He wants to die, but he has never genuinely wanted Marianne to forget about his life” (Rooney, 2018, p. 173). As the narrative unfolds, we find that the protagonists serve as a scaffold for Derrida (1992), since deconstruction always posits ethical responsibility as an undecidable affair. Initially, he failed to acknowledge her publicly in school, revealing a neglect of ethical responsibility. Connell starts to seek therapy after the death of his friend Rob and pursues writing as his career as a reflection of his commitment to mental health and honesty, significant features of ethical responsibility in personal progress. Similarly, Marianne’s openness to love without dependence and acceptance of Connell’s life decision mirror her ethical responsibility towards her relationship and selfhood. In the modern world of digital technologies, where social identities are formed and staged, the story of Sally Rooney can be discussed as a quest for authentic contact. The readiness in the main leads to a weak confrontation of the conventions of emotional distance. Therefore, their engagement is a testament to a strong relationship, revealing the power of unity in an era characterised by disunity and isolation.

V. CONCLUSION

There are many factors to refer to when exemplifying and performing the performativity components of Derridean deconstruction in *Normal People*, and these include language, binary oppositions, and selfhood. The analysis of the artificial and unsteady character of social binary opposition makes them appear contingent, unreliable, and subject to change, rather than being a slice of life or an essential aspect. The study explores the refusal of the novels to be concluded into a narrative, moral and fixed identity of characters, the select theorist proposes, since meaning is never finished and identity is never complete. This literary device renders the major fiction extremely pertinent to current cultural circumstances, particularly in its depiction of 21st-century social concerns, including intimacy, identity, and inter-human relationships within a hypermediated world. This paper draws attention to the progressive ethics of distinctiveness and openness in the fiction characterised by its subtlety and gradualism. In addition to this, the protagonists Connell and Marianne opt for gentleness and care, rather than security and socially sanctioned behaviours; they invest in a vision of intimacy that subverts indecision and undecidability. Derrida argues that we are responsible for making ethical decisions when an event is undecidable and in those moments where something or someone is undecided and undecidable. However, we must not refrain from taking notice and from responding. As a result, the deconstructive strategy is always at hand, or so the research work maintains—the deconstructive strategy. The scholarly article illustrates ways in which deconstruction can furnish valuable conceptual tools to make sense of the causes of contemporary social anxieties and to formulate new ethical relations. The reason is that in a culture where discursive authority is in constant contestation with one another, where social identities are in a constant state of crisis, and in a world where no one truly feels at home. The study concludes that while meaning remains uncertain, ambiguous, and never fixed, human relationships manage to endure. It provides a meticulous Derridean deconstructive reading of Sally Rooney’s *Normal People*. Despite the application of the study, it nonetheless reveals certain limitations. This study will focus on one primary text only. The selected fiction, while rich and deconstructive, does not easily allow for generalization of the results to all of Rooney’s other works or contemporary fiction broadly. The methodology of the research is quite qualitative and interpretive. The emphasis is on detailed reading and theoretical mapping. While this highlights critical reading of language and narrative structure, it lacks empirical validation. For the future scope of the present study, a comparative analysis with other millennial novels may reveal whether Rooney’s approach to relational ethics and narrative ambiguity in the performative aspects of deconstruction signals a broader literary trend. Moreover, in methodology, by integrating deconstruction, interdisciplinary fields such as

psychology, sociology, or digital humanities can highlight the narrative indeterminacy and fluid identities that intersect with mental health and digital communication in the contemporary world. Thus, this research establishes a significant foundation for existing discussions between literary theory, ethics, and cultural studies.

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Transformative Maternities: Navigating Culture, Identity, and Motherhood in Amy Tan's *The Joy Luck Club*

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Abstract—This study investigates the transformation of motherhood constructs in *The Joy Luck Club* (1989) by the Chinese-American writer, Amy Tan, focusing on how racial, ethnic, and cultural exigencies influence maternal experiences. By utilizing both analytical and comparative methodologies, the study examines narrative techniques, thematic elements, and character development through transnational feminist and postmodern theoretical frameworks. The findings reveal that the novel challenges traditional views of motherhood by highlighting the impact of racial, ethnic, and socio-cultural factors and showcasing diverse maternal roles. The study shows that Amy Tan's novel redefines maternal constructions, emphasizing resilience, cultural heritage, and the negotiation of dual cultural identities. This study recommends further exploration into contemporary multi-ethnic literature to deepen the understanding of the complexities of motherhood across different cultural contexts. Additionally, it suggests incorporating more diverse voices in literary criticism and feminist discourse to enrich the perspectives on maternal experiences. The implications of this study are significant for feminist and multi-ethnic literary studies, providing a nuanced appreciation of the intersectionality of motherhood with cultural, ethnic, racial, and social issues. By emphasizing the transformative power of maternal bonds and the influence of cultural integration, this research contributes to a broader understanding of identity, resilience, and the evolving nature of motherhood in multicultural societies.

Index Terms—Chinese-American, feminist, motherhood, multi-ethnic, postmodern

I. INTRODUCTION

“All human life on the planet is born of woman,” announces Rich (2021) in her seminal work *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution*. Describing the motherhood experience, Rich continues, “the one unifying, incontrovertible experience shared by all women and men is that months-long period we spent unfolding inside a woman's body...most of us first know both love and disappointment, power and tenderness, in the person of a woman” (p. 11). Despite its shared commonality, motherhood remains a controversial issue within different literary, cultural, social, and philosophical discourses. While motherhood has been tackled in multiple works of literature and culture, there is still much to be said and refuted about the ambivalence and doubleness of the many motherhood constructions and literary representations of the maternal experience. Much has also changed in late 20th and early 21st centuries, and a need for an on-going discussion of the maternal experience should be considered as social, cultural, economic, and political conditions change. “A time of changing demographics and family structures, as well as of mass migration and the widespread hybridization of identities” as Rye et al. (2018) affirm in their *Motherhood in Literature and Culture*.

While Rich's *Of Woman Born* reveals the most fundamental aspect in human being's life – the universal experience of being born from a woman and the first encounter with the complex abundance of emotions such as love, disappointment, power, and tenderness, the multiple-sided nature of motherhood has been studied in the different fields of literature, history, philosophy, and anthropology. Motherhood is both universal and enveloped in complexity and ambivalence, a fact which makes women different and triggers continual intellectual discussion of the interpretation of diverse maternal forms. The embedding of the dialogue on the importance of a sustained discussion as stated by Gill Rye and co-authors reveals the new dynamics and hybridization of identities due to family system alteration, mass migration and other demographic shifts. These alterations require a revision and a broader engagement in the discussion of the maternal experience, taking its role into account as a determinant of the individual and collective identities in changing social, cultural, economic, and political landscapes. Hence, such conversations about motherhood require a detailed analysis of

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their long-term foundation as well as the current transformations, which provide knowledge about the everlasting and ever-changing nature of the maternal experience in the human history.

Many literary works have depicted maternity and its myriad cultural meanings; from the canonical male representations of motherhood to recent female fictional and autobiographical writings that focus on the multi-faceted constructions of the maternal experience. According to Staub (2007) in her *The Literary Mother*, “historically, writers – both male and female – have been obsessed with motherhood, often idealizing it as a kind of holy vocation, but just as frequently demonizing it as monstrous. And archetypally, the mother figure is constructed as saint and witch, fairy godmother and wicked stepmother” (p. 1). Within these vagaries of the depictions of the motherhood experience in literature, this study discusses the transformation of motherhood constructions as impacted by racial, ethnic, cultural, and social exigencies of diverse mother subjects. I argue that the conceptualization of motherhood has changed over time depending on the mother figure’s cultural positionality and the particularities of her race, ethnicity, and social politics. This new conceptualization of the maternal experience is investigated in Amy Tan’s *The Joy Luck Club* (1989) which presents a number of diverse maternal experiences though the mothers identify as Chinese or Chinese-American. The study and the selection of Amy Tan’s work does not in any way generalize about all Chinese mothers’ experiences or multi-ethnic women, but it intends to situate these women experiences within their specific positionality to uncover the multiplications of motherhood constructions as affected by the exigencies of race, ethnicity, and culture. The cultural positionality in the novel enables the researcher to explore how race and ethnicity influence mothers’ interactions with their children because experiences of motherhood are so bound up in race, and it is inevitable that the mothers transmit their cultural identity to their children.

The adoption of a transnational feminist theoretical approach facilitates this study of ethnic women’s maternal discourse. It shows how ethnic women authors such as Amy Tan reconceptualize motherhood by highlighting the transnational feminist ideas of positionality and reflexivity. To clarify, in transnational feminist theory the concept of positionality means that one’s place in the world is composed of multiple social identities which relay different sources of power, privilege, and marginalization (Enns et al., 2021, p. 14). It is a situational recognition of how one’s social identities and cultural affiliations may affect one’s understandings and biases. Similarly, reflexivity as part of transnational feminist theory implies that one should undertake a critical analysis of one’s assumptions, values, worldviews, and locations to observe whether these factors might shape one’s views of others (Enns et al., 2021, p. 13). These processes of reproduction and representation of knowledge are critical in the analysis of motherhood within the context of racial, ethnic, and gender attributes.

The research investigates how motherhood experiences have changed over time within Chinese American communities from the late 20th century. It focuses on how factors like race, ethnicity, religion, and immigration have influenced the identities of mothers within these groups. It is crucial to understand the way in which mothers construct their identity within contemporary, complex mothering roles and responsibilities. The research, therefore, intends to answer the following questions:

1. How does multi-ethnic women’s literature, represented by Amy Tan’s *The Joy Luck Club*, present a transformation of already established motherhood constructions?
2. What is the impact of the racial, ethnic, and cultural exigencies of the mother subject on her maternal experience?
3. How does the positionality of the mother figure in postmodern literature present a new conceptualization of the motherhood experience?

Amy Tan’s novel intertwines the lives of four Chinese American women and their immigrant mothers, exploring their mother-daughter bonds, cultural identities, and the gaps between generations and cultures. It looks at how maternal discourse evolves in a multi-ethnic context, highlighting the contrast between the mothers, shaped by traditional Chinese values, and the daughters, influenced by American culture, leading to challenges in understanding and communication. This intersection of cultures leads to a transformation in how these women perceive motherhood, femininity, and their cultural heritage. In the novel, the maternal narrative emphasizes sacrifice, pain, hope, and resilience. The mothers’ difficult pasts in China influence their aspirations for their daughters in the U.S. Meanwhile, the daughters, facing their own struggles in America, grow to understand their mothers’ viewpoints, deepening their insight into their identities as women and members of a multi-ethnic community.

II. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY AND LITERATURE REVIEW

The issue of this study is centered around the evolving depiction of motherhood in multi-ethnic women’s literature. Existing literature has extensively explored various facets of motherhood, but often within specific cultural or geographical contexts. For instance, Karmakar (2018) highlights the portrayal of motherhood in Indian literature, focusing on the works of authors like Ashapurna Devi and Jhumpa Lahiri and emphasizing the cultural and societal norms within their narratives. This research is centered on investigating four key areas: the sense of self and autonomy in motherhood, dynamics between mothers and daughters, the experience of motherhood within diaspora communities, and aspects of non-biological mothering. The objective is to grasp the literary implications of these themes and their role in reshaping the concept of motherhood from diverse viewpoints, thereby questioning established Western feminist narratives. The study highlights a multifaceted, nuanced, and varied array of notions about motherhood, deeply rooted in specific cultural settings while engaging with broader international discourses.

Similarly, Sugiyama’s (2000) investigation into the literary representations of motherhood by ethnic minority authors

in the U.S. sheds light on the postmodern creativity within these narratives. The study aims to provide an overview of the evolution of feminist motherhood theories and the importance of maternal discourse by women of color in understanding postmodernism and its realities. It concentrates on how authors like Toni Morrison, Leslie Marmon Silko, and Maxine Hong Kingston utilized themes of motherhood in their writings to mirror their own experiences and investigates how motherhood influences creativity and the dynamics of a mother's role as a writer and speaker. The study highlights the growth of feminist interest in mothers as subjects in the 1980s, exploring the representation of motherhood from a mother's perspective. Sugiyama concludes that postmodernism, as represented through maternal voices, does not necessarily become apolitical or nihilistic. Such texts, at their most insightful, may represent the world and people's subjectivity as fragmented and decentered, organizing it in a politically meaningful way (p. 71).

In the analysis of *The Joys of Motherhood* novel by Buchi Emecheta, Barfi et al. (2015) examine the manifestations of colonialism, capitalism, racism, and solidarity under the direction of Chandra Talpade Mohanty's postcolonial feminist theory. The study found that Emecheta's work intricately portrays the various dimensions of women's struggles in a postcolonial context, emphasizing the intersectionality of various forms of oppression, such as colonialism, capitalism, and patriarchy and forms of motherhood, and highlighting the importance of solidarity among women in these settings (p. 26).

Brooks' (2008) research on African American and Afro-Caribbean motherhood sheds light on how motherhood can be a form of resistance against patriarchal norms, while also indicating the need for more extensive exploration in a wider multi-ethnic setting. The research focuses on how these influences affect mothers' interactions with their children and how black motherhood serves as a site of resistance against patriarchy. The study analyzes works by Zora Neale Hurston and Toni Morrison to explore how black mothers resisted societal norms and patriarchal inheritance and to highlight the significance of maternal lineage and spiritual heritage in black communities, emphasizing how motherhood is used as a form of resistance in African American and Afro-Caribbean cultures. The research concludes that understanding the dynamics of black motherhood is crucial in appreciating the resilience and heterogeneity within these communities, especially in the face of societal and familial challenges posed by the legacy of slavery (Brooks, 2008, p. iii).

However, there is a notable gap in the comprehensive synthesis of these perspectives, particularly in the context of the transformation of motherhood constructs across different multi-ethnic narratives. This study aims to fill this gap by analyzing how modern multi-ethnic literature, such as Amy Tan's *The Joy Luck Club* presents a transformation of traditional motherhood representations. The main focus of this study is to conduct an integrated analysis of how maternal discourse has evolved in modern multi-ethnic female literature, which offers a broader perspective on motherhood across various racial, ethnic, and cultural contexts, and enhances feminist and postmodern literary studies by providing a diverse and thorough view of the development of motherhood in literature. On the other hand, multi-ethnic literature is more concerned with the plurality of stories and identities of ethnic minorities, while they are usually represented in a wider socio-political context, like the United States, without focusing on the specificity of the ethnic discourse. Therefore, this study's theoretical value mainly stems from its contribution to the feminist and the multi-ethnic literary fields by bridging a gap between the traditional feminist narratives predominantly focused on Western perspectives and the rich, varied experiences of motherhood in a specific ethnic space as depicted in the work of Amy Tan.

III. DISCUSSION

This study concentrates on how Amy Tan's *The Joy Luck Club* reimagines Chinese motherhood, taking into consideration ethnicity and culture in a postmodern context, and it also investigates the challenges that immigrant mothers encounter, such as feeling disconnected from their culture, striving to maintain their ethnic identity, and redefining their role as mothers. These challenges stem from the complex process of acculturation and the emotional upheaval of migrating from one's homeland to a new country. Chinese immigrant mothers, like other voluntarily immigrants, grapple with the loss of their familiar cultural contexts, which deeply affects their sense of identity and their role within the family and the broader community (Verbruggen, 2018). The postmodern condition of the novel appears in its rejection of singular truths about motherhood and its presenting of a pastiche of maternal experiences that resist homogenization. By employing a postmodern framework, the analysis highlights how Tan's work fragments and reconstructs the narrative of motherhood by applying a paradox to challenge traditional representations and invite multiple interpretations (Hutcheon, 2002).

Sugiyama (2000) defines postmodern motherhood as a complex interplay of various themes including ethnicity, culture, history, and the representation of these in late twentieth-century American literature (p. 71). Presenting a variety of maternal realities, though "overdetermined by cultural, historical, and political specificities" empowers a portray of the "fragmentation and decenteredness of today's society" (Sugiyama, 2000, p. 76). The maternal experience in postmodern theory supports this narrative of the decentered world. It recognizes the fluidity and evolving nature of motherhood, especially in multicultural contexts. Raith's (2008) study discusses the mother in postmodern theory by highlighting the complex and fluid nature of motherhood. It shows that motherhood involves navigating multiple, often contradictory identities, emphasizing the transition's individuality and diversity, which aligns with the postmodern view of motherhood as an evolving and multifaceted experience (p. ii). Amy Tan's *The Joy Luck Club* navigates through this multifaceted identity theme early in the novel when Suyuan Woo, one of the mother figures in the novel, plans to give her daughter, Jing-Mei (June) Woo, a swan's feather which stands as a symbol of transformation, fluidity, evolvment, and hope. It is

a metaphor for the mother's wish for her daughter to transcend cultural limitations and forge a new identity, one that blends her heritage as Asian with the opportunities of her new homeland as American. Sugiyama indicates that by employing maternal discourse, one may explore a variety of maternal experiences and subjectivities which are typical of mothers of racial minorities; by doing this, one may also represent a reality that is shared by the majority and may be conceived as "postmodern" (2000, p. 76).

It is, nevertheless, crucial to examine postmodern, Asian American, motherhood through the ethnically and culturally complicated and shifting parenting concept in Amy Tan's *The Joy Luck Club*. Amy Tan's narrative intricately weaves the personal histories and cultural backgrounds of its characters into the broader tapestry of their experiences as immigrants and as members of the diaspora. The ethnic and cultural identities of the characters are not merely backdrops but are pivotal to their life stories and the mother-daughter dynamics that shape the narrative. Furthermore, *The Joy Luck Club* portrays the complex interactions between the traditional values that the mothers bring from China and the new values their American-born daughters must navigate. These interactions often result in conflicts and reconciliations that are deeply influenced by the mothers' experiences of migration, racialization, and cultural assimilation. As Bhabha (1994) suggests in his discussion of cultural hybridity, the novel presents characters who live on the borders of two cultures, struggling to form identities that reconcile their heritage with their present realities.

On the other hand, the novel addresses the specific pressures and challenges faced by Asian American women which are not just personal or familial but are also shaped by broader social perceptions and stereotypes about race and ethnicity in America. Tan's detailed portrayal of these characters' lives offers insights into the nuanced ways in which race and culture intersect with gender and identity, influencing how these women perceive themselves and are perceived by others. The two conceptions of positionality and reflexivity that are adopted in transnational feminist theory can be utilized here to reflect on how these multi-ethnic mothers are in constant questioning of their cultural positions as formed by different forces of power and marginalization which renders them as carrying multiple social identities. Similarly, these women realized the limitations of their native ethnic identity as Chinese and started a negotiation and critical analysis of their traditions, values, and worldviews to reconstruct their relationships with their daughters.

With a focus on the evolution of motherhood in a multicultural American context, the story challenges traditional views of Chinese motherhood by deconstructing complex mother-daughter relationships and integrating postmodern frameworks. It redefines the mainstream views, whether Chinese or American, about motherhood and incorporates postmodernity to reveal the multiple layers of the parenting experience.

The novel includes sixteen interwoven stories in four sections with each section tells four separate narratives of four Chinese mothers; Suyuan Woo, An-Mei Hsu, Lindo Jong, and Ying-Ying St. Clair—and their daughters—Jing-Mei (June) Woo, Rose Hsu Jordan, Waverly Jong, and Lena St. Clair. These characters are central to understanding the transformation of motherhood constructs within the novel, as their stories bridge generations and cultures, revealing the mothers' pasts in China, their immigration to America, and the daughters' struggles with cultural identity and personal aspirations. While this study examines these women's maternal experiences, it focuses on the character of Suyuan Woo, June's mother, whose story permeates the narrative through her daughter's voice. Through her shared evocative dream as a Chinese immigrant mother to go back to China to find her daughters, whom she was forced to leave on the roadside during Japan's invasion of Kweilin during the second world war, Suyuan's story serves as a bridge between cultures and generations.

This detailed examination sets the stage for a nuanced exploration of the complex mother-daughter relationships and the broader implications of the immigrant experience and motherhood within multi-ethnic literature. The story of Suyuan Woo embodies the intersection of loss, memory, and cultural preservation within the narrative. As the founder of the titular *Joy Luck Club* in China and San Francisco, Suyuan serves as a critical bridge between past and present, illustrating the profound challenges of immigration and the struggle to maintain cultural identity in a foreign land. Her complex relationship with her daughter Jing-mei (June) Woo underscores the generational and cultural gaps that define and challenge mother-daughter dynamics in immigrant families, making her story a pivotal element for understanding the broader themes of cultural identity, belonging, and maternal legacy in the novel. Jing-mei's trip to China after her mother's death to meet her half-sisters, twins Chwun Yu and Chwun Hwa, starts a journey of discovery of oneself and one's culture. By delving into themes of identity, loss, and the enduring bond between mothers and daughters, Tan also highlights the power of storytelling as a means of understanding oneself and one's heritage.

A. Transformation of Established Motherhood Constructions

In Amy Tan's novel, the first four stories recall the mothers' relationships with their own mothers, while the second and the third parts of the novel present the daughters', Waverly, Jing-mei, Lena, and Rose, recollections of their childhood relationships with their mothers and their adulthood struggles. However, the last part of the stories recounts the mothers' struggle to provide their daughters with solutions and support in their lives while realizing the transformation in their motherhood priorities and their maternal identities. The traditional role of motherhood within Chinese culture is masterfully depicted through the character of An-mei Hsu, who reflects on her mother's life to illuminate the values of filial piety, family honor, and the transmission of cultural heritage. Through An-mei's narrative, Tan underscores the expectations placed on mothers to serve as moral and cultural custodians. These mothers are portrayed as pivotal in imparting lessons of strength, resilience, and the importance of heritage, ensuring the continuity of cultural identity and family legacy.

The profound bond between generations of women in the story is explored through crucial dialogue, such as when Auntie An-mei tells Jing-mei, "You must see your sisters and tell them about your mother's death," emphasizing the importance of conveying the stories of the past (Tan, 1989, p. 35). Auntie An-mei's exclamation, "How can you say? Your mother is in your bones!" highlights the intrinsic connection between mothers and daughters, suggesting that understanding a mother's life is essential to understanding one's own identity. This dialogue underscores the role of storytelling and memory in preserving familial bonds and cultural heritage as constructed in traditional Chinese motherhood.

Furthermore, Tan delves into the nuances of maternal guidance and the transmission of cultural values amidst the challenges of assimilation. For example, Lindo's reflection that her daughter "wanted to go to China for her second honeymoon but now she is afraid... Only her skin and her hair are Chinese. Inside—she is all American-made" captures the complex roles of mothers as cultural bearers and educators (Tan, 1989, p. 219). This internal conflict between nurturing a daughter's Chinese heritage and accepting the realities of identity transformation in a new country illustrates the generational and cultural gaps that challenge mother-daughter relationships throughout the novel, emphasizing the delicate balance between preserving cultural values and adapting to new environments.

An-mei's journey, however, and the stories she shares serve as a testament to the sacrificial nature of motherhood as traditionally established, showcasing the depth of love, duty, and sacrifice that mothers endure to uphold these values. One poignant instance is when An-mei discusses the importance of listening to one's mother to understand deeper truths about life and heritage, "In truth this was a bad thing that Yan Chang had done telling me my mother's story. Secrets are kept from children a lid on top of the soup kettle so they do not boil over with too much truth. After Yan Chang told me this story, I saw everything. I heard things I had" (Tan, 1989, p. 204). An-mei Hsu's story exemplifies the profound impact of maternal legacies on identity formation. As a member of the Joy Luck Club, a gathering of Chinese immigrant women, An-mei learns about her mother through Yan Chang, her mother's devoted servant. This revelation acts as both an enlightenment and a burden, shedding light on the secretive and protective nature of motherhood. An-mei describes this secrecy as a "lid on top of the soup kettle" (Tan, 1989, p. 204) a metaphor for the way mothers shield their children from harsh truths to protect them. However, once An-mei uncovers these hidden truths about her mother's challenges and sacrifices, she experiences a significant shift in perception, leading to a deeper understanding of her own heritage. This narrative moment underscores the role of mothers as bearers of wisdom and resilience, emphasizing how the experiences and stories passed from mothers to daughters are vital in shaping their identities and understanding of their cultural and familial backgrounds.

On the other hand, An-mei's relationship with her daughter, Rose, vividly encapsulates the generational and cultural conflicts typical in immigrant families, highlighting the tension between traditional Chinese maternal roles and the values embraced by American-raised daughters. These daughters, influenced by a culture that champions freedom and individualism, frequently clash with their mothers' expectations and teachings, which emphasize the importance of listening and understanding deeper truths about life and heritage. An-mei's narrative stresses the importance of preserving cultural identity while navigating new societal norms. Through her actions and wisdom, An-mei teaches resilience and the importance of learning from hardships. This is highlighted in a poignant moment when she recounted how her mother taught her a lesson about truth using the necklace of fake pearls that An-mei received as a present from the second wife of her mother's husband. After revealing the fakeness of the pearls by crushing one under her foot, her mother let her wear them for a week to understand the ease of succumbing to falsehoods, after which An-mei's mother presents her with a real heavy ring of watery blue sapphire asking, "Now can you recognize what is true?" to which her daughter nods affirmatively (Tan, 1989, p. 199). This interaction underscores the complex interplay of maintaining one's cultural roots while adapting to and integrating new cultural realities.

The story of the artificial pearls is imbued with life lessons of skepticism and critical thinking that are essential for An-mei, and her daughter afterwards, as they grow within the dual contexts of their Chinese heritage and American environment. This metaphor beautifully encloses the novel's broader themes of identity, heritage, and the maternal transmission of wisdom across generations, highlighting Amy Tan's exploration of the intricate dynamics of mother-daughter relationships within the Chinese American cultural framework. Acts of maternal guidance throughout the novel are emblematic of the complexities of mother-daughter relationships as explored through layers of cultural and personal history. An-mei's lessons transcend the immediate context, delving into the essential process of discerning truth in a world filled with illusions. Her method of imparting wisdom reflects a fundamental aspect of the mother figure in the novel; the role of mothers in guiding their daughters through the intricacies of life, armed with the resilience borne of their own experiences.

In addition to the maternal guidance and transmission of wisdom, An-mei Hsu's story poignantly illustrates the profound impact of maternal sacrifice on daughters' lives. Her mother's decision to leave her so she could have a better future encapsulates the deep expressions of love and sacrifice that permeate the novel. This event not only underscores the complexities of mother-daughter relationships but also highlights the importance of holding onto one's roots and the resilience needed to navigate life's challenges. Through these teachings, An-mei learns to value her heritage and identity, which are critical in her quest for authenticity in a multifaceted world. The mother-daughter bond in her story reveals that understanding one's maternal lineage is key to discovering one's true nature as narrated by An-mei herself:

Here is how I came to love my mother. How I saw in her my own true nature. What was beneath my skin. Inside

my bones... Even though I was young, I could see the pain of the flesh and the worth of the pain. This is how a daughter honors her mother. It is so deep it is in your bones. The pain of the flesh is nothing. The pain you must forget. Because sometimes that is the only way to remember what is in your bones. You must peel off your skin, and that of your mother, and her mother before her. Until there is nothing. No scar, no skin, no flesh. (Tan, 1989, p. 42)

This quote illustrates the deep, emotional layers of the mother-daughter relationship, showing how a mother's sacrifices become a part of her daughter's identity. An-mei's reflection on her mother's pain and sacrifice not only fosters a deeper love and understanding for her mother but also aids in her self-discovery and self-acceptance, illustrating the complex interplay between individual identity and familial legacy; a process of reflexivity as discussed in transnational feminist theory. She emphasizes the importance of embracing one's heritage and identity to foster personal growth and resilience. Through her mother's stories, An-mei learns the significance of maintaining a connection to one's roots and the potential it holds for guiding future generations. This reflexivity anticipates the mother-daughter reconciliation later in the novel.

It is clear, thus, how Amy Tan challenges the conventional view of motherhood through the diverse experiences of the mothers in *The Joy Luck Club*, showing them as multifaceted individuals who navigate the dual responsibilities of cultural preservation and personal fulfillment. The narratives of Lindo Jong, Suyuan Woo, and An-mei Hsu reveal mothers who are caretakers, educators, and resilient survivors, embodying the complexities of identity formation in the context of immigration. The traditional role of motherhood in the Chinese culture is challenged by these women's diverse life experiences and by their American daughters, which negate any homogeneity of maternal discourse in the multi-ethnic context. The transformation of motherhood is a central theme in the novel, reflecting changes not only from one generation to the next but also within the lives of the mothers themselves. This transformation can be seen in how the mothers' identities and priorities shift in response to their immigration to America, their encounters with American culture, and their relationships with their daughters. The mothers change as they navigate the challenges of raising children in a culture different from their own, learning to bridge the gap between their heritage and the new world in which they find themselves. As the mothers adapt, they also confront and often revise their own positionality and assumptions about what it means to be a mother and how to balance the demands of work, family, and self.

This evolution is mirrored in their daughters, who, through understanding their mothers' stories, begin to see them in a new light—not just as parents but as individuals with their own dreams, fears, mistakes, and histories. A reflexive critical analysis of one's locations to observe whether they might shape one's views of others (Enns et al., 2021). It is depicted in Jing-mei's reflection on her troubled relationship with her mother which not only showcases the tension between cultural expectations and individual identity but also the struggle for autonomy within the mother-daughter relationship. This is exemplified in a moment of defiance where the narrator rejects her mother's traditional expectations, stating, "I wasn't her slave. This wasn't China. I had listened to her before and look what happened. She was the stupid one" (Tan, 1989, p. 122). This pivotal moment signifies the daughter's attempt to assert her independence, highlighting the generational and cultural clash often experienced by children of immigrants as they navigate their dual identities, striving to honor their heritage while seeking their own path. However, Jing-mei (June) later narrates how she reached an understanding of her mother's thoughts as she is turning thirty-six, only after the mother's death:

Five months ago, after a crab dinner celebrating Chinese New Year, my mother gave me my "life's importance," a jade pendant on a gold chain. The pendant was not a piece of jewelry I would have chosen for myself... I stuffed the necklace in my lacquer box and forgot about it. But these days, I think about my life's importance. I wonder what it means, because my mother died three months ago, six days before my thirty-sixth birthday. And she's the only person I could have asked, to tell me about life's importance, to help me understand my grief. (Tan, 1989, p. 171)

This quote touches upon the transformative journey of motherhood, reflecting on the gifts and lessons passed from mother to daughter. It suggests the enduring influence of maternal wisdom even after a mother's death, and the daughter's evolving understanding and appreciation of her mother's teachings and values as she navigates her own grief and questions of identity. Such reflections encapsulate the rich, complex portrayal of motherhood in the novel exploring the themes of cultural identity, the multifaceted roles of mothers, and the transformative impact of maternal relationships across generations.

The novel frames mothers in a way that highlights the complexity of their roles, challenging stereotypes about motherhood and ethnicity. It shows that motherhood is not a static identity but one that evolves over time and through the interplay of cultural, personal, and generational forces. While it remains consistent yet it changes across different generations and cultures. The complex relationship between the mothers and their identities evolves as they face new challenges and environments. This theme reflects the deep connection and varying experiences between mothers and their children, weaving through past and present, and blending traditional values with new perspectives. The novel intricately delineates motherhood as an entity deeply anchored in cultural expectations and personal sacrifices, yet remarkably fluid, adapting as mothers and daughters chart their paths through the dual challenges of immigration and cultural assimilation.

The focus on mother-daughter relationships in *The Joy Luck Club*, rather than mother-son dynamics, is a deliberate choice by Amy Tan to explore the subtle differences of female identity, intergenerational cultural transmission, and the complexities of navigating dual cultures for women. This thematic emphasis allows for an in-depth examination of the unique pressures, expectations, and roles that women face within both their families and societies. By centering on the

experiences of mothers and daughters, Tan highlights how these relationships serve as pivotal sites for the negotiation of identity, tradition, and change across generations, particularly in the context of immigration and cultural assimilation. The novel challenges traditional, idealized images of motherhood by exploring its emotional and psychological complexities, focusing on the sacrifices, resilience, and strength required from mothers. This portrayal goes beyond the archetype of maternal idealism to showcase a multifaceted view of motherhood, acknowledging the depth of maternal challenges to balance personal and cultural identities. Through this nuanced exploration, the narrative redefines the essence of motherhood, highlighting the adaptability and profound influence of mothers within the complexities of cultural expectations. Williams (1999) highlights how An-mei's mother embodies both sacrifice and the complex legacy of maternal expectations, suggesting that these idealized attributes often lead to personal sacrifice and emotional complexity in the lives of mothers (p. 78). The novel shows mothers' sorrow and self-reproach when they fall short of this lofty ideal motherhood that is constructed by their culture. Society's valuing of motherhood, which frequently only considers spiritual and moral values, ignores the tremendous range and complexity of maternal experiences.

Simultaneously, Amy Tan's novel presents a questioning of a fixed image of motherhood deeply entrenched in traditional Chinese culture, which lauds self-sacrifice, resilience, and the stoic endurance of adversity for the family's sake, particularly the children. This examination is vividly portrayed in the narratives of the mothers of the novel who have weathered profound losses and sacrifices, both in China and as immigrants in America. Their stories, steeped in resilience against hardship, echo the traditional values that control the maternal role and emphasize the welfare of children over mothers' needs. However, as the novel unfolds, it also charts the evolving nature of maternal identity, as these women adapt to new cultural environments and engage with their American-born daughters' shifting ambitions. This evolving portrayal is illuminated in the mothers' endeavors to bridge the cultural chasm with their daughters, often misunderstood due to generational and cultural divides, and in the gradual reconciliation of mothers to their daughters' American values and identities. For example, Jing-mei (June) Woo's assumption of her late mother Suyuan Woo's role within the titular group deepens the exploration of their complex relationship, particularly highlighting Suyuan's influence as a mother. Suyuan's resilience and her decision to start the Joy Luck Club in San Francisco were driven by a desire to preserve her Chinese heritage while adapting to her new American life. This decision, coupled with her painful history of having to leave her twin daughters behind in China, shapes June's perception of motherhood and her understanding of her own mother's sacrifices. These experiences reveal the deep emotional and cultural conflicts that immigrant mothers face, balancing the preservation of their original culture with the need to adapt to a new one.

This narrative shift not only underscores the transformation in June's perception of her mother but also prompts her to reflect on her own potential maternal role. The relationship between Suyuan and her daughters, and the legacy of her choices, offer a poignant commentary on how the maternal experience is influenced by historical and cultural pressures. Tan is far away from presenting an ideal mother figure as constituted in the Chinese cultural doctrines. Instead, her mother figures are burdened with past mistakes and life lessons that shape their maternal relationships with their daughters and their eventual self-acceptance. The reconciliation between June and her mother symbolizes a healing of generational and cultural divides, illustrating a merger of tradition and modernity. June's deeper understanding of Suyuan's choices provides insights into how these maternal legacies impact daughter's perceptions of motherhood, potentially shaping how she might approach her relationship with her own children in the future. This evolution of maternal perception is crucial as it highlights how mothers and daughters navigate their identities through a blend of cultural values, mutual respect, and open dialogue.

In *The Joy Luck Club*, the transformation of the characters' maternal identities is explored through their re-examination of their inherited Chinese cultural identity and past experiences in China, and their reconceptualization of their motherhood as they reconcile with their Americanized daughters. This is particularly evident in the segments titled "Double Face" and "A Pair of Tickets" in the novel. In "Double Face," Lindo Jong reflects on the challenges of retaining her Chinese identity while adapting to American life. She describes the difficulty of keeping her "Chinese face" in America, noting that even before arriving, she had to conceal her true self and adopt American ways to fit in. Lindo's story captures the tension between maintaining one's heritage and assimilating into a new culture. She recounts how, despite her efforts to appear more American, she was still recognized as an outsider. Lindo's internal struggle with her dual identity emphasizes the complexities of navigating between two cultures and the fear of losing one's roots in the process.

In "A Pair of Tickets," Jing-mei Woo experiences a profound shift in her perception of her Chinese heritage during a trip to China. Initially, she believes she has little connection to her Chinese roots, influenced by her upbringing in America. However, as she crosses the border into China, Jing-mei feels a visceral change and begins to recognize the Chinese part of herself awakening. This story segment highlights the theme of ethnic and cultural identity being more than just external appearances or behaviors; it is deeply ingrained and can emerge in significant moments. Jing-mei's journey to China serves as a catalyst for her to embrace her Chinese heritage, illustrating the idea that one's racial identity can evolve and become more meaningful through personal experiences and connections. Both stories illustrate how the American experience impacts the characters' Chinese ethnic identity. Through Lindo Jong and Jing-mei Woo, Amy Tan explores the nuances of identity formation in the context of immigration, cultural assimilation, and the search for self-understanding within the tapestry of one's heritage.

B. A Postmodernist Perspective on Motherhood

Amy Tan's *The Joy Luck Club* presents a nuanced exploration of motherhood, underscored by the complexities of cultural transition. It delves into the intertwining lives of Chinese immigrant mothers and their American-born daughters, highlighting their aspirations, adversities, and transformative journeys. Through a short anecdote at the beginning of the novel of a Chinese woman traveling to America, titled "Feathers From a Thousand LI Away," Tan delves into the specific aspirations that this woman harbors for her future daughter—a life unfettered by the traditional Chinese standards that once constrained her own existence:

In America I will have a daughter just like me. But over there nobody will say her worth is measured by the loudness of her husband's belch. Over there nobody will look down on her because I will make her speak only perfect American English. And over there she will always be too full to swallow any sorrow! She will know my meaning because I will give her this swan—a creature that became more than what was hoped for. (Tan, 1989, p. 15)

This woman comes to represent the mothers in the novel itself as they aspire to a different life for their daughters in America. As shown in the above quote, the metaphor of the loudness of her husband's belch serves as a poignant critique of the subordinate role of women in her native culture, encapsulating the oppressive societal norms she wishes her daughter to transcend in the United States. As the woman dreams of her daughter's life in America, she imagines a realm of possibilities where her child is judged not by antiquated conventions but by her own merits, including the mastery of perfect American English; a symbol of assimilation and individual success. This ambition reflects the mother's broader hope for her daughter to avoid the sorrows and hardships of her own life, aiming instead for a new space filled with freedom and self-determination. The narrative further enriches this theme through the symbol of the swan, emblematic of transformation and hope, which the mother plans to give her daughter. Yet, upon their arrival in America, the swan is confiscated by immigration officials, leaving her with only a feather and a diminished memory of her original dreams and intentions. This poignant moment underscores the fragile nature of aspirations in the face of harsh realities, yet the feather remains a token of enduring hope and the complex, often painful process of cultural preservation and identity formation in a new land.

Through the evolving mother-daughter dynamics, Tan captures the nuanced ways in which generational and cultural gaps manifest, challenging the simplistic notion of cultural assimilation and traditional motherhood. In essence, *The Joy Luck Club* serves as a poignant illustration of the transformation of traditional motherhood constructions within multi-ethnic women's literature, particularly when viewed through the prism of the mother in postmodern theory. This transformation is evident in the narrative's departure from conventional portrayals of motherhood that often confine women to subordinate roles within their cultural and familial hierarchies. In contrast, as in the introductory anecdote, Tan's narrative foregrounds the mother's aspirations for her daughter's autonomy and success in the United States, free from the restrictive societal norms of her native culture. This desire for her daughter to speak "only perfect American English" and to be "too full to swallow any sorrow" symbolizes a break from the past and a reimagining of motherhood that values individuality, self-expression, and resilience against cultural and linguistic assimilation pressures. The mother in postmodern theory challenges the homogeneity of traditional motherhood narratives by highlighting the diverse, complex, and often contradictory experiences of mothers, particularly those from multi-ethnic backgrounds. It argues that motherhood cannot be understood through a single lens but rather requires consideration of the varied contexts, identities, and discourses that shape it. In this light, the narrative reflects postmodernism's emphasis on heterogeneity and the rejection of universal truths, showcasing how immigrant mothers navigate the dual challenges of preserving their cultural heritage while adapting to new societal expectations in America.

The symbol of the swan, which the mother intends to give to her daughter as a representation of hope and transformation, further underscores the novel's alignment with postmodern themes. The swan's journey from being more than what was hoped for to being reduced to a mere feather by immigration authorities reflects the complex realities of immigration, identity, and the intergenerational transmission of cultural values. This metaphorical representation of the swan captures the essence of postmodern motherhood which involves the acknowledgment of loss, change, and the ongoing negotiation of maternal identity in a multicultural context. In his analysis of motherhood in multi-ethnic women's literature, Graves (2017) highlights the nuanced and evolving representations of motherhood and offers a rich understanding of the transformations and challenges experienced by women navigating issues of citizenship, affective bonds, and societal expectations (p. 16). Postmodern theory challenges traditional narratives and societal expectations of motherhood, emphasizing diverse experiences and subjective interpretations rather than a monolithic view.

However, the loss of the swan upon arrival in America, leaving the mother with just a feather, introduces a poignant twist. It reflects the harsh reality of immigrant experiences where dreams and expectations confront the complexities of assimilation and cultural dislocation. This aspect of the narrative aligns with the mother in postmodern theory by illustrating the unpredictable and multifaceted nature of motherhood in a transnational context. The mother's journey and aspirations for her daughter thus become a microcosm of the broader experiences of many immigrant mothers, highlighting the evolving and transformative nature of motherhood across different cultural landscapes. This critical examination demonstrates a deep understanding of how traditional motherhood roles are challenged and redefined in the context of multicultural and immigrant experiences. Tummala-Narra (2004) discusses the struggle immigrant women confront in maintaining their cultural heritage while adjusting to new society standards, notably with their children's choices and independence. She argues, "In grappling with these contradictions, immigrant mothers are in a position of

both reproducing their connection to their cultures of origin and redefining their roles in the family system and their formulations of their social contexts, all of which have significant influence in the lives of their children” (p. 175).

In Tan’s novel, Jing-mei’s recollection of her mother initiating the San Francisco version of the Joy Luck Club in 1949 captures the abrupt and challenging transition Woo’s parents faced when they emigrated from China to the United States, carrying with them only the most essential of belongings. The family’s migration, marked by the mother’s decision to bring solely silk dresses, illustrates a profound transformation in the narrative of motherhood. Here, traditional roles and cultural identities are redefined within a new environment. Jing-mei’s reminiscence emphasizes not just the physical journey of immigration but also the metaphorical journey of maternal figures in multi-ethnic contexts. These mothers adapt to new cultural landscapes while preserving elements of their heritage, thereby reshaping the concept of motherhood across cultural divides.

In another vein, the novel highlights the theme of sacrifice in the immigrant experience, particularly from a postmodern perspective on motherhood. The maternal figure’s sacrifice extends beyond the physical loss of home and belongings, delving into emotional and psychological dimensions. The choice to bring only silk dresses, rather than more practical items, underscores a strong emotional connection to cultural identity, which immigrant mothers strive to preserve and transmit to their offspring. This aspect illustrates the evolution of motherhood in multi-ethnic literature. The narrative provides a nuanced understanding of how sacrificial the maternal journey is, especially within the context of immigration and cultural integration. This observation is consistent with Tyldum’s (2015) research, which often depicts female migrants primarily as mothers, emphasizing narratives of sacrifice and somewhat diminishing the perspective of female migration as a pursuit for personal betterment (p. 51). The balance between cultural preservation and assimilation is a central theme in postmodern discourse on identity, and the choice to bring only silk garments from China is a potent metaphor of the emotional and cultural burdens that immigrant mothers carry. This imagery illustrates the postmodern concept of identity as constructed and fluid, shaped by both past influences and present realities.

Postmodern motherhood theory, as outlined by Taylor (2017), offers a framework for understanding this complex interplay of identity, culture, and motherhood. It emphasizes the dynamic process of negotiation that immigrant mothers undergo as they reconcile their cultural heritage with their new lives in America (Taylor, 2017, p. 110). This theory suggests that motherhood can be seen as a site of cultural conflict and negotiation, where traditional roles and expectations are continuously redefined in response to changing socio-cultural landscapes. Thus, the experiences of Suyuan and other mothers in *The Joy Luck Club* reflect postmodern themes of fragmentation and hybridity, highlighting their capacity to adapt and transform in response to their transnational experiences. Belford and Lahiri-Roy (2018) underscore the intricate process of redefining identity and managing emotional challenges that immigrant mothers often face, marked by a blend of privilege and disempowerment, as they navigate their roles within new cultural contexts (p. 25). Tan’s work provides a profound exploration of the transformation of traditional motherhood roles, resonating deeply with the themes of cultural dislocation and identity redefinition in a new, often challenging, environment.

On another vein, the narrative insightfully reveals that Suyuan Woo, the mother of Jing-mei (June) Woo, shares a deeply evocative and symbolic dream about her homeland, Kweilin. This dream transcends mere personal longing and memory, capturing broader themes of hope, disillusionment, and the dislocated immigrant experience. It symbolizes postmodern parenting theory with its contradictions, combining elements of power, tenacity, and flexibility. This idea highlights motherhood’s diversity and evolution, especially in shifting cultural and socioeconomic contexts. Suyuan’s narrative, and her dream of Kweilin, exemplify the redefined contradictory roles and shifting identities of mothers in multi-ethnic narratives. The dream’s portrayal as both nostalgic and traumatizing aligns with postmodern motherhood theory highlighted by Bueskens (2018) that acknowledges the complexities and challenges of motherhood in contemporary western societies (p. 16). Bueskens’ study discusses modern mothers’ duality and contradiction that resist any classification of the maternal experience within universalized conceptions of motherhood. Within this context, Veazey (2019) also states that immigrant mothers navigate liminal spaces, where their identities and roles are in flux amidst sociocultural and historical contexts of migration and adaptation. “Both migration and motherhood rupture women’s established social networks at the precise time their need for support, advice, information, empathy, and companionship increases” (p. 153). This dual rupture is symbolized in Suyuan’s dream of Kweilin as both sentimental and traumatizing, reflecting on a sweet homeland and warning of a difficult immigrant experience. Veazey’s insight connects the personal and collective experiences of immigrant mothers to the challenges they face in multicultural environments, emphasizing the importance of social connectedness for their experiences of motherhood. The trauma, thus, as reflected in Suyuan’s dream, is not just personal but is embedded within the broader social, cultural, and political contexts of immigration and dislocation.

Motherhood in multi-ethnic women’s literature is portrayed as a transformative force that extends beyond traditional roles, embodying resilience, creativity, and communal empowerment. Through the lens of characters like Suyuan Woo in *The Joy Luck Club*, motherhood evolves from a personal experience into a collective identity that enables women to navigate and transcend oppressive conditions. In *The Joy Luck Club*, the collective strength of motherhood is emblematically represented through the communal gatherings of the women in the club. These meetings are not only a space for sharing personal narratives but also a platform for mutual support and the intergenerational transmission of knowledge and experience. The club acts as a microcosm of a broader societal framework, where the personal tribulations and triumphs of motherhood transcend individual experiences to reflect universal themes of hope, survival, and

empowerment amidst adversity. This transformation is depicted as a shift from the “old” view of motherhood as a limiting, individual role to a “new” perspective that highlights its potential for fostering endurance and empowerment in adverse situations. In his analysis of the mother in postmodern theory, Majdi (2023) outlines the evolution of feminist theories of motherhood, showing how the maternal discourse of the women of color can be pivotal in examining both postmodern realities and theories of postmodernism. In this study, the postmodern realities of motherhood acknowledge the complexities and challenges of the maternal experience in multicultural contexts by recognizing its fluidity and evolving nature.

IV. CONCLUSION

The Joy Luck Club by Amy Tan presents motherhood as transformative in both personal and societal dimensions, challenging women to navigate the tension between societal myths of the self-sacrificing, ever-giving mother and their own diverse experiences. The transformation involves a shift from the “old” idealized views that restrict women’s identities within narrow confines of selflessness, to a “new” understanding that embraces the complexity, ambivalence, and richness of motherhood as lived experience. This process is not merely about adopting a new role but entails a profound reconfiguration of identity, culture, and ethnic perspectives. Despite societal pressures to conform to dominant ideologies, the journey of motherhood has the potential to subvert traditional narratives, advocating for a broader recognition of motherhood’s multifaceted nature. It underscores the need for societal acceptance of the diverse realities of motherhood, allowing women’s personal stories to challenge and transform entrenched views, and fostering a more inclusive and realistic appreciation of what it means to be a mother.

This study adopts the postmodernist lens to examine the Chinese-American maternal experience in Amy Tan’s work, and it is clear that multi-ethnic women writers add transformative narratives that would fit into postmodern literature. Sugiyama (2000) indicates that “fictional works by women of color and especially their fictional representation of motherhood can even be viewed as the most ambitious and representative examples of postmodern American literature in the last two decades” (p. 71). This quote suggests that multi-ethnic women’s literature, especially its portrayal of motherhood, is a significant and ambitious representation of postmodern American literature. It emphasizes the importance of including the perspectives of women of color in the literary canon, highlighting their unique contribution to the broader understanding of postmodern themes.

Through the postmodern theory of motherhood, this study argues that Tan’s work presents a postmodernist condition in the complex maternal identities and experiences of the Chinese-American mothers that are impacted by cultural, historical, and personal variables. The novel illustrates that parenthood is dynamic and evolving from Chinese-American viewpoints. It depicts postmodern parenting as diverse and contextual, shaped by society, history, and personal experience. The transformation of established motherhood constructions within multi-ethnic women’s literature is depicted through the shifting narratives that explore the depths of maternal diversity and its impact on the mother-daughter relationship within Chinese-American contexts.

One major aspect of motherhood’s complexity that this current study explores is the rejection of idealistic clichés about motherhood through the mothers’ introspective self-examination and confession of their terrible backgrounds which highlight generational and societal differences between them and their daughters. This juxtaposition highlights the transnational feminist dichotomy of positionality and reflexivity in which women whether mothers or daughters undergo a process of examining one’s position amidst multiple forces to be able to understand one’s self and reflect on the worldviews of others. The Chinese-American mothers and daughters in Tan’s novel are heterogeneous through their intercultural differences, and Amy Tan skillfully unveils the complex dynamics of intercultural motherhood practices within the Chinese-American community, particularly focusing on the nuanced subjective experiences of the narrating women. In postmodern literature, the positionality of the mother figure is fluid and multidimensional, formed by memory, loss, and reconciliation and this approach humanizes the mother figure as a multifaceted character with diverse emotions. Hence, the themes of motherhood, identity, and cultural transition in *The Joy Luck Club* offer a nuanced exploration of the multifaceted experiences of Chinese-American mothers. By examining motherhood through the lenses of postmodern literature, transnational feminism, and multi-ethnic dynamics, the novel highlights the intricate interplay between personal, familial, and cultural narratives.

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Preserving Local Languages Through Communication Media: The Role of Acehnese Oral Literature in Eastern Coastal Aceh

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Abstract—Acehnese oral literature is a cultural heritage that encompasses folklore, hikayat, poetry, as well as historical, ethical, and cultural values passed down through generations. However, the rise of digital technology and shifting lifestyles among the younger generation in eastern coastal Aceh have led to the marginalization of oral traditions and local languages. This study explores the role of oral literature as a form of communication media in the effort to preserve the Acehnese local language. Using a qualitative approach, the research identifies various forms of oral literature utilized by community leaders and cultural figures to convey messages and assesses their effectiveness in engaging the younger generation. The findings indicate that oral literature serves not only to promote cultural awareness but also to maintain the vitality of local languages through contextually relevant and culturally grounded channels. This practice demonstrates adaptability to modern times and facilitates the connection between local cultural identity and contemporary communication needs. The integration of cultural and linguistic values within a single narrative framework allows for the revitalization of local languages in harmony with the preservation of regional identity. This research affirms the significance of sustaining oral traditions through communication media as a strategic means of safeguarding local identity in the face of globalization.

Index Terms—Acehnese oral literature, communication media, local language, coastal Aceh, cultural preservation

I. INTRODUCTION

Oral literature is an intangible cultural heritage that has grown and evolved within the living spaces of traditional

societies. It functions not merely as entertainment but as a medium of social communication, moral education, and a repository of collective memory passed down across generations (Desfianti & Hudaidah, 2025). In Aceh, forms of oral literature such as *hikayat*, folktales, rhymes, and traditional poetry serve as vital instruments for preserving deeply rooted cultural values within the community. These narratives are rich in historical, ethical, and aesthetic meaning, and are intricately tied to the expression of the Acehnese language. The use of local language within such narratives positions oral literature not only as a reflection of cultural identity but also as a functional and contextual mechanism for language preservation. Consequently, oral literature holds a strategic function that must be protected amidst the complex pressures of social transformation.

Over the past two decades, Acehnese oral literature has faced an increasingly evident existential crisis. The waves of globalization and modernization have triggered substantial changes in patterns of communication, knowledge distribution, and cultural consumption. Younger generations, raised in the digital era, are more exposed to global content mostly in Indonesian or foreign languages through social media and entertainment platforms. Global popular culture, with its widespread reach, has gradually displaced local narratives as a source of knowledge, values, and entertainment (Rizqiya, 2024). As a result, oral literature has begun to lose its relevance as a source of value-based education and collective identity. This phenomenon highlights a growing generational disconnect in appreciating and continuing oral traditions. In fact, similar trends have been observed across other regions, such as in the weakening of traditional storytelling as a community-based tourism asset in Kedang Ipil, where modernization has overshadowed oral practices that once formed the identity of the village (Indriani et al., 2022).

The Acehnese language, as the primary medium of oral literature, has also been significantly affected. The decreasing use of the Acehnese language in daily conversations, public forums, and mainstream media has weakened intergenerational transmission of cultural knowledge. This trend not only threatens the survival of oral literature as a cultural expression but also accelerates the erosion of the local language as a core marker of Acehnese identity (Permata Sari et al., 2025). If left unaddressed, this situation could lead to the disappearance of the Acehnese language from the lived experience of the community. The loss of language correlates directly with the fading of the values, norms, and historical consciousness embedded within it. Therefore, the preservation of oral literature must become an integral component of broader efforts to sustain the Acehnese language. In this context, the efforts of Acehnese religious scholars to convey Islamic values through *hikayat* such as *Prang Sabi* reflect how oral literature has historically served as a medium for the internalization of spiritual and cultural norms (Hariad et al., 2025).

One strategic approach to preserving oral literature lies in the use of communication media. Broadly defined, media includes traditional channels such as community radio and public cultural forums, as well as digital platforms like YouTube, podcasts, and locally-based social media. The potential of media as a tool for reproduction and dissemination stems from its ability to reach diverse audiences across age groups. Oral narratives presented in audiovisual formats, digital recordings, or online storytelling content can enhance accessibility and appeal. Media can provide a more dynamic representation of oral traditions without sacrificing their cultural essence. This creates strategic opportunities to revitalize traditional forms in ways that resonate with digitally native audiences. As Pulungan (2024) emphasizes, the integration of traditional narratives with modern digital platforms can serve as a powerful instrument for religious and cultural diplomacy in a plural society.

The eastern coastal offers a rich sociocultural context for examining media-based oral literature preservation practices. Communities in these areas maintain enduring religious and customary traditions that are closely tied to local language use. In East Aceh, for example, the *dayah* (Islamic boarding schools) and *meunasah* (village prayer halls) serve as hubs of intergenerational interaction. In social events such as religious gatherings, communal feasts, and Islamic celebrations, the Acehnese language remains the primary mode of communication. These practices indicate that oral tradition is not confined to the private domain but continues to shape the public sphere. Such dynamics open up pathways for media to reinforce the cultural functions of local language. Certain districts, such as Idi Rayeuk, Julok, and Peureulak, are well known for their efforts to preserve *hikayat*, traditional poems, and folktales. Activities such as oral storytelling and poetic performances still take place during customary and religious events. However, the forms of delivery are beginning to transform through audiovisual documentation and community radio broadcasts. These efforts pave the way for the revitalization of oral literature in more communicative formats that are readily accepted by younger generations. Media thus functions as a crucial bridge between the older generation, who are custodians of tradition, and the youth, who are its inheritors. In this way, communication media becomes a vital platform for sustaining the vitality of the local language. From a broader Islamic communication perspective, as Hefni (2015) asserts, media can function as a contemporary channel for da'wah that adapts to the changing cultural and technological landscapes.

Unfortunately, the relationship between oral literature, communication media, and language preservation has rarely been the subject of integrated scholarly inquiry. Previous studies tend to focus on the aesthetic, linguistic, or historical aspects of oral literature (Yulsafli & Erfinawati, 2022), while media studies often emphasize technological transformation and patterns of information consumption. Yet, the integration of both fields holds great promise for developing preservation strategies that are adaptive to the realities of contemporary cultural ecosystems. In a multicultural society like Aceh, media can act as a new cultural space where oral traditions are revitalized and transmitted more broadly. This research seeks to address this gap by bridging the fields of cultural literature and

communication. This study aims to examine how the existence of Acehese oral literature can be strengthened through the use of communication media as a strategy for preserving local language. The primary focus is directed toward the eastern coastal areas of Aceh, which have historically maintained a close relationship with oral traditions. The study will identify existing forms of oral literature, the communication channels through which they are disseminated, and the public's perceptions of the media's effectiveness in sustaining local language awareness. It will also investigate the extent to which digital media can serve as a participatory space for younger generations. The research hopes to offer a comprehensive view of the dynamics involved in local language preservation.

Employing a qualitative approach, this study seeks not only to describe the phenomenon but also to analyze the sociocultural dynamics that influence the success or limitations of preservation through media. It will explore the experiences of community members, cultural practitioners, and local media producers as primary data sources. Oral literature will be positioned as a living cultural content that evolves in tandem with societal change. The findings of this study are expected to contribute to the development of more inclusive and contextually relevant preservation strategies. Ultimately, this will support the continued vitality and transmission of oral literature to future generations. The primary contribution of this research lies in the integration of three key elements: oral literature as dynamic cultural heritage, communication media as a means of cultural transformation, and local language as an identity that must be preserved. Amid the tide of global cultural homogenization and linguistic dominance, media-based strategies rooted in local cultural practices become not only a viable option but a necessary imperative. This also affirms that cultural preservation is not merely a normative discourse but a practical effort that requires innovation and intergenerational collaboration. In this way, the richness of Indonesia's cultural diversity can be more vibrantly sustained. This research aspires to enrich academic literature and offer practical insights for cultural preservation advocates.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

A. *Acehnese Oral Literature as Cultural Heritage and Collective Identity*

Acehnese oral literature is a collective cultural expression that originates and thrives in traditional societies, especially in rural and eastern coastal communities of Aceh (Yulsaflī et al., 2018). Its diverse forms *pantun*, *hikayat*, *dendang*, *syair*, and folklore are passed down intergenerationally through oral tradition. In these practices, the local language serves not merely as a linguistic medium but as a cultural vessel carrying stories, advice, and values. Oral literature in Aceh thus functions not only as entertainment but as a means of preserving ethical norms and transmitting local wisdom (Yulsaflī & Erfinawati, 2022). Beyond its aesthetic value, oral literature anchors the collective identity and moral orientation of the Acehese people. This is especially true in the eastern coastal regions, where oral storytelling traditions remain closely integrated into daily life and community rituals. Functionally, Acehese oral literature has an educative, historical, and spiritual role. Narratives featuring religious values, heroism, and local philosophy are transmitted in accessible and culturally resonant ways. These stories provide not only moral instruction but also collective memory. According to Elmira et al. (2021), oral literature plays a crucial role in reinforcing the community's cultural resilience and rootedness in local values. It symbolically affirms the cohesion of social structures and sustains the relevance of the Acehese language as a living language of thought, feeling, and interaction. In the eastern coastal areas of Langsa, Aceh Timur, and Aceh Tamiang, this role is particularly salient, where oral narratives serve as both repositories of meaning and tools of cultural continuity.

Acehnese oral literature also reflects the sociocultural dynamics of the coastal communities, which are characterized by close ties between custom and spiritual beliefs. This interconnectedness is evident in narrative content that harmonizes ancestral values with local philosophies within a unified cultural expression. Oral literature in these communities becomes a dialogical space connecting generations, linking historical experience to contemporary values, and facilitating intergenerational cultural learning (Safriandi et al., 2022). Thus, preserving oral literature also entails preserving the Acehese language, since the two are inseparable. In this regard, oral literature represents a strategic cultural asset and a bulwark against the erosion of local identity under modern pressures.

B. *Traditional Media as a Vehicle for Oral Literature Dissemination*

Traditional communication media such as oral performances, community radio, and public cultural forums have long served as vital channels for preserving and transmitting oral literature in eastern coastal Aceh. In areas with limited digital access or strong adherence to traditional customs, these forms remain widely used and socially relevant. Community members often participate in storytelling events, religious gatherings, and ritual performances where *hikayat*, *pantun*, and *syair* are delivered. As noted by Feng et al. (2021), the use of culturally embedded traditional media enhances the effectiveness of communication by aligning messages with the audience's values and context. This creates emotional closeness and strengthens receptivity to moral and social messages embedded in the oral literature. Moreover, traditional media fosters community involvement and oral interaction, which are crucial for language retention. As stories are told in Acehese, the language remains actively used and valued. In this way, traditional media supports not only cultural sustainability but also linguistic preservation. Sarkowi et al. (2024) assert that such forms of communication act as barriers against cultural homogenization, promoting pluralism and cultural pride. In the context of eastern coastal Aceh, traditional media plays a dual role: it keeps oral traditions alive while nurturing the linguistic

landscape in which they are expressed. These media are thus not relics of the past, but adaptable tools for safeguarding local language and culture in the present.

C. Local Language Preservation and the Role of Oral Literature

Local languages constitute a core element of cultural identity and cognitive worldview (Budiarta, 2019; Indrawati & Sari, 2024). However, in today's globalized environment, they face increasing marginalization due to the dominance of national and global languages in education, media, and public life. This linguistic shift endangers not only vocabulary but also embedded cultural meanings and indigenous knowledge systems. As oral literature is almost always conveyed in the local language, its practice becomes a strategic entry point for language preservation. In the eastern coastal areas of Aceh, this connection is particularly critical, as the local language remains the heart of cultural transmission in many communities. Oral literature serves as a vehicle for both formal and informal language acquisition. Through repeated exposure to stories, idioms, metaphors, and expressions, young generations internalize the structure, meaning, and rhythm of the Acehnese language. These narrative forms offer more than passive language learning; they foster active cultural engagement and emotional connection to the language. In familial and community settings, storytelling allows elders to pass on linguistic richness, fostering intergenerational continuity. This process ensures that language is not merely spoken but lived as part of shared experience.

In Aceh, revitalizing oral literature represents a proactive strategy to counter linguistic decline. When children and youth are encouraged to listen, retell, or even perform traditional stories, they are not only exposed to the language but also to the cultural values and historical consciousness embedded within them. In this way, oral literature is a bridge between past and future, and between language and lived identity. Its continued relevance hinges on its integration into accessible, contemporary communication platforms.

D. The Impact of Globalisation and Digital Culture on Oral Traditions

Globalization has transformed the way culture is consumed and communicated. The younger generation, particularly in urban and semi-urban areas of Aceh, increasingly turns to short-form digital content, global entertainment, and social media, often in Indonesian or foreign languages (Nur Areefa & Sobirin, 2024). As a result, traditional narrative forms such as hikayat and pantun are perceived as outdated, slow-paced, and irrelevant. This shift in media preference poses a serious threat to the viability of oral traditions as sources of education, identity, and entertainment. The decline in oral tradition use has direct implications for local language survival. With fewer children hearing or speaking Acehnese in storytelling contexts, language transmission is disrupted. Siregar (2022) notes that the prestige associated with global languages accelerates language shift and cultural assimilation. Without intentional revitalization, oral literature may lose its role as a living tradition and instead become a static archive. Therefore, new strategies are needed to reintroduce oral literature to modern audiences, especially the youth, in formats they find familiar and engaging.

E. Digital Media as a Tool for Revitalizing Oral Literature

To adapt oral literature to contemporary media ecosystems, digital platforms must be employed strategically. In recent years, initiatives such as YouTube storytelling channels, podcast series, and TikTok-based cultural education content have shown promise in reaching younger demographics. When hikayat or pantun are presented with audio-visual elements, subtitles, or interactive components, they become more accessible and compelling to digital-native audiences. This approach does not replace the tradition but rather transforms its delivery to align with current communication habits. Community-led digital archiving and performance-sharing projects can also foster local engagement and ownership. By involving local storytellers, youth groups, and cultural activists, oral literature becomes a participatory, evolving practice rather than a relic. This form of digital communication ensures that the Acehnese language remains visible in online spaces, challenging the dominance of global languages. More importantly, it frames oral literature not as a museum piece but as a living, relevant, and adaptable form of expression.

F. Novelty and Research Contribution

The novelty of this research lies in its integrative approach to three critical areas: the role of oral literature, the strategic use of communication media (traditional and digital), and the preservation of the Acehnese language, especially in eastern coastal Aceh. While prior research (Yulsafli & Erfinawati, 2022; Elmira et al., 2021) has explored the cultural or aesthetic aspects of oral literature, and others (Sarkowi et al., 2024) have focused on communication strategies, very few have examined how media platforms can serve as active agents in both transmitting oral literature and revitalizing local language. This study positions itself as a cross-disciplinary effort that bridges cultural studies, linguistics, and media communication. It highlights the lived practices of coastal communities where oral tradition is not just heritage but also a living communication tool. By focusing on how oral literature can thrive through communication media, this research offers practical insights for policy makers, educators, and cultural practitioners. It challenges conventional preservation models by proposing that oral literature must enter the digital domain not only for survival, but for meaningful, intergenerational relevance.

III. METHODOLOGY

The research method used in this study is a descriptive qualitative approach with an ethnographic research type.

Ethnographic research is employed to deeply explore the perspectives and lived experiences of the community in interpreting their cultural practices, particularly the use of oral literature as a component of local communication media (Spradley, 2007; Simarmata et al., 2023). This approach was chosen because the study aims to reveal the function, meaning, and cultural value of Acehese oral literature as it is utilized through various communication media both traditional and digital as a strategy to preserve the local language in the eastern coastal areas of Aceh. Data were collected using three main techniques: participatory observation, in-depth interviews, and document analysis. Observations were conducted during various social and cultural events such as traditional performances, community feasts, local festivals, and community media broadcasts that featured elements of oral literature. Interviews were held with traditional leaders, cultural practitioners, local media managers, and community members directly involved in the preservation or use of oral narratives. Document analysis included audio-visual recordings, content from YouTube and community radio, as well as local manuscripts and cultural archives related to traditional storytelling practices.

The data collected were analyzed through the stages of data reduction, data presentation, and drawing conclusions. Data reduction was used to select and focus on information relevant to the research objectives (Zain, 2025), while data presentation was carried out in the form of descriptive narratives supported by direct quotations from informants. To ensure the validity of the data, triangulation of techniques and sources was performed, along with member checking to confirm the accuracy of the information analyzed. This methodological design supports the main objective of the study, which is to identify how oral literature is employed across various communication media and how such practices contribute to the sustainability of the Acehese language and the local cultural identity of communities in eastern coastal Aceh. The research stages are illustrated in the following figure.

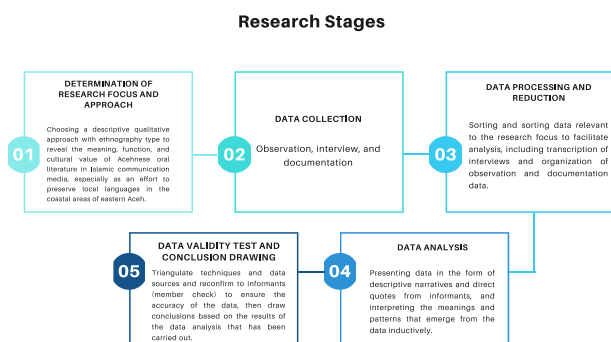


Figure 1.

IV. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

A. Oral Literature in Eastern Coastal Aceh as a Means of Local Language Preservation

Based on the interviews, oral literature in the eastern coastal region of Aceh remains strongly present in community life, particularly through forms such as *seumapa*, *hadih maja*, and *hikayat*. These literary genres are not only found in ceremonial events such as weddings, circumcisions, and *kenduri* (communal meals), but are also embedded in daily interactions. *Hadih maja*, for instance, is often used as a reference for giving advice or expressing views on life. Meanwhile, *hikayat* and *seumapa* enrich local speech practices by conveying moral values and collective history through stories and metaphors. The existence of these forms indicates that oral literature is not merely a cultural relic but a living tradition continuously upheld by local communities.

An interview with a traditional leader (Informant 2, a customary elder) revealed:

“We still recite *hadih maja* at *kenduri* and family events. Young people enjoy listening because the language is beautiful and meaningful. I usually say, ‘*Gadoh bak jeut, tapak hana meu.*’ That means don’t be arrogant even if you’re smart, because knowledge is not for showing off”.

This statement highlights the transformative role of oral literature in transmitting life values to younger generations. In this context, oral literature functions not only as a reminder of the past but also as an ethical guide in daily social life.

Within the coastal communities of Eastern Aceh, oral literature serves as a vehicle for passing on values, knowledge, and customary norms across generations. This aligns with the study by Fahmi et al. (2016), which emphasized that oral literature in East Aceh is a key medium for preserving local cultural continuity. When a mother sings a lullaby in classical Acehese, she is not only soothing her child but also passing on linguistic identity. As one housewife (Informant 4) explained:

“I still sing the same lullabies my mother taught me. The lyrics are full of advice don’t be lazy, respect your parents. My child loves the line that says: ‘*Bek rame le droe, hana droe nyang tulong lam panyang.*’ That teaches not to be selfish”.

This quote affirms the important role of women in preserving local language and oral literature within the domestic

sphere, making them central figures in the cultural transmission process.

The language used in oral literature is generally classical Acehnese, with dialectal features specific to the eastern coast. This dialect contains vocabulary and syntactic structures that differ from the Acehnese spoken in the central or western regions, revealing the internal linguistic diversity of the Acehnese community. In *hadih maja*, for instance, symbolic expressions and metaphors are abundant, reflecting the local wisdom of coastal societies. The continued use of Acehnese in these forms shows that it still fulfills pragmatic, aesthetic, and ideological functions in everyday life.

The involvement of traditional leaders, *teungku* (religious clerics), and community members plays a key role in sustaining these oral traditions. One cleric (Informant 5, a preacher) noted:

“When I give sermons, I often quote *hadih maja* so that Acehnese people remember their ancestral language. Like during last Maulid, I said: ‘*Kiban ta mita ridha Tuhan, lam leubeh ta han ngon jurangan.*’ It means we must be obedient and sincere”.

This quote shows that oral literature is not just used to reinforce religious teachings but also to maintain cultural identity within religious spaces. This organic collaboration between religion and custom creates a preservation ecosystem that grows from collective awareness, rather than depending on formal institutions. Oral literature becomes part of daily social interaction, proving that cultural preservation can grow from within the community.

B. Islamic Communication Media as a Vehicle for the Sustainability of Acehnese Oral Literature

This study found that the preservation of Acehnese oral literature such as *seumapa*, *hadih maja*, and *hikayat* is closely tied to the active role of Islamic communication media in the lives of eastern coastal communities. Interviews with religious leaders, teachers, and community elders confirmed that these literary forms remain alive in various religious and social events, particularly weddings, *kenduri*, and circumcisions. Direct field observations also showed that the use of classical Acehnese in these contexts is not merely symbolic but a living tradition passed down through generations.

A young preacher (Informant 6, a local Islamic speaker) explained:

“I intentionally relearned *hadih maja* so I could include it in my sermons. For example, when talking about patience, I use: ‘*Bek lale, bek geutanyoe manah, ta kiban jinoe droe khanduri poma jatah.*’ People immediately understand because the language is familiar to them”.

This indicates that preachers intentionally employ oral literature as a strategic means of da'wah, embedding Islamic values within a cultural framework. This illustrates a dynamic process of intertextuality, where religious and traditional languages mutually reinforce each other.

Islamic communication media also plays a significant role in the digital sphere. A manager of a local TikTok da'wah account (Informant 7, a religious content creator) shared:

“I open my content with *hikayat* or *hadih maja*. For example, when talking about respecting parents, I quote: ‘*Kiban awak teuka beusama, nyan lam bak abu droe tanyoe geuh mula.*’ It helps remind viewers of our traditions, not just religion”.

By combining engaging visuals with familiar linguistic styles, this method effectively extends oral literature's reach to younger generations accustomed to digital media. In this way, Acehnese oral literature is revitalized as part of a modern religious narrative.

Women's religious groups also contribute significantly to this effort. In a community prayer gathering, one female participant (Informant 8, a community religious leader) noted:

“At every *pengajian*, I insert *hadih maja*. I remind the village girls: ‘*Udep bak linto, hana ta peu na buleun, buleun hana sinyak.*’ It teaches patience and discourages jealousy”.

This example shows that oral literature continues to function as a medium of moral instruction, even in informal and domestic religious settings.

A key finding of this research is that this preservation effort is not the result of government policy or curriculum programs, but rather emerges organically from the community's own initiative. Religious leaders, mosque youth, and women's prayer groups all use available platforms whether pulpits or social media to embed local values into religious discourse. This shows that cultural and linguistic preservation can evolve bottom-up, rooted in lived experience and social engagement.

In conclusion, Islamic communication media in Eastern Coastal Aceh functions not only as a tool of da'wah but also as a medium for the preservation and revitalization of Acehnese oral literature. This research demonstrates that local language preservation can effectively coexist with religious practice, especially when both are framed within a culturally reinforcing narrative. This community-based communication model offers a compelling solution to language preservation in the digital age and presents a replicable approach for other regions facing similar challenges.

V. CONCLUSION

Acehnese oral literature plays a vital role as a living cultural heritage that not only reinforces the collective identity of Eastern Coastal Aceh communities but also serves as a medium for social, educational, and spiritual communication. Through the use of traditional forms such as folktales (*hikayat*), poetic expressions (*hadih maja*), and ceremonial rhymes (*seumapa*), this oral tradition becomes a powerful tool for transmitting cultural wisdom, ethical values, and

religious teachings. Moreover, it preserves the richness of the Acehnese language in the face of modernization and the increasing dominance of global languages in daily communication. However, lifestyle shifts among the younger generation and the prevalence of national and foreign languages in digital platforms have caused a gradual decline in the transmission of local culture and a marginalization of the Acehnese language. In this context, Islamic communication media emerge as a strategic channel for revitalizing both oral literature and local linguistic identity. The integration of oral literature in Islamic preaching through hikayat, verses of advice, and metaphorical expressions demonstrates how religious discourse can simultaneously preserve cultural narratives while deepening Islamic understanding.

This study affirms that the sustainability of Acehnese oral literature is being organically maintained through collective efforts of community actors, including religious leaders, educators, mothers, and digital content creators. Their initiatives exemplify a community-based preservation model rooted in lived tradition and adapted to both physical and digital communication spaces. Therefore, revitalizing oral literature through Islamic communication media is a culturally relevant and adaptive solution to address the challenges of globalization while safeguarding the linguistic and cultural identity of Eastern Coastal Aceh.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The authors would like to express their sincere gratitude to **Samudra University** for the academic support and institutional environment that facilitated the completion of this research. Appreciation is also extended to the Faculty members and colleagues who provided constructive feedback and scholarly encouragement throughout the research process. The authors further acknowledge the local communities and cultural practitioners in the eastern coastal areas of Aceh for their openness, participation, and invaluable insights, which greatly enriched this study.

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article “Islam, Culture, and Public Communication: Synergy Among Aceh Leaders in Enhancing Community Participation in the Digital Age” in the *Journal of Religious Entity Humanity (JIREH)*. Another of his works, “The Tale of Prang Sabi as a Public Communication Tool in the Internalisation of Islamic Sharia in Aceh”, was published in the *Samudra Keadilan Law Journal* in 2025. At present, he remains actively engaged in research in the fields of communication, language, oral literature, and culture. He is recognised as an academic with a strong commitment to understanding local cultural dynamics and developing contemporary communication strategies within Acehnese society. ORCID iD: <https://orcid.org/0009-0007-9983-2841> Email: jokohariadi@unsam.ac.id



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Folklore Story Containing 4C Based on Flipbook Maker Application”, and “The Development of Digital Teaching Materials for Writing Pantun Based on Aceh’s Local Wisdom”. These three publications reflect the integration of technology, local wisdom, and 21st-century competencies in the learning process. His research interests focus on Indonesian language teaching, particularly through digital approaches and those rooted in regional cultural values. He continues to develop learning materials relevant to the needs of today’s learners. ORCID iD: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4252-7604> Email: muhammادتaufik89@unsam.ac.id



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Does Translation Contribute to Facilitating Second Language Acquisition?

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Abstract—Translation integration into second language acquisition (SLA) has been an ongoing debate. The present study examined the function of translation as a pedagogical vehicle in facilitating SLA by implementing a mixed-method design incorporating a questionnaire and semistructured interviews. The questionnaire was distributed to 355 learners enrolled in the English Language and Translation BA program at Qassim University, Saudi Arabia, and eight participants were also interviewed. The questionnaire investigated how translation did or did not facilitate SLA, while semistructured interviews offered students' detailed perspectives on the benefits and challenges of utilizing translation as an instructional strategy to accelerate SLA. Questionnaire data were analysed via descriptive statistics and interview data were analysed via thematic analysis. The study provided empirical evidence underscoring the pivotal role of translation in facilitating SLA. The results of both the questionnaire and interview data indicated that translation contributes positively to efficient language skills development, comprehension of academic material and word meanings, vocabulary acquisition and retention and understanding of grammatical differences between the first (L1) and second (L2) languages. However, participants acknowledged that reliance on translation could obstruct learners' thinking ability in the L2 and constrain direct engagement. Nevertheless, the interview data revealed several challenges, including the harmfulness of overreliance on translation—which could obstruct learners' thinking ability in the L2 and constrain direct engagement—and impediments to communication. The study recommends that translation be thoughtfully integrated into L2 contexts while maintaining a balance between translation and the L2 throughout the learning process, particularly in early stages.

Index Terms—translation, second language acquisition, language learning, pedagogical translation

I. INTRODUCTION

Adopting translation in the learning process to facilitate second language acquisition (SLA) constitutes a critical element in the academic field and learners' professional development. According to Widdowson (2014) and Cook (2007), second language (L2) learners frequently use translation throughout language learning. As a language acquisition method, translation has the potential to develop essential language skills (Pym et al., 2013; Pym, 2016; Richards & Rodgers, 2014). Indeed, translation is often regarded in the literature as the fifth core language skill (Saricoban, 2012; Pym et al., 2013). Accordingly, there is considerable interest in translation pedagogy within the context of L2 learning (Garcia & Pena, 2011; Leonardi, 2010; Malmkjær, 2012; Priya & Jayasridevi, 2018; Pym, 2011). According to Shiyab and Abdullateef (2001), "translation facilitates and speeds up the learner's comprehension process" (p. 1). Recent scholarly investigations have demonstrated positive correlations between the use of translation and SLA (Keck, 2006; Kidd & Donnelly, 2020; Wach & Monroy, 2020). According to House (2009), students' first language (L1) is a significant asset for aiding SLA. Ali (2012) noted that translation encourages learners to view the L2 through their L1 and enables them to compare the two languages throughout the learning process. Moreover, translation offers students the opportunity to apply their knowledge of the L2 in practical use (Lan, 2008; as cited in Barus & Ekalestari, 2022). Translation is thus fundamental in supporting effective communication in the L2 (Cook, 2010).

Recent studies have revealed that translation as a pedagogical method has been employed for a variety of communicative purposes (González Davies, 2004; Kerr, 2014). The employment of translation in L2 learning contexts, as argued by Leonardi (2010), is designed not to train professional translators but to facilitate SLA. Moreover, González Davies (2002) differentiated between the use of translation as a strategy for L2 learning activities and as a strategy to prepare students who wish to pursue translation and interpreting programs. Oguz (2014) notes that translation cannot be ignored in second language learning. Consequently, Gutiérrez (2021) argues that it is essential for education stakeholders to adopt strategies that use translation effectively in language learning. To sum up, translation, through supporting and promoting diverse language skills, exerts a crucial impact on students' advancement in comprehensive competence in both their L1 and L2 (Károly, 2014).

Understanding the interplay between translation and SLA is crucial to understanding the learning process. Studies on the practice of adopting translation in SLA have revealed that translation instruction enhances students' L2 proficiency (Alahmadi & Foltz, 2020; Alshaikhi, 2022; Boustani, 2020; Saz et al., 2015). Furthermore, research from cognitive linguistics and neuroscience has provided evidence advocating for the implementation of translation in language learning (Kerr, 2014). Nevertheless, the contributions of translation as a medium for facilitating SLA and learners' perspectives on

the benefits and challenges of adopting translation as a pedagogical strategy to facilitate SLA remain underexplored, underscoring the need for a study to investigate the act of translation as an approach to facilitating SLA. Accordingly, the current study seeks to extend the literature in two ways: first, by examining the effectiveness of translation as a pedagogical vehicle to facilitate SLA; and second, by investigating the benefits and challenges of utilizing translation as an approach to aid L2 learning from the student perspective—here, English Language and Translation students at Qassim University, Saudi Arabia. The findings will offer implications for L2 program designers, learners and teachers and professionals on whether to adopt translation in L2 learning and teaching. In addition, the findings will identify the benefits and challenges of adopting translation as a strategy to accelerate students' SLA.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

An increasing number of studies have debated the function of translation in L2 learning and have highlighted its usefulness as an instructional tool that merits further investigation (Alaboud, 2022; Boshraadi, 2014; Cook, 2010; House, 2009; Kerr, 2014; Kim, 2011; Larsen-Freeman & Anderson, 2013; Vermes, 2010). Appropriately designed integrations of translation can be adopted in L2 learning contexts to improve language skills (Duff, 1994; Marton & MacIntyre, 2020; Pavón Vázquez & Ramos Ordóñez, 2018; Pym et al., 2013; Tsagari & Giannikas, 2020). For example, language learners tend to rely on their L1's vocabulary to comprehend unknown words in the L2 (Cook, 2007) and translation may thus serve as a valuable cognitive strategy in L2 vocabulary acquisition (Hummel, 2010; Laufer & Girsai, 2008).

There remains a scholarly debate regarding the inclusion of translation in language learning methodologies. Methodologies such as the *direct method* reject the use of translation in learning settings and view students' habits in the L1 as obstacles to L2 learning, whereas the *reform movement* favours the employment of L2 as the main medium of teaching and interaction in classrooms (Larsen-Freeman & Anderson, 2013). Alternatively, *communicative language teaching* seeks to enhance learners' communicative competence in the L2 through interaction and communicative activities, although it permits the careful involvement of the L1 when deemed necessary (Larsen-Freeman & Anderson, 2013). According to Munday (2016), incorporating translation into L2 learning and teaching has largely been abandoned in most English-speaking countries. Nevertheless, Liao (2006) reported that students utilized translation during the learning process to expand their proficiency in the L2 and that translation assisted them in verifying their understanding of various language tasks. Such findings support the notion that translation may employed as a strategy in SLA that also serves as a valuable method for understanding complex information in the L2.

Karimian and Talebinejad (2013) studied the utilization of translation as a technique in learning English and aimed to determine the translation strategies employed among language learners during the learning process. A questionnaire survey of 170 Iranian L2 learners and interviews with 120 students revealed that learners employed various translation-based strategies to aid them in their comprehension, retention and production of English.

In another study, Boshraadi (2014) examined the use of translation as an L2 teaching method with 180 L2 learners. This sample was distributed into six groups based on proficiency level. The experimental groups were instructed via translation-based teaching methods and a posttest and questionnaire were employed to evaluate L2 learners' thoughts on the use of translation as an instructional approach. The findings supported the notion that translation, including translation practices within the classroom, is an effective strategy for enhancing L2 learning.

In the same vein, Alshaikhi (2022) investigated the support of translation in enhancing English language proficiency at the University of Tabuk, Saudi Arabia. Pym's (2013) framework was adopted to assess the effect of translation activities on language proficiency via pre- and posttests. The findings demonstrated that translation significantly improved and promoted SLA.

In contrast to these findings, others have argued against the use of translation within L2 learning settings (Marqués-Aguado & Solís-Becerra, 2013; Sali, 2014). Translation has long been excluded from many language learning classes (Popovic, 2001). The primary criticism of incorporating translation into language learning is that translation is primarily used in reading and writing only, prompts learners to think about the L2 through their L1, has limited real-world applicability, results in more errors and is considered to be effective only in literature and grammar curriculum (Carreres, 2006). Others have argued that translation has various limitations when it is utilized in L2 instruction. Translation may encourage learners to think in a single language and then move to a different one, prevents teachers and learners from engaging in a single language, and creates a misconception among students that there is a one-to-one resemblance in two different languages (Newson, 1988). A study that interviewed Iranian teachers about their perspectives on using translation in classroom found that Iranian L2 teachers do not support employing translation within the L2 learning journey (Asgarian, 2013).

In the same vein, Almoayidi's (2018) review of the literature on the integration of the L1 in L2 classes noted that exposing learners to the L2, rather than their L1, is essential for successful SLA. While some scholars have argued that the use of translation facilitates the learning process, others have indicated that it hinders learning the L2 by reducing students' direct interaction in the L2. The findings suggested that learning methods that use only the L2 make the learning process more enjoyable and beneficial.

In a study seeking to examine previous research findings suggesting that L2 learners may acquire new vocabulary more effectively through translation than other contexts, Alroe and Reinders (2015) employed a sample of more than one thousand Thai freshmen learners of English. The students were separated into three groups, each tasked with acquiring

thirty new English words: bilingual translation pairs; context within English sentences accompanied by graphic illustrations; and illustrated English sentences provided with Thai translation. A posttest did not show any notable difference among the three groups, suggesting that translation use in classroom to facilitate SLA is not justified.

III. METHODOLOGY

A. Research Questions

This study investigates the following research questions:

1. To what extent does translation contribute to facilitating second language acquisition?
2. What are students' perspectives on the benefits and challenges of utilizing translation as a pedagogical vehicle to support second language learning?

B. Participants

The study recruited 355 undergraduate male students in the English Language and Translation BA program at Qassim University. The program is structured as a 4-year academic course of study comprising eight levels, offering a comprehensive curriculum designed to facilitate learning English. The program includes a diverse range of subjects, such as language skills, linguistics and translation. English is utilized as the medium of instruction in all courses of the program. Subjects were duly notified that participation was entirely voluntary and that they could withdraw from the study at any stage without incurring any adverse consequences. Further, all responses provided were handled with the utmost confidentiality. Ethical approval was granted by the Ethical Committee of the Deanship of Postgraduate Studies and Scientific Research at Qassim University, Saudi Arabia (Reference No. 25-33-06).

C. Study Design

A mixed-method design was adopted that incorporated a questionnaire and semistructured interviews. The rationale for adopting mixed methods in this study was to leverage their complementary strengths and the advantages of both to facilitate a thorough analysis of the investigation. In the area of translation research, questionnaires have been employed mainly to explore translation as a profession or to survey the opinions of translation students on teaching and learning processes (Saldanha & O'Brien, 2014). Accordingly, the questionnaire was administered to collect quantitative data regarding the extent of the role of translation in facilitating L2 learning.

Because one objective of the study was to obtain a comprehensive understanding of student perspectives with respect to the benefits and challenges of adopting translation as an instructional method in facilitating SLA, a qualitative component—semistructured interviews—was also incorporated. Qualitative research generally focuses on investigating and detailing a case, providing the researcher with a thorough, thoughtful understanding of a present issue in a real context (Yin, 2018). Researchers routinely employ semistructured interviews to obtain a comprehensive understanding of respondents' beliefs or perceptions related to a specific topic (Smith, 1995). The interviews, conducted by the author, followed a flexible set of questions and were audio-recorded for analysis.

D. Data Collection Procedures

(a). Questionnaire

To examine the extent to which the use of translation as a pedagogical tool can facilitate SLA, an online questionnaire was administered owing to its methodological efficiency in reaching a broad and diverse sample of participants. Questionnaires comprise a number of questions or statements to which respondents provide written responses or select answers from among existing options (Brown, 2001). Questionnaires are commonly utilized in studies of L2 learning (Dörnyei & Taguchi, 2009). The questionnaire was constructed and items were developed based on the author's expertise in teaching translation to undergraduate students of English language and translation. To ensure the validity of questionnaire items, a rigorous and comprehensive review was conducted by two experts in teaching English as a second language and translation. Necessary amendments were then made accordingly. The author then reviewed the items with the experts to finalize the questionnaire.

Following this review process, a group of 35 students was selected to pilot-test the questionnaire. Pilot-testing prior to data collection is a best practice in questionnaire design as it helps the researcher identify potential issues in the content, grammar and format of the questionnaire (Bradburn et al., 2004; Jenn, 2006). After successful completion of the pilot test, the questionnaire was distributed to participants via Google Forms, which required respondents to select the option that best described their situation. Participants responded using a five-point Likert scale (Strongly Agree, Agree, Neutral, Disagree, Strongly Disagree). Oral translations of questionnaire items were provided when deemed necessary.

(b). Semistructured Interviews

Interviews involve structured conversations comprising questions and answers designed to achieve specific objectives; their primary aim is to obtain insights about the subjective meanings that individuals attribute to the topic under investigation (Rietveld & Van Hormelen, 2019). Interviews can be classified into three main categories: highly structured, completely unstructured and semistructured. Semistructured interviews represent a hybrid approach that combines elements of both structured and unstructured formats (Lapan et al., 2011; Merriam, 1998). The interviews for this study

were conducted by presenting participants with a series of questions, which participants answered directly. According to Adler and Adler (2012), an adequate sample in qualitative research can range from a single participant to more than 100. Accordingly, eight interviewees—one from each of the eight distinct levels of study—were selected to obtain diverse insights and capture a wide range of student perspectives on the benefits and challenges of utilizing translation as a pedagogical vehicle to support SLA acquisition. The average duration of each interview ranged from 15–20 minutes. The interviews were audio-recorded. Participants were assigned numerical identifiers to ensure confidentiality, which were subsequently used in reporting the data.

E. Data Analysis

The quantitative data obtained from questionnaires were analysed in SPSS (version 28). Descriptive statistics, including means, standard deviations and frequency, were calculated to summarise responses and interpret the five-point Likert scale. Inferential statistical techniques, including hypothetical means and one-sample *t* tests, were applied to evaluate the significance and relative position of each questionnaire item.

The interviews were analysed thematically to reveal students' perspectives on the benefits and challenges of adopting translation as an instructional strategy to aid in learning a second language. According to Clarke and Braun (2017), thematic analysis is administered to uncover respondents' perspectives and aims at understanding their thoughts about a specific phenomenon. Interview analysis followed six phases outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006) as follows: (a) becoming familiar with the data and transcribing the interviews verbatim, (b) creating initial codes, (c) identifying themes, (d) refining and examining themes, (e) identifying and naming themes and, finally, (f) revealing the final analysis. Codes are typically employed to organize and group data with similar meanings to help authors efficiently locate and cluster related segments for analysis (Stuckey, 2015). Following the recommended guidelines of Saldaña (2013) for small-scale studies, the author applied manual coding to the transcribed interview data. From these codes, the author then constructed themes, i.e., a structured frame presented to organize and report the researcher's analysis (Clarke & Braun, 2017).

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the results of the data collected via the study instruments, including the statistical analysis of the questionnaire data and the results of the thematic analysis. Then, it presents a detailed discussion of the results. The results are discussed in the same order as the study's research questions.

A. The Extent of Translation's Contribution to Facilitating SLA

The following table presents the means, standard deviations, hypothetical means, *t* test values, relative means, significance levels and the evaluated level of each questionnaire item relating to the contribution of translation in facilitating L2 learning. Correlation coefficients were calculated between each item of the questionnaire and its total score. The correlation coefficients ranged between 0.51–0.66 and all were statistically significant at the 0.01 level. The questionnaire utilized in this study showed strong reliability, with a Cronbach's alpha (α) coefficient of 0.823.

TABLE 1
DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS FOR THE CONTRIBUTION OF TRANSLATION IN FACILITATING L2 LEARNING

No	Statement	Frequencies and ratios	Response options					Mean	Std. dev.	Hypothetical mean	t	Relative mean	Sig. (2-tailed)	Level	Rank
			Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree								
1	Translation should be an essential strategy in acquiring a second language.	F	107	179	53	10	6	4.04	.845	3.4	14.369	80.9%	0.01	High	4
		%	31.1	50.4	14.9	2.8	1.7								
2	Translation should be used primarily in the early stages of second language learning.	F	81	153	74	40	7	3.73	.998	3.4	6.324	74.7%	0.01	High	6
		%	22.8	43.1	20.8	11.3	2								
3	Translation should be employed exclusively to clarify complex terms.	F	8	27	89	137	94	2.20	.991	1.8	7.708	44.1%	0.01	low	11
		%	2.3	7.6	25.1	38.6	26.5								
4	Translation helps enhance reading comprehension.	F	158	119	56	15	7	4.14	.965	3.4	14.519	82.8%	0.01	High	2
		%	44.5	33.5	15.8	4.2	2								
5	Translation improves writing skills.	F	102	115	80	49	9	3.7	1.101	3.4	5.303	74.2%	0.01	High	8
		%	28.7	32.4	22.5	13.8	2.5								
6	Translation plays a crucial role in acquiring new vocabulary.	F	164	134	38	12	7	4.22	.912	3.4	17.107	84.4%	0.01	High	1
		%	46.2	37.7	10.7	3.4	2								
7	Translation facilitates grammar learning in a second language.	F	68	152	99	26	10	3.68	.958	3.4	5.539	73.6%	0.01	High	9
		%	19.2	42.8	27.9	7.3	2.8								
8	Translation helps develop listening skills.	F	97	116	76	49	17	3.63	1.159	3.4	3.891	72.8%	0.01	High	10
		%	27.3	32.7	21.4	13.8	4.8								
9	Translation helps enhance speaking skills.	F	122	105	80	34	14	3.80	1.128	3.4	6.818	76%	0.01	High	5
		%	34.4	29.6	22.5	9.6	3.9								
10	Translation helps in understanding the linguistic differences between the first and second languages.	F	146	125	64	15	5	4.10	.937	3.4	14.153	82%	0.01	High	3
		%	41.1	35.2	18	4.2	1.4								
11	I use translation as a strategy to comprehend academic content.	F	82	140	98	21	14	3.71	1.011	3.4	5.932	74.2%	0.01	High	7
		%	23.1	39.4	27.6	5.9	3.9								
SUM1								41.019	5.804	34	22.784	74.52%	0.01	High	
12	Excessive use of translation can create an obstacle in learning a second language.	F	77	115	97	52	14	3.53	1.102	3.4	2.26	70.6%	0.02	High	2
		%	21.7	32.4	27.3	14.6	3.9								
13	Relying too much on translation can weaken the ability to think in the second language.	F	88	137	87	36	7	3.74	1.005	3.4	6.38	74.8%	0.01	High	1
		%	24.8	38.6	24.5	10.1	2								
14	Translation limits direct interaction in the second language.	F	65	118	104	58	10	3.47	1.056	3.4	1.41	69.4%	0.16	moderate	3
		%	18.3	33.2	29.3	16.3	2.8								
SUM2								7.247	2.388	5.4	14.575		0.01	low	

Items 1–11 in Table 1 pertain to the function of translation in facilitating SLA, whereas items 12–14 delineate the potential impediments associated with the integration of translation into L2 learning contexts. As shown in Table 1, the total mean of the items 1–11 was 3.75, with a relative mean of 74.52%, whereas for items 12–14 the total mean was 3.58 and the relative mean was 71.6%. The results indicated that all items correlated with the role of translation in L2 learning

received high ratings, with the exception of item 3, which received a low rating. The means and standard deviations of questionnaire items (1–11) are listed as follows, in descending order, starting with the highest value: item 6 ($M = 4.22$, $SD = 0.912$), 4 ($M = 4.14$, $SD = 0.965$), 10 ($M = 4.10$, $SD = 0.937$), 1 ($M = 4.04$, $SD = 0.845$), 9 ($M = 3.80$, $SD = 1.128$), 2 ($M = 3.73$, $SD = 0.998$), 11 ($M = 3.71$, $SD = 1.011$), 5 ($M = 3.07$, $SD = 1.101$), 7 ($M = 3.68$, $SD = 0.958$), 8 ($M = 3.63$, $SD = 1.159$) and 3 ($M = 2.20$, $SD = 0.991$). Although the items addressing the impediments of translation in L2 learning (items 12 and 13) received high ratings, item 14 received only a moderate rating. The following are the means and standard deviations for questionnaire items 12–14, in descending order, starting with the highest value: 13 ($M = 3.74$, $SD = 1.005$), 12 ($M = 3.53$, $SD = 1.102$) and 10 ($M = 3.47$, $SD = 1.056$). Thresholds were established for high (hypothetical mean of 3.4) and low (hypothetical mean of 1.8) levels of agreement.

Artar (2018) posited that translation enhances fundamental language skills. As indicated by Table 1, participants overwhelmingly agreed on the effectiveness of translation as a pedagogical vehicle in L2 learning, particularly in the early stages. According to Putrawan (2019), beginners may benefit from the use of translation, as it can facilitate language learning in a more comfortable environment; indeed, in this study, translation was found to foster the development of various language skills.

According to Nation (2001), vocabulary is a fundamental element of SLA. The findings of the present study suggested that learners perceive translation as a valuable and effective tool for acquiring and developing vocabulary, as it enables matching the word in the L1 with its correspondent in the L2, thereby facilitating long-term retention and greater semantic understanding of the vocabulary in the L2. This supposition aligns with the findings of other studies that translation can substantially improve learners' vocabulary awareness and understanding in the L2 (Alshaikh, 2022; Khrystych, 2025).

Further, participants agreed that translation enhances their reading comprehension and writing proficiency, indicating that translation is a valuable strategy that should be implemented when learning or teaching reading and writing courses in an SLA context. These findings align with those of Alaboud (2022), who reported that translation functions as a constructive method for improving learners' reading comprehension skills within an L2 context and with those of Abas and Ghanem (2023), who reported that translation significantly enhanced learners' writing proficiency and provided opportunities to refine their writing skills.

In addition to reading and writing, the findings suggest that learners view translation as a strategy for developing their listening and speaking skills. These findings are consistent with those of Naghipoor and Bolori (2013), who observed that the integration of translation significantly enhanced learners' listening comprehension in an L2 context. However, these findings contrast with those of Priya and Jayasridevi (2018), who argued that prolonged reliance on translation in SLA is associated with limitations in developing speaking proficiency.

The findings also reveal that translation facilitates learners' understanding of grammar variations in both languages (L1 and L2). These results are aligned with several studies that have reported that incorporating translation into L2 learning contributes to a deeper understanding of grammatical and structural differences between the two languages (Khrystych, 2025; Priya & Jayasridevi, 2018).

Further, these findings imply that learners regard translation as a meaningful strategy for enhancing their comprehension of academic material. This result indicates that translation may serve as a valuable pedagogical approach for interpreting the complex terminology frequently present in academic courses. These findings are in accordance with those of Machida (2011), who argued that translation is naturally employed in comprehending new ideas or meaning in an L2. However, the findings also revealed that most participants disagreed with the notion that translation should be used solely to explain and elaborate complex terminology. Moreover, they acknowledged that reliance on translation in SLA may obstruct learners' ability to think in the L2 and constrain opportunities for direct engagement with the L2.

In conclusion, the majority of the English Language and Translation students at Qassim University recognized translation as a substantial facilitator of L2 learning. According to Priya and Jayasridevi (2018), translation has often been misconstrued as an outdated methodology in L2 learning contexts—perceived as restrictive, misleading and a hindrance to learners' ability to think in the L2. Nevertheless, they argued, when properly integrated into L2 learning through reading, listening, writing and improving vocabulary, translation can serve as a valuable pedagogical vehicle that facilitates SLA—an assertion that is substantiated by the findings of the present study. Moreover, these findings align with other studies finding that the incorporation of translation can improve vocabulary acquisition and enhance proficiency in reading and writing (Huang, 2023) and can serve as an effective strategy in SLA (Liu & Yang, 2025). However, these findings are inconsistent with the findings of other scholars, who have argued that the L2 should be used as extensively as possible within classroom settings to ensure that learners consistently use it as the primary medium of communication (Almoayidi, 2018; Turnbull, 2001). The complex nature of L2 learning environments may explain some of the observed variability of scholarly perspectives on the contribution of translation to SLA.

B. Students' Perspectives on Benefits and Challenges of Utilizing Translation as a Pedagogical Vehicle to Support L2 Learning

The second research question endeavoured to elucidate participants' perspectives on the benefits and challenges associated with integrating translation into SLA. Semistructured interviews with open-ended questions were used as the main instrument for gathering the data pertaining to this question. The qualitative analysis of responses evolved around seven main themes, which were further subdivided into various subthemes. The findings obtained from these interviews offer substantive insights into the benefits and challenges of employing translation as a methodological strategy for

supporting SLA.

(a). *Learning Efficiency*

Ascertaining the most effective method for optimizing learning efficiency in SLA is a prevalent concern among L2 learners. In accordance with this notion, Student 7 argued that *“translation is a strategy that speeds up the process of learning a second language,”* while Student 3 indicated that *“the use of translation facilitates more rapid understanding among learners.”* These findings echo those of Artar (2018), who argued that translation facilitates SLA by enabling learners to save time, and Khan (2016), who demonstrated that translation can effectively support SLA. Nevertheless, Student 1 also noted that *“translation is a complex process that necessitates an advanced level of language proficiency.”* This statement suggests that the use of translation constitutes a significant challenge for early-stage learners, as its effective use necessitates a relatively advanced level of language proficiency. Perhaps surprisingly, this statement is inconsistent with the findings of previous studies, which have suggested that the use of the L2 may be more appropriate for advanced learners, whereas translation can be beneficial for beginners in SLA (Asgarian, 2013) but may diminish in effectiveness as language proficiency increases (Liu & Yang, 2025).

(b). *Meaning Comprehension*

Comprehension of meaning emerged as a significant benefit of utilizing translation within SLA contexts, as indicated by the majority of the respondents. Student 3 stated, *“without translation, I would be unable to comprehend the meanings of words in the second language.”* Student 5 argued that *“I unconsciously translate from second language to my first language to understand things.”* Further, Student 2 stated, *“translation is a useful way to provide the accurate meaning, rather than guessing it from context, which might not always be correct.”* These findings indicate that learners regard translation as a reliable strategy for comprehending and obtaining the accurate meanings of unknown vocabulary in the L2. These results support Machida’s (2011) assertion that students naturally adopt translation to understand new ideas or meaning in the L2 and the findings of Al-Musawi (2014), who indicated that the central role of translation is *“to transmit appropriate meaning of a word or a sentence linguistically, semantically, and pragmatically”* (p. 1). Further, Student 5 stated that *“in the early stages of second language acquisition, learners unconsciously rely on translation by default for understanding meaning.”* A fellow Student 7 argued *“translation is a comfortable and safe zone for beginner second language learners.”* These statements suggest that translation is a preferred strategy among beginners in an SLA context, as it offers a perceived sense of security in comprehending word meanings. This result is consistent with the findings of Mutlu-Gülbak et al. (2015) and Putrawan (2019), who suggested that translation facilitates SLA among beginner or lower-level learners by offering a more comfortable and secure learning experience. Nevertheless, Student 1 argued that *“literal translation, which is often the strategy used for learning a second language, may not convey the accurate meaning of certain words.”* Another respondent (Student 8) noted that *“literal translation may mislead the student about the meaning of words.”* Such statements indicate that some learners consider translation to be a misleading strategy rather than a supportive strategy in L2 learning. This assumption is consistent with the findings of Azzan and Sakale (2025), whose study indicated that *“in many cases, a literal translation may result in awkward or unclear language, as it may not accurately convey the intended meaning”* (p. 119).

(c). *Language Skills Development*

The findings pertaining to this theme suggest that the majority of interviewees perceived translation as an impactful pedagogical strategy for developing L2 skills. For example, Student 4 noted that *“translation is a helping tool in learning vocabulary;”* similarly, Student 5 stated that *“translation increases students’ vocabulary size.”* These findings indicate that a subset of L2 learners employ translation as a strategic tool to facilitate the acquisition of unfamiliar vocabulary. These findings support Webb’s (2009) assertion that acquiring vocabulary via translation is a valid method for L2 learners. Additionally, Student 7 claimed that *“translation facilitates the development of reading and writing skills.”* This statement indicates that translation serves not only as a strategy for vocabulary acquisition but also as an approach for enhancing reading and writing proficiency in the L2. This suggestion is supported by Artar (2018), whose study revealed that participants benefited from translation as an effective method for enhancing their reading and writing proficiency.

(d). *Memory Retention*

The findings related to this theme indicated that several respondents perceived translation as an effective strategy for improving long-term retention of information. Accordingly, using translation in the context of SLA may facilitate improved vocabulary retention. This perspective is exemplified by Student 2, who stated, *“translation keeps the meaning of vocabulary in my mind for a long time.”* These findings correspond with those of Liu and Yang (2025), who demonstrated that the integration of translation significantly enhanced vocabulary retention among L2 learners.

(e). *Subtitling as a Language Learning*

Subtitling is a multimodal language learning strategy adopted by numerous learners. One of the respondents (Student 4) stated, *“I started learning a second language through subtitles.”* Similarly, Student 8 argued that *“subtitling is a good strategy for learning a second language.”* This perspective indicates that subtitling is regarded by a considerable number of learners as a helpful strategy for acquiring an L2—an assertion supported by Aksu Ataç and Günay Köprülü (2018),

who argued that a significant number of L2 language learners benefit from subtitling.

(f). *Harmfulness of Overreliance*

A significant proportion of interviewees articulated concerns that employing translation as a primary language learning medium, rather than as a supportive pedagogical strategy, may yield counterproductive outcomes in SLA contexts. Student 6 argued that “*excessive use of translation hinders learners second language acquisition.*” These findings are consistent with those of Huang (2023), who reported that “overreliance on translation might hinder the overall learning journey of second language learners” (p. 201).

(g). *Communication Impediment*

A limited number of respondents reported that the employment of translation in SLA may negatively affect communicative proficiency, particularly with respect to speaking skills, which may consequently impede cognitive processing in the L2. Student 6 stated that “*translation causes a lack of communication skills and hinders learners’ ability to think in the second language.*” A fellow participant (Student 8) argued that “*translation may limit learners’ ability to communicate effectively in the second language, particularly in speaking.*” These statements suggest that translation may obstruct practice in the L2, thus limiting students’ ability to engage and think in it. These findings align with Cook (2010), who argued that employing translation during the learning process may impede effective communication, hinder students’ ability to acquire a new language and obstruct their ability to think in the L2. In contrast, Huang (2023) asserted that translation serves as a dynamic and interactive strategy that enhances communicative competence in SLA. Taken together, these findings indicate that the use of translation in L2 learning contexts is complex and may have a variety of effects, depending on the learner and the context.

V. CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

The present study aimed at examining the role of translation as a pedagogical vehicle in facilitating SLA in the English Language and Translation BA program at Qassim University, Saudi Arabia. A mixed-method research design incorporating a questionnaire and semistructured interviews was employed. The questionnaire investigated the contribution of translation in facilitating L2 learning, whereas the semistructured interviews presented a detailed comprehension of students’ perspectives on the benefits and challenges of utilizing translation as an instructive strategy to accelerate the L2 learning process. Descriptive statistics were used to analyse the questionnaire data, while interviews underwent thematic analysis.

The study provided empirical evidence underscoring the pivotal role of translation in facilitating L2 learning. The findings indicated that translation contributes positively to language skills development, comprehension of academic material, L2 vocabulary acquisition and understanding of grammatical variations between the L1 and L2. Despite these benefits, however, the participants also acknowledged that (over)relying on translation in SLA may obstruct learners’ ability to think in and directly engage with the L2.

The interview data revealed numerous key benefits of utilizing translation in SLA, including learning efficiency, meaning comprehension, language skills development, memory retention strategies and enhanced language learning. Interviewees indicated that translation accelerates SLA, enhances comprehension of word meanings, facilitates language skills development, aids long-term retention of vocabulary and encourages the use of subtitling as a language learning tool. Nevertheless, the interview data also revealed a number of challenges, particularly with respect to the harmfulness of overreliance on translation and potential communication impediments. A significant proportion of interviewees articulated concerns that employing translation as a primary language learning medium, rather than as a supportive pedagogical strategy, may yield counterproductive outcomes in SLA contexts. A limited number of respondents reported that the employment of translation in SLA may negatively affect communicative competence.

The study recommends that translation be thoughtfully integrated into L2 contexts while maintaining a balanced use of translation and the L2 throughout the learning process, particularly in the early stage.

Further research is recommended to explore how translation can be effectively utilized across individual language skills, with the aim of identifying best practices and methods for integrating translation into the teaching and learning of individual language skills.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The researcher would like to thank the Deanship of Graduate Studies and Scientific Research at Qassim university for financial support (QU-APC-2026).

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Turkic Language Speakers' Perception of Toponyms as Cultural Heritage in the National Epos "Edige"

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Abstract—The purpose of the present study is to examine the attitudes of modern native speakers of Turkic languages to the role of place names used in national folklore in preserving their nations' cultural heritage. This mixed-methods study is based on a specially developed questionnaire to provide quantitative and qualitative data on student youth's perceptions of toponyms as carriers of cultural heritage in a famous epic poem, which has many versions in different Turkic languages. The participants of the investigation are 214 undergraduate students majoring in Pedagogy and Philology at universities located in Kazakhstan, Tatarstan and Karakalpakstan. The results of the study show that, although toponyms from the epic poem "Edige" are not widely used either in official documents or in everyday situations, they still perform an essential function in preserving the historical and cultural heritage of the Turkic peoples. Through place names, students relate to locations that are historically and culturally important, and the knowledge of their origins and meanings is maintained by means of national folklore. Based on the responses of modern speakers of such Turkic languages as Kazakh, Tatar and Karakalpak, we conclude that the knowledge of place names in epic literature contributes to the collective memory about certain places and passing it down through generations.

Index Terms—toponym, folklore, epic poem, cultural heritage, Turkic

I. INTRODUCTION

Turkic epic poetry occupies a special place in world epic literature, combining characteristic features of epic poetry from various parts of the world. Turkic epic poems can be compared with the epic works of Homer as they are written in verse and describe long journeys made by the protagonists. At the same time, realism in depicting everyday life and mysticism in describing the world of spirits relate Turkic epos to Scandinavian sagas (Lethbridge, 2016). Another

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distinctive feature of Turkic epic poems consists in the exaggeration and idealization of the hero, and such a poetic hyperbole brings them close to Mongolian and Russian epos (Orlov, 1945). On top of all of this, Turkic epic poetry as part of national folklore is one of the most important components of Turkic culture (Tadjibaeva, 2020; Mamayev et al., 2021), expressing the nation's originality (Zhanibekova & Beisenova, 2021) and maintaining historical consciousness and knowledge of the Nomadic lifestyle (Zhumabayeva, 2022). Of particular importance in reflecting the Turkic national culture are names of places, or toponyms, related to the events described in epic poems.

Place names in epic poetry are considered essential due to their connection with nations' history and traditions. In the context of globalization, it is becoming crucial to preserve nations' cultural heritage. Being reflections of a nation's material and spiritual culture (Tektigul et al., 2021; Turdibekov, 2021), place names perform an essential role in maintaining the specific features of the traditional lifestyle and national identity, which are conditioned by a particular geographical position (Hadieva & Akish, 2015; Aleshinskaya, 2020). Toponyms are defined as carriers of national-cultural information (Lanovaya, 2021) or geocultural codes providing ethnocultural, geographic and spatial information that contributes to a better understanding of indigenous peoples' historical settlements, inter-ethnic contacts and societal values (Kurilova et al., 2023), as well as their economic activity and ancient migrations (Ganieva et al., 2020; Boribayeva et al., 2018). In epic poetry, toponyms can help to create an illusion of pseudo-documentary (Aleksenko et al., 2022) as they reveal significant information about specific locations at the time of their settlement (Seidl, 2019), historical events taking place in them (Hedquist et al., 2014) and various peoples inhabiting them (Lutfullina, 2021).

Among Turkic heroic epic poems, the most famous is "Edige", which is based on a well-known legend about Edige Batyr, a real historical figure of the second half of the 14th century. At that time, the Golden Horde, whose territory used to be the land of the Turks in the eastern part of Russia and the western part of Kazakhstan, weakened. Edige was an authoritative biy (translated as "people's adviser, mediator in disputes") who headed the ulus between the Volga (Yedil) and the Urals (Zhaiyk). The epic poem depicts the events of the war in 1398, when the combined army of Lithuania, Poland and Western Russia tried to separate the territory of the Golden Horde. Edige showed great courage in this war and made efforts to strengthen the Golden Horde again.

The epic poem "Edige" is treated as one of the pearls of the Turkic peoples' verbal creativity (Sagitov, 1986). It has the largest number of national versions, being widespread among many peoples such as Bashkirs, Karakalpaks, Kazakhs, Nogais, Tatars, Turkmens, Uzbeks and other Turkic peoples who inhabited Central Asia, Siberia, the Volga region, the Caucasus and Crimea. The poem has been subjected to numerous qualitative textual analyses focusing on its content and artistic features (Urmanche, 2015), poetic features characteristic of its different versions (Zhanpeissova & Kuzembayeva, 2019), the history of its creation (Assanov et al., 2016), religious and mythological aspects (Nurdauletova, 2012). A more recent study has looked at the functioning and cultural meaning of place names in the Kazakh and Tatar versions of the poem (Kenbayeva et al., 2022). It also showed that through toponyms in the national versions of the epic poem "Edige" a special microcosm was created displaying the reality that the Turkic peoples are familiar with and revealing valuable data on the life and interaction between the Turkic peoples for several hundred years.

Despite the acknowledged significance of toponyms in preserving the cultural heritage of a nation, little attention has been paid to examining native speakers' perception of the connection between toponyms in national folklore and cultural heritage. The analysis of toponyms can provide a description of the spiritual culture and worldview of the people who speak the given language (Vasil'eva & Dmitrieva, 2021). Given recent advances in qualitative investigations into the role of toponyms in national folklore and especially the epic poem "Edige", this study goes further to quantitatively explore attitudes of native speakers of the Turkic languages, to whom the poem and toponyms used there are sure to have a lot of meaning. The purpose of the current research is to examine, by means of a questionnaire developed specially for this study, Turkic young representatives' attitudes to the role of toponyms used in the epos "Edige" in preserving their nations' cultural heritage. We will show how modern speakers of such Turkic languages as Kazakh, Tatar and Karakalpak perceive the role of toponyms in national folklore and how the knowledge of place names in epic literature contributes to the collective memory about particular places and passing it down through generations.

II. METHODOLOGY

A. Research Design

The current investigation has an embedded mixed-methods design (Creswell & Plano-Clark, 2011). In order to explore Turkic people's attitudes to toponyms used in the epic poem "Edige", a questionnaire was conducted among representatives of three Turkic nations – Kazakh, Tatar and Karakalpak. The questionnaire was aimed at undergraduate students, as they are generally considered a socially active group, being quite numerous and socially and demographically significant (Shunkeyeva et al., 2020). Student youths are also viewed by Groff et al. (2022) as "a pressure cooker of high-speed renewal", enabling a wider understanding of language change in society. The questionnaire allowed collecting and analyzing quantitative and qualitative research data on how Kazakh, Tatar and Karakalpak students understand the role of toponyms in preserving their national cultural heritage. The questionnaire

contained closed-ended and open-ended questions to enable quantitative and qualitative analyses of the respondents' attitudes.

B. Participants

The sample for the current investigation comprised 214 undergraduate students aged between 17 and 25 studying Pedagogy and Philology at three universities in Kazakhstan, Tatarstan and Karakalpakstan: M. Utemisov West Kazakhstan University (78 students), Naberezhnye Chelny State Pedagogical University (20 students) and Nukus State Pedagogical University (116 students). The language of instruction at each university is conditioned by its location: all subjects at M. Utemisov West Kazakhstan University are taught in the Kazakh language, while at Naberezhnye Chelny State Pedagogical University in Russian and/or Tatar, and Nukus State Pedagogical University in Karakalpak. In the introductory part of the questionnaire, the respondents were asked to provide information regarding their gender, age, nationality and native tongue, year of studies and major. The collected data demonstrating the distribution of the variables in the samples' profiles are presented in Table 1.

TABLE 1
SAMPLES' PROFILE

Variables		Frequency (percent)		
		Kazakh sample	Tatar sample	Karakalpak sample
Gender	Female	68 (87.2%)	19 (95%)	89 (76.7%)
	Male	10 (12.8%)	1 (5%)	27 (23.3%)
Age	17	8 (10.25%)	1 (5%)	0 (0%)
	18	8 (10.25%)	11 (55%)	0 (0%)
	19	48 (61.5%)	0 (0%)	3 (3.6%)
	20	12 (15.4%)	4 (20%)	12 (10.3%)
	21	2 (2.6%)	0 (0%)	29 (25%)
	22	0 (0%)	4 (20%)	24 (20.7%)
	23	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	21 (18.1%)
	24	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	18 (15.5%)
	25	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	9 (7.8%)
Nationality	Karakalpak	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	93 (80.2%)
	Kazakh	76 (97.4%)	0 (0%)	5 (4.3%)
	Russian	1 (1.3%)	6 (30%)	0 (0%)
	Tatar	1 (1.3%)	14 (70%)	0 (0%)
	Turkmen	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	4 (3.4%)
Native tongue	Uzbek	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	14 (12.1%)
	Karakalpak	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	103 (88.8%)
	Kazakh	78 (100%)	0 (0%)	1 (0.9%)
	Russian	0 (0%)	8 (40%)	0 (0%)
	Tatar	0 (0%)	12 (60%)	0 (0%)
Year of studies	Turkmen	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	2 (1.7%)
	Uzbek	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	10 (8.6%)
	First, Bachelor	13 (16.7%)	12 (60%)	0 (0%)
	Second, Bachelor	19 (24.3%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
	Third, Bachelor	36 (46.2%)	3 (15%)	49 (42.2%)
Major	Fourth, Bachelor	10 (12.8%)	5 (25%)	67 (57.8%)
	Pedagogy	43 (55.1%)	13 (65%)	71 (61.2%)
	Philology	35 (44.9%)	7 (35%)	45 (38.8%)

In our questionnaire, we aimed to involve students from two educational backgrounds related to examining and teaching national culture, and sought for more or less equal distribution in number, as well as on the age and gender basis. The participation in the questionnaire was voluntary, and we distributed the questions among undergraduate students at the three universities in three locations. Obviously, students from Nukus State Pedagogical University in Karakalpakstan participated in the questionnaire more willingly. This partially accounts for the uneven distribution of age variables, as undergraduate students who participated in the questionnaire appear to be of a larger average age. The research sample also demonstrates an uneven distribution of gender variables, which is consistent with the general observation that the majority of students choosing educational programs in Pedagogy and Philology are female, as opposed to technical universities where the majority of students are normally male (Aleshinskaya & Vasilieva, 2025). Moreover, this accords with the observation made by Lippa et al. (2014) that it is more typical of women to be employed in people-oriented occupations such as teachers. Regarding the nationality and native tongue, a greater diversity is demonstrated by students of Nukus State Pedagogical University in Karakalpakstan. The proportion of students studying Pedagogy is larger than that for Philology in all the three samples, which can be related to the universities' specializations.

C. Data Collection

The data for the current investigation were collected through the online questionnaire distributed among students of the three universities using Google forms. The questionnaire for this study was inspired by the survey conducted by Hakala et al. (2015). The statements in the abovementioned study addressed the relation between place names and name

branding, so we followed the authors' general idea but modified and added our own questions to avoid connection with name branding and build ties with national folklore. The aim of our questionnaire was to find out the students' perception of using place names from a famous epic poem in their everyday life and the role of these toponyms in their national culture. The questionnaire contained ten closed-ended items and an open-ended item in the form of statements divided into three main parts.

The first part of the questionnaire included five closed-ended questions devoted to the respondents' individual understanding of place names from the poem and relation to them and their native place: (1) Some of the toponyms in the poem "Edige" name the place(s) where I live/come from; (2) I understand the meanings of the place names used in the poem; (3) I know the history (etymology) of the place names in the poem; (4) The place names in the poem reflect the history and culture of the place where I live/come from; (5) I use the names of the places in the poem in everyday life. The second part of the questionnaire addresses the respondents' attitudes to the ties between toponyms in national folklore and their national culture: (6) The poem "Edige" is important for the culture of the place where I live/come from; (7) Most or all of the place names in the poem are official names (can be found on the maps, signs, etc.); (8) It is important to know the etymology and meaning of the place names in the poem; (9) If the place names in the poem were changed, part of the place's history and culture would be lost; (10) If the place names were removed from the poem, part of the place's history and culture would be lost.

The variants of responses to the closed-ended questions were based on the Likert scale from 5 (completely agree) to 1 (completely disagree). No optional responses were offered for the final open-ended question in the third part of the questionnaire, and the respondents were expected to provide their own detailed comments to the questions in the previous two parts. Informed consent was obtained from the students to take part in the questionnaire and to process their responses.

D. Data Analysis

To ensure the reliability and validity of the mixed-methods study, we tried to maintain both emic and epic perspectives in the analysis of the research data. The epic approach was based on the quantitative analysis of the responses to the closed-ended questions using the Google spreadsheets. This enabled us to calculate the frequencies and proportions of the responses to Questions 1–10 (the first and second parts of the questionnaire). Normalized frequencies of the participants' responses were calculated to enable identifying similarities and differences between the samples that are different numbers. The interpretations of the students' responses to the closed-ended questions were based on a 5-grade Likert scale.

The emic approach was based on the thematic analysis of the subjective data provided by the participants of the questionnaire in their responses to the final open-ended question. The thematic analysis of the students' comments was based on the deduction of the main meanings (Creswell & Plano-Clark, 2011). The qualitative analysis of the respondents' comments allowed identifying the following themes: the toponyms from the poem employed officially and on a daily basis; the existence of the real place names in the locations under discussion; the significance of place names in the local history and culture. The combination of quantitative and qualitative analyses was implemented to obtain reliable and trustworthy data about the students' attitudes to the role of toponyms used in the national epos "Edige" to the preservation of national cultural heritage.

III. FINDINGS

A. Quantitative Results

This section presents the results obtained through the analysis of quantitative data provided in the students' responses to the closed-ended questions of the questionnaire. Table 2 displays the normalized frequencies of the respondents' attitudes expressed in their answers to the first part of the questionnaire (Questions 1–5). In this part of the questionnaire, the participants provided responses to the statements regarding their personal understanding of toponyms from the epic poem "Edige", as well as relation to them and their native place. The normalized frequencies of the students' responses are given per 100.

TABLE 2
NORMALIZED FREQUENCIES OF STUDENTS' RESPONSES TO QUESTIONS 1–5 (PER 100)

Question	Variants of responses	Responses by sample		
		Kazakh	Tatar	Karakalpak
1. Some of the toponyms in the poem “Edige” name the place(s) where I live/come from.	I completely agree.	16.67	15	45.69
	I partly agree.	24.36	40	23.27
	I neither agree nor disagree.	41.03	45	11.21
	I partly disagree.	5.13	0	9.48
	I completely disagree.	12.82	0	10.34
2. I understand the meanings of the place names used in the poem.	I completely agree.	20.51	15	23.27
	I partly agree.	28.2	50	37.93
	I neither agree nor disagree.	37.18	35	13.79
	I partly disagree.	5.13	0	18.96
	I completely disagree.	8.97	0	6.03
3. I know the history (etymology) of the place names in the poem.	I completely agree.	11.54	10	12.07
	I partly agree.	41.03	45	40.52
	I neither agree nor disagree.	28.2	40	23.27
	I partly disagree.	6.41	0	18.96
	I completely disagree.	12.82	5	5.17
4. The place names in the poem reflect the history and culture of the place where I live/come from.	I completely agree.	26.92	20	39.65
	I partly agree.	41.03	35	22.41
	I neither agree nor disagree.	14.1	40	13.79
	I partly disagree.	3.85	5	13.79
	I completely disagree.	14.1	0	10.34
5. I use the names of the places in the poem in everyday life.	I completely agree.	7.69	0	13.79
	I partly agree.	33.34	45	37.07
	I neither agree nor disagree.	19.23	45	14.65
	I partly disagree.	15.38	5	27.59
	I completely disagree.	24.36	5	6.9

As seen from Table 2, the responses to the first part of the questionnaire reveal differences in attitudes between representatives of different locations. A vast majority of Karakalpak students agreed completely or partly with the first statement, “Some of the toponyms in the poem ‘Edige’ name the place(s) where I live/come from”, while Kazakh and Tatar students expressed more uncertainty. In their responses to the second statement, a large number of students from different ethnic backgrounds acknowledged that they completely or partly understand the meanings of the place names used in the poem. Yet, a considerable number of respondents from Kazakhstan and Tatarstan neither agreed nor disagreed with this statement. In response to the third statement, most students from all the three locations agree, however partly, that they know the history (etymology) of the place names in the poem. At the same time, quite a lot of responses in the Tatar sample expressed the participants’ uncertainty regarding their knowledge of the history and etymology of toponyms used in the epic poem.

A slight contrast can be observed in the responses to the fourth statement regarding the reflection of the local history and culture by means of the place names in the poem. The largest number of Karakalpak students strongly agreed with this statement, whereas the largest number of Kazakh and Tatar students agreed only to some extent. At the same time, a large number of Tatar students did not know how to respond to the fourth statement. The fifth statement, “I use the names of the places in the poem in everyday life”, caused some contradiction in students’ responses. Thus, the majority of participants from all the three universities partly agreed with this statement. Meanwhile, a quite large number of Karakalpak students partly disagreed, and a large proportion of Kazakh students completely disagreed with the statement. None of Tatar students agreed completely, however a significant number of them did not know what to answer again. It is noteworthy that the frequency of the response “I neither agree nor disagree” among students from the university in Tatarstan is considerably higher than of those from Kazakhstan and Karakalpakstan. Probably, Tatar respondents were rather undecided on these statements. This issue requires further investigation on a larger sample of participants from Tatarstan.

Table 3 displays the normalized frequencies of the respondents’ attitudes expressed in their answers to the second part of the questionnaire (Questions 6–10). The second part of the questionnaire focuses on the participants’ perception of the ties between toponyms in national folklore and their national culture. The normalized frequencies of the students’ responses are provided per 100.

TABLE 3
NORMALIZED FREQUENCIES OF STUDENTS' RESPONSES TO QUESTIONS 6–10 (PER 100)

Question	Variants of responses	Responses by sample		
		Kazakh	Tatar	Karakalpak
6. The poem “Edige” is important for the culture of the place where I live/come from.	I completely agree.	15.38	30	67.24
	I partly agree.	35.9	25	14.65
	I neither agree nor disagree.	8.97	45	4.31
	I partly disagree.	24.36	0	7.76
	I completely disagree.	15.38	0	6.03
7. Most or all of the place names in the poem are official names (can be found on the maps, signs, etc.).	I completely agree.	12.82	10	31.03
	I partly agree.	29.49	35	25
	I neither agree nor disagree.	33.34	50	24.14
	I partly disagree.	7.69	0	12.93
	I completely disagree.	16.67	5	6.9
8. It is important to know the etymology and meaning of the place names in the poem.	I completely agree.	21.79	25	76.24
	I partly agree.	25.64	35	13.79
	I neither agree nor disagree.	28.2	35	3.45
	I partly disagree.	12.82	5	4.31
	I completely disagree.	11.54	0	11.21
9. If the place names in the poem were changed, part of the place's history and culture would be lost.	I completely agree.	21.79	40	57.76
	I partly agree.	23.08	35	14.65
	I neither agree nor disagree.	25.64	25	6.9
	I partly disagree.	14.1	0	6.9
	I completely disagree.	15.38	0	13.79
10. If the place names were removed from the poem, part of the place's history and culture would be lost.	I completely agree.	28.2	30	57.76
	I partly agree.	20.51	45	10.34
	I neither agree nor disagree.	28.2	25	10.34
	I partly disagree.	5.13	0	6.03
	I completely disagree.	17.95	0	15.52

As shown in Table 3, the absolute majority of Karakalpak respondents completely agreed with the sixth statement that the poem “Edige” is important for the local culture. On the other hand, opposite views were expressed by Kazakh respondents, almost half of whom agreed completely or partly with the statement, while almost the other half expressed complete and partial disagreement. Slightly over a half of Tatar respondents agreed completely and partly with the sixth statement, whereas a little less than a half did not know whether they agreed or disagreed. The seventh statement, “Most or all of the place names in the poem are official names” was the only one in the questionnaire where the a third of Kazakh respondents and half of Tatar respondents chose the option “I neither agree nor disagree”. Moreover, a large number of Karakalpak respondents chose the same option, meaning that this question was the most complicated to answer to all the participants of the questionnaire.

According to the responses to Question 8, most respondents agreed that it is important to know the etymology and meaning of the place names in the poem “Edige”. Besides, quite a lot of them were sure that if the toponyms in the poem were changed, part of the local history and culture would be lost, and in case toponyms were removed from the poem, part of the local history and culture would be lost. It should be added here, however, that quite a few Karakalpak and Kazakh respondents, surprisingly, expressed complete disagreement with the final two statements. Yet, despite some disagreement, the responses showing agreement, both complete and partial, are significantly dominant in all the three samples.

B. Qualitative Results

The qualitative analysis of the respondents' answers to the open-ended question allowed arranging them into thematic groups. As a result of the thematic analysis, the following thematic groups of responses were identified: (1) whether real place names used in the epic poem exist in the locations under discussion; (2) what toponyms from the poem are utilized on an official or daily basis; (3) how the respondents see the significance of place names in the local history and culture.

Among the toponyms that exist in the localities under consideration, many respondents mentioned the toponyms *Oyil* and *Kyil*, which are located on the territory of modern Kazakhstan. These toponyms were mentioned more than a hundred times. The toponyms *Qubakol* and *Qumykent* were mentioned in the students' responses 25 times. Most respondents believe that the toponyms *Qubakol* and *Qumykent* (translated as “a city of sand”) are a desert, although in the Kazakh and Tatar national versions these toponyms are found in the form of a city where the main hero of the epic, Edige, was born. The hydronyms *Kargaly* and *Elek* were mentioned 18 times in the respondents' answers. Some respondents also mentioned *Altyn Orda*, a khanate that appeared in the Nogai period; the main hero of the epic, Edige, lived and ruled the Golden Horde. In the respondents' answers, the Golden Horde (*Altyn Orda*) was mentioned 9 times. The respondents who mentioned the Golden Horde believe that all toponyms, despite the fact that they are not used in everyday life or do not exist on the map of modern Karakalpakstan, are a source of historical information related not only to culture but also to nature. Moreover, in the respondents' answers, it is stated that the toponyms reflect ancient migrations and interethnic contacts of the Turkic peoples.

Regarding the second theme, most respondents agreed that many toponyms are not found on the geographical map of modern Karakalpakstan, Kazakhstan or Tatarstan, but they are sure that the Turks, who led a nomadic lifestyle, once inhabited the banks of the rivers *Edil* and *Zhaiyk*. Therefore, it is no surprise that the respondents mentioned the toponyms *Edil* and *Zhaiyk* in their comments about 150 times. Moreover, according to some respondents, if the toponyms *Edil* and *Zhaiyk* are removed from the epic, the work will lose its importance, because they are a significant part of the lexicon of the poem “Edige”. All the toponyms that are found in the epic poem “Edige” determine the place and historical background of the action of the work. By naming the place of the characters’ movement, the narrator carries out a geographical concretization of the event described. All the toponyms found in the poem are real, and all of them are connected with the history of the Turkic peoples.

It is also important to note that respondents wrote that the above-mentioned toponyms are found not only in the epic poem “Edige”, but also in Karakalpak classical works. Many Karakalpak respondents indicated that the toponyms *Zhaiyk* and *Edil* are found, for example, in Karakalpak folk songs, which they often hear or sing themselves at traditional events. For example, the song “Zhailauym” (translated as “summer, stay on summer pastures”) describes the difficult life of the Karakalpaks after migrating from the land of Turkestan.

The respondents gave numerous comments on the significance of toponyms in the local history and culture. Below are selected comments to provide a general overview of the respondents’ opinions, regardless of their local belonging: “Toponyms are our memory of language, history and geography”; “We need toponyms to know where we live”; “It is important to know the history of our geography. It is important to know the places where our heroes fought for the sake of the country”; “The study of geographical names is of great scientific value, illuminating unknown facts from the distant depths of the history of a people, revealing obscure aspects of the directions of its migration, military alliances, etc.”; “Toponyms are a reflection of the history of a nation, they record various periods of development and prosperity of the language and culture of a society”; “Important place names for history and culture depend on the context and interests. For example, ancient cities such as Rome or Athens are of great importance for the history of civilization. In everyday situations, language depends on the place of residence, and the use of place names can be related to geography, history or culture”. Several responses mention the connection of place names with future: “The toponyms used in this poem will undoubtedly remain in history, serving as a good lesson for future generations”; “A world where history and culture are intertwined for our future”. Thus, Kazakh, Tatar and Karakalpak students are united in their belief that toponyms used in the national epos “Edige” are a valuable cultural heritage that reflects elements of the material and spiritual culture of the Turkic peoples.

IV. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUDING REMARKS

The current study was devoted to examining Turkic young representatives’ attitudes to the role of toponyms used in the well-known national epos “Edige” in preserving their nations’ cultural heritage. To the best of our knowledge, such an empirical analysis has not been performed so far. The results of our questionnaire are in fairly good agreement with those of the survey conducted by Hakala et al. (2015) in their investigation into the residents’ views on the role of toponyms as the carriers of identity and heritage being further transferred to the place brand. According to the researchers, place names have a significant historical and cultural value, and in carrying memories of the place’s past, they represent its collective memory. Furthermore, place names are closely related to place branding from the heritage perspective. The heritage perspective is what the researchers’ and our studies have in common. However, unlike the study on heritage as a tool for place branding, our research attempted to empirically establish relation between place names and national culture through national folklore.

As a result of the empirical investigation, toponyms in national folklore are shown to essentially contribute to the collective memory about a particular place and transferring it from one generation to another. In accordance with the participants’ responses to ten closed-ended and one open-ended questions, a significant number of Kazakh, Tatar and Karakalpak students believe that, although toponyms from the epic poem “Edige” are not widely used either in official documents or in everyday situations, they still perform an essential function in preserving the historical and cultural heritage of the Turkic peoples. Through toponyms, the respondents relate to places that are historically and culturally important, and the knowledge of their origins and meanings should be passed on from one generation to another thus preserving the cultural heritage. Based on the responses of modern speakers of such Turkic languages as Kazakh, Tatar and Karakalpak, we conclude that the knowledge of place names in epic literature contributes to the collective memory about certain places and passing it down through generations. Moreover, considering the relatively large number of “I neither agree nor disagree” responses, a serious step in the preservation of cultural heritage through place names in national folklore would be to integrate culturally meaningful narratives into education, as suggested by Toibazar et al. (2025). Probably, the frequent use of the option “I neither agree nor disagree” in the students’ responses to the statements in the questionnaire is indicative of the lack of culturally rich content comprising Turkic epic literature in the curriculum.

The current research has several limitations. Based on the results of the present investigation, it has been shown that place names employed in national versions of the famous Turkic epic poem reveal the common cultural code inherent in the Turkic peoples, as they are characterized by a common Nomadic lifestyle and culture (Kenbayeva et al., 2022). The respondents’ detailed comments confirm the idea of being united with the common cultural code (Pangereyev et al.,

2023). At the same time, the responses seem to lack comments showing any significant differences in perceiving individual cultures through place names. A further direction of the research could be to address the cultural originality of the Turkic peoples by focusing on aspects that seemed essential to those who named culturally important places (Lim Tyan Gin & Perono Cacciafoco, 2021) that would point at the specificity of the worldview and culture of a particular Turkic people. Moreover, the present study is limited by a relatively small research sample, especially the Tatar sample. A larger sample involving participants representing a wider geography of the Turkic peoples and a higher number of universities would permit more discrepancies between the various samples to be observed in the students' responses to the closed-ended questions. This would enable a better understanding of actual differences between the Turkic peoples allowing us to draw conclusions regarding their individuality.

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Language, Ideology, Power, and Persuasion: A Case in Arabic

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Abstract—The present paper handles the intricate relationship between language, power, ideology, and persuasion. The study tackles this important aspect of people's daily lives and focuses on religious discourse that aims at changing people's lives that could lead to subversive consequences. The researchers selected a well-known Arabic speech delivered to the inhabitants of Mecca (in Saudi Arabia) by a member of dissidents (Khawarij) and analyzed it within two frameworks, one proposed by Fairclough (2001) and the other proposed by Aristotle. The purpose of selecting these two models is to put the two to robust testing to find out which can successfully handle the chosen text well. After applying the former model, it was found that the chosen text has met all the points proposed by Fairclough in being so tightly woven as to be called a coherent and unified text. However, when the latter model was applied, it was found the speech failed to meet the three elements proposed by Aristotle, namely, logos, ethos, and pathos. The authors have found that the framework proposed by Fairclough is appropriate for texts that could be analyzed socio-linguistically, while the model proposed by Aristotle is more appropriate for religious and political speeches. It is hoped that this study and similar others underpin the relevant ongoing research and accentuate the intriguing and profound relationship between language, power, ideology, and persuasion. However, the speaker is unlikely to achieve what he intends if all or at least one of the Aristotelian rhetorical triangle's components are missing.

Index Terms—language, power, ideology, persuasion, religious

I. INTRODUCTION

Language plays a considerable and vital role in the lives of its speakers. Language can influence people's beliefs, conduct, and perception in various ways (see, for instance, the Sapir/Whorf Hypothesis, sometimes called 'Linguistic Relativity') (Whorf, 1964). Language has also become an increasingly main tool of social change and power. What is more crucial is to say that the forms of language are so imbued with assumptions that are solely ideological. Thus "the ideological nature of language should be one of the major themes of modern science" (Fairclough, 2000, p. 2).

Many other theorists try to draw this intimate relationship between society and language. Mackey (1973) tries to account for the power of language by calling his model a geo-linguistic adequacy. He states that the functions of language include three variables: language power, language attraction, and language pressure. Foucault (1980) describes the power of language by saying, "Power is an organ of repression." Kachru (1986) tries to elaborate on Foucault's model by raising a number of questions and points, some of which are how the power of language is manifested in society and whether language is really an organ or tool of oppression. To Foucault, language functions in circles or sometimes takes the form of a chain. Based on the whole model proposed by Kachru (1986), which describes the power of language in terms of parameters, the present writers believe that the power of Arabic can also be perceived in various parameters, a topic that lies outside the scope of this paper. De Kadt (1993) believes that language has two facets: overt and covert. The overt facet refers to the level language can play as a means of communication. The covert facet, on the other hand, refers to the level of effect language can have on its speakers. Sauer (1989) views ideology as harmful to the languages spoken in Holland when he talks about the situation of this country when it was occupied by the Nazi army. Woolard et al. (1994, p. 55) discuss language ideologies, a subject that has already been discussed but requires further clarification. In their introduction, they say that there is as much variation in ideas about speech as there is in speech itself.

Crystal (1997) talks about the power of English when it spread in various domains in vast areas of the globe. In the same vein, we can talk about Arabic, which spread even faster than English in less than one hundred years to cover a vast area that extends from the Wall of China to the Danube River in Europe. However, one has to add that language per se does not possess the power that we know about it; it is the speakers of the language that provide that language with this type of power (Wodak, 1989). Weber (1914) was probably the first to talk about the power of governments and their institutions. He said that power can be obtained through dominance or by consent of the people.

Furthermore, Robin believes that power falls into two traditions: one is the mainstream in the form of governments and religious foundations, and the other is the second-stream, which is interested in the significance of its persuasive influence (see also Gramsci, 1971). Simpson and Mayor (2010) state that power needs to be legitimized, and this can be achieved

through language and other systems of communication. They also add that power can be obtained through vital social resources such as education, knowledge, and wealth.

The crux of this paper discusses the complex relationship between language, ideology, power, and persuasion. Ideology and persuasion are probably inveterate, as we see in various events and stories in the current world. The three above elements (i.e., language, ideology, and power) will never work alone unless persuasion is reached. The dramatic roles of these three factors in changing the feelings, attitudes, and beliefs of people are based on a host of techniques, tactics, and strategies. This piques our interest in what we witness in the status quo in the Middle East, where some leaders of various religious groups address their followers and are capable of convincing them to obey and carry out their orders, even if they are asked to bomb themselves or kill their close relatives.

It stands to reason to inquire about the great impact of eloquent speech and its effect on the audience. One example mentioned by Mahmoud (1979) is Father Jim Jones, a religious reformer and leader of a Protestant sect in California. At the beginning of his movement, this man called his followers to virtue and good deeds, but behind his eloquence and good fluency of speech, he hid the ugly face of a man of drugs, sex, and crimes. Despite the blessings he received from various well-known figures, such as President Carter, the man's ugly face was uncovered when he called his followers to group suicide, and in a limited time, about nine hundred of his followers, including Jones himself, committed suicide. The ugliest phase of this crime is that whole families, including children, men, women, and old and young people, committed suicide. It is only through the orders of Jones that those people killed themselves. It is indeed the power of language and the stunning power of the leader's words that could make the leader's speech part of one's beliefs or creed. In the same vein, we have witnessed similar actions of people blowing themselves up in mosques or churches or obituary gatherings.

One really wonders which miraculous forms of language one leader may use to convince his followers to commit suicide or blow themselves up among a group of innocent people or soldiers. What happens to the minds of followers when they hear the stunning words combined with the wonderful tone of their leader? What type of mental state do followers reach under the great effect of the leader's words and expressions? It is indeed an impressive and stirring form of language that a leader enjoys and employs to persuade his followers of the intended message.

The approach that is adopted here views language as something dynamic in the sense that it is a tool that could change the social structure, relations, and identities. It is also a tool of producing and reproducing (Simpson & Mayor, 2010, p. 50). According to Aristotle, there are three tools that help language or speech to be persuasive: a) personal character; b) evocative speech that stirs emotions and brings vivid images; and c) persuasive argumentation to prove a truth. Despite the attributes of the speech, Al-Shari failed to convince the people of Mecca to accept what he alleged to be true, simply because his speech was not persuasive.

II. PERSUASION AND SPEECH

According to Simone (1976, p. 21), persuasion is "a human communication that is designed to influence others by modifying their beliefs, values, or attitudes." For a speech to be convincing, the speaker must come across as trustworthy and knowledgeable about the topic he discusses. He can earn the audience's trust if:

1. He knows a lot about the topic.
2. He prepares well for how to defeat or refute counterarguments.
3. He could come to his points before the audience got bored.
4. He could estimate who the audience is.
5. He considers the audience's age, gender, cultural and religious background, shared attitudes, shared beliefs and hopes, and baseline attitudes: are they hostile, neutral, or open to change?

Thus, "persuasion is not a matter of coercion or accident, but it is inherently communicational" (Dainton, 2004). According to Petty and Cacioppo (1986), persuasion is essentially seen as a cognitive event, meaning that the recipients of the persuasive message employ reasoning and motivational processes in their minds. To them, for the message to be persuasive, it depends on two points: (1) The target must be highly motivated to process all the information being given, and (2) must be able to process the message cognitively. According to Miller et al. (1976) and Smith and Shaffer (1995), persuasion is linked to speech rate. When the message is rejected, something called a boomerang happens, and this is the case with the speech of Abu Hamzat-l-Shari.

III. METHODOLOGY

Data of the Study

This study addresses Al Shari's speech delivered to the people of Hijaz, instigating them to rise against the rule of the Umayyad leader. The paper focuses on several artistic images, such as metaphoric and idiomatic expressions, which are derived from the surrounding environment and ancient Arab life. Such expressions are obviously employed by the speaker to express intense emotions and ideas that create powerful connections. This is obvious in the way he used verbs, adjectives, and passive voice, to mention a few. The layout of the paper is based on the framework proposed by Fairclough (2001).

The argument starts by analyzing the text (see the appendix) through looking at the selection of patterns of vocabulary, the structures employed by the speaker, and textual tools of cohesion, unity, and coherence as indicated in the following section.

Data Analysis

This study analyzes a masterpiece of speech attributed to a leader of a religious group named the Dissidents (Khawarij). He is called Abu Hamzata-l-Shari. This piece was written in prose but was delivered as a speech to a group of the inhabitants of Mecca, Saudi Arabia.

The speaker wanted the people of Mecca to join him in his revolution against the Umayyad rulers at that time. His speech is filled with a lot of religious words and expressions. For instance, he claimed that he and his followers were faithful to Islam and that they were true followers of Prophet Mohammad (PBUH). They pray at night and fast in the daytime. When it is the time of fighting, one can see them in the vanguard of any battlement. So, some of them died in the battle while their bodies were attacked by birds and wild animals in the battlefield.

The speaker appears to be so eloquent and effective and shows sheer chutzpah. In this speech, the speaker put himself squarely in the middle of great competitions that ignited at that time. This appears crystal clear in the selection of words, phrases, clauses, and other structures. His sermon has been preserved in collections of early Arabic rhetoric and was admired for its eloquence and moral flavor. But the crucial question is: Could this speaker convince the people of Mecca of his message?

IV. DISCUSSIONS

Dimensions of Analyzing the Target Language

The speaker employed a number of metaphors and idioms. Some of these metaphors are:

As if the breath of Hellfire was in their ears

as if there was extremely hot air in their ears

He was terrified by the strikes of death.

The ground consumed their foreheads,

and their knees went yellow from persistent praying and fasting.

They prostrate according to the orders of the Holy Quran.

The battlement litters (i.e., the beginning of a battle).

Analysis of this sample shows that the selected vocabulary for this occasion is ideologically contested. The speaker claims that his followers are similar to those of the Prophet's companions in that they pray and worship Allah regularly; they perform night prayers to the extent that their bodies are exhausted and their faces turned pale. The selected vocabulary is formal, drawn from Standard Arabic, which is used merely for this occasion and similar other purposes. The words carry expressive values in the sense that they are evaluative in nature. The leader was describing his followers as if they were the companions of the Prophet (PBUH); they were committed to the faith of Islam.

As far as verbs are concerned, they are used as dynamic rather than stative. This is justified on the ground that the speaker wanted the inhabitants of Mecca to believe that his followers are real men, committed to the faith of Islam, pious, brave, and ascetic.

As for adjectives, there are many adjectives used by the speaker to describe his followers, such as people who stay late at night (to pray to Allah, in the middle of the night); Allah observed them reciting the Noble Quran and praying; when they read an ayah discussing paradise, they would cry out longing for paradise; see glowing faces covered in blood; wild birds swoop in and beasts hurry to eat their corpses after death; many others had deep cuts from iron bars on their cheeks.

The speaker here uses adjectives in this spiritual speech to enhance understanding, evoke emotions, and paint vivid pictures for his audience. He intends to add details and nuance to descriptions, making the message more relatable and impactful. He also intends to convey his attitude and perspective, guiding the audience to interpret the message.

At another level, many other sentences in the speech are passive, describing the followers as pious, young, and shrewd, with weak bodies and pale faces due to constant praying and fasting. The purpose of using the passive voice is to demonstrate interest in the individuals who experience the activity rather than those who merely carry it out.

In this manner, the most significant item serves as the sentence's main focus and subject:

Examples are:

Faces covered with blood

Palm hands are cut from their wrists.

The swords were pulled.

They were worn out from worshipping and weak and emaciated.

Their backs were bent down because of the frequent prostration to Allah.

The tone of all the sentences is saturated or imbued with certainty, and they are direct. The speaker is certain of what his followers are really like. It seems as if he envisages that there are no people similar to them at his time. They are really ideal or unique in their type. Thus, there is no single word that expresses possibility or probability, but the words themselves are obvious and express certainty.

A. Demonstratives

Spiritual speakers use demonstratives (words like "this," "that," "here," and "there") to point to specific concepts, ideas, or experiences that are central to their message, often to make them more tangible or relatable to the audience. This can involve drawing attention to a particular feeling, a past event, or a spiritual principle, helping listeners connect with the speaker's message on a deeper level.

B. *The Definite Article*

The definite article in Arabic, namely (al) 'the,' is so frequent and common. Thus, in the present Arabic text, it has been repeated nineteen times. The definite article is used with prominent words such as the Holy Quran, Hellfire, and earth. It is used here for emphasis. This emphasis often highlights the uniqueness or particular importance of the noun being referred to.

C. *Pronouns*

All the employed pronouns appear annexed to either nouns or prepositions. They appear annexed to nouns thirty-two times while to prepositions six times. The reason is that nouns carry a 'heavier' meaning than pronouns. Nouns are typically preferred by readers or listeners over pronouns because they convey more precise meanings. The pronouns used in the text are 'you' and 'they.' The former pronoun refers to the inhabitants of Mecca, while the latter refers to the speaker's followers. There is, however, one single pronoun that refers to the speaker himself, which is 'me.' This appears at the beginning of the text but disappears later.

D. *Comparatives*

The text does not include any comparatives, but the used words all indicate that the speaker's followers are better than those who do not join them. Furthermore, there is no single euphoric word in the text due to the possibility of misunderstanding, abuse or perceived lack of sincerity. The speaker's concern was to emphasize reverence, wisdom, and moral guidance.

E. *Ellipsis*

There is no single example of ellipsis. Given the speech is religious, the speaker is so willing to avoid any form of ellipsis because his speech is motivational, which aims to inspire and encourage individuals to take action. The speaker's intention is to evoke strong emotions and create a sense of motivation and determination in the listeners. They allow for more nuanced communication, enabling speakers to express subtle differences, evaluations, and even social meanings. Martin (2001) refers to demonstratives, pronouns, comparatives, adverbs (i.e., here, there, now, then), and definite articles as references. The speaker tends to use them very often for precision and expressiveness.

F. *Substitution*

There is no single example of substitution, whether it be verbal, nominal, or clausal. While substitution aims to help link the parts of the text to each other and maintain consistency, the speaker here avoids any kind of substitution in this speech. As a religious discourse, the speech is centered on Almighty God and devotion to Him. It is realistic and symbolic, aiming to have a bearing on the audience reaction. For this reason, he avoids substitution and repetition that is boring and tedious.

G. *Conjunctions*

Here one looks at how strings and chains of utterances interact. In Arabic, the most common conjunction is *wa*, meaning 'and'. This has been repeated sixteen times. However, '*wa*' has been used either to conjoin sentences or phrases. The latter outnumbers the former. This is due to the succession of short descriptions given regarding the followers of the speaker. Indeed, this string of descriptions has created a beautiful line of cohesive harmony. The use of *wa* in this speech is meant to provide more information and give reasons for the actions performed by the companions of the Prophet to arouse interest in what they were doing and motivate people of Mecca to follow in their steps.

H. *Lexical Cohesion*

This sort of cohesion refers to the repetition of certain words, synonyms, antonyms, and collocations. The present text includes the words: Allah, *shabab* ('the youth'), *?ard* ('the earth'), *kam min* ('how many'), *Jannah* ('paradise'), and *sibaaC* ('beasts'). The speaker also used some synonyms, such as *sharr* and *baTil*, 'evil and vice.' When we consider collocations, we find more examples, such as *Jannan* and *nar* 'paradise and hellfire,' *Qiyam* and *Siyam* 'prayer and fasting,' *shabab* and *kahl* 'young and old,' *Cahd* and *waCd* 'commitment and promise,' and in *Salatat* 'swords pulled.' Lexical cohesion is used to connect ideas and create a sense of unity.

Martin (2001, p. 31) states that 'the relationship between a cohesive item and the item it presupposed in a text is referred to as a cohesive tie.' In the present text, the speaker depends on lexical cohesion, as he selected a number of lexical items that fit well with the description he gave regarding his followers. By all means, the analysis of a certain text is based on one's register.

All of these items discussed above make a text cohesive. In the words of Halliday and Hasan (1976, p. 23), 'The concept of cohesion can therefore be usefully supplemented by register, since the two together effectively define a text. A text is

a passage of discourse that is coherent in these two regards: it is coherent with respect to the context of the situation and therefore consistent in register, and it is coherent with respect to itself and hence cohesive.'

V. DISCUSSION BASED ON FAIRCLOUGH'S FRAMEWORK

The nature of the text in question is religious, one important parameter behind the dissemination of Arabic in the world, as it describes a certain religious sect called *Al-Khawarij* (the Dissidents). The speech was actually reproduced many times and sometimes surreptitiously in some areas as a masterpiece of literature. Thus, it spread from one area to another, from Mecca in the Arabian Peninsula to countries like Syria, Iraq, and Egypt, till it reached our place of living. The type of parameter involved in this type of spread is the demographic parameter. People usually quote this speech as an example of an eloquent piece of work that is unified and coherent with well-organized structures and well-chosen vocabulary and metaphors. The researchers like to call this the functional parameter.

As opposed to functional parameters, social practice underlines the intimate relationship between power and ideology. This relationship is represented and advanced by the use of discourses that (re)produce, challenge, or transform in one way or another. What one can emphasize is that discourse is employed to convince followers to accept certain cultural, political, and ethical values associated with the leader, speaker, group, or party (i.e., hegemony). This view is well considered in Fairclough's model, which views society in terms of ideological processes of change in hegemony. To him, power can generally be obtained through coercion or consent. The former can be obtained militarily or politically, while the latter can generally be obtained by the language of a certain thread of thought. He identified a number of hegemonic processes, which he sees as indicative of wider changes in discourse practice or in orders of discourse in society.

Fairclough (1992, 1995) refers to any discourse as a text, which is a three-dimensional phenomenon that includes text, discourse practice, and social practice. To him, discourse is a text that includes certain vocabulary, grammar, cohesion (i.e., the use of conjunctions, synonyms, and antonyms), and text structure (e.g., turn-taking). Discourse is a discourse practice when we pay attention to the process of producing a text, its distribution, and its consumption. The producer of this text is a religious leader of an Islamic sect called the dissidents (*Khawarij*). He produced this text to show and disseminate the beliefs of his sect. Despite the high level of eloquence of the man, we have not heard of the great effect of his speech, as not many followers joined his sect. However, his speech is still quoted as a highly intertwined text, and the vocabulary is well-chosen to the extent that many of the used words are not familiar to even modern educated Arabic speakers, such as *andaa'u Cibaada*, *aTlaaHu Sahar*, *wa-Siyufuhum qad in Salat*, and *ramilat mahsinu wajhihi*.

The speaker employed a number of conjunctions in his speech. These conjunctions are so common in Arabic, such as (*wa*) 'and', (*?itha*) 'if', and (*kam min*) 'how many...'. The speaker also used a question that triggers a positive answer when he said, 'The companions of the Prophet were not young?!' The sequence of descriptions the speaker gave regarding his followers was so impressive. This sequence makes his speech so eloquent and effective. Some of these descriptions are metaphoric, such as (*ka?aan zafir Jahannam fi?uthanayh*), 'as if the breath of Hellfire is in his ears,' and (*qad?akalt?al?ard jibahuhum w-aydihim w=aarjuluhum*), 'earth had eaten their foreheads, hands, and legs.' This is a common use of metaphors to express or embody ideology. The researcher could coin this as 'body metaphors' on the analogy of Fairclough's (1989, p. 20) term 'discourse metaphor'.

All the words used by the speaker include very harsh and strong sounds saturated and loaded with 'heavy' meanings relevant to exerting a lot of effort, whether in worshipping Allah, the Almighty, or in fighting the enemy. These sounds include [k], [q], [f], [h], [C], and [h]. All such sounds require a lot of effort in production and can easily impress the audience. Thus, the words that include these sounds seem so effective and persuasive. As a result, the speech sounds so aesthetically pleasing, and the yielded words include well-thought-out forms. This finding aligns with Robert Tennyson Stevens' (2003, 2004) belief that "our choice of language can either hamper or enhance our ability to create the experience of our choice." We also perceive here how the concept of power is productive and enhances the textual tools such as cohesion, unity, and coherence (Foucault, 1980).

Halliday (1994, p. 309) defines cohesion as 'a set of resources for constructing relations in discourse that transcend grammatical structures.' One cannot talk about cohesion apart from texture. The latter is defined as 'the process whereby a reading position is naturalized by texts for listeners/readers.' (Martin, 2001, p. 35) According to Halliday and Hasan (1976), the inventory of cohesion includes the following resources: reference, ellipsis, substitution, conjunctions, and lexical cohesion.

VI. DISCUSSION BASED ON ARISTOTLE'S FRAMEWORK

Aristotle believes that if a certain speaker or writer plans his speech or text to be convincing, he has to meet three conditions, or his speech/text has to include three elements: logos, ethos, and pathos as the figure shows below:

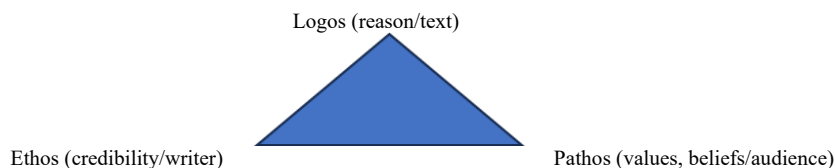


Figure 1.

In other words, if a speaker or writer wants to convince or persuade his audience, his argument has to be reasonable enough. His speech or text has to be logical and based on real things or evidence that the audience believes to be true and cannot be denied. On the other hand, the acceptability of speech and text is very closely related to the character of the speaker or the writer. This time it is the type of personality and identity of the speaker/writer that plays a vital role. The audience has to trust the speaker/writer regarding what he says or writes as undeniably true. This is Ethos.

For a certain text to be pathos, it must include values and beliefs that the audience takes for granted and form part of their beliefs and probably creed. Now if we apply the three elements of Aristotle to the speech delivered by Al-Shari, we can conclude the following: First, the people of Mecca believed all the features he cited regarding the companions of the Prophet (PBUH) but were doubtful about all the features or characteristics he mentioned regarding his troops or fighters. He did not crystallize the real and true characteristics of his followers. It seems that the people of Mecca felt that the knights and other followers that joined Al-Shari were by no means similar to the companions of the Prophet (PBUH). Thus, the first element fails to help Al-Shari convince those people of his argument.

If we apply the second element, namely ethos, we find that the people of Mecca did not even know Al-Shari himself or even his followers. Thus, Al-Shari could not appeal to his status or authority. Lastly, the audience's emotions are not evoked by the third component, pathos. This shows that the speaker's argument failed to persuade the audience by evoking feelings or emotions or being sympathetic with him. Unfortunately, Al-Shari failed to evoke any sort of feeling or perception in the audience to accept his words or believe him, even though part of his ideas were true when he talked about the traits of the companions of the Prophet. Therefore, according to Aristotle's rhetorical triangle, Al-Shari could not be an eloquent speaker, as his speech did not conform with the elements of the triangle. In fact, the people of Mecca killed him as a result of this.

VII. CONCLUSION

This paper has adopted two different frameworks, one by Fairclough and the other by Aristotle. The former model seems more like a linguistic one, while the latter is more logical and philosophical. It seems crystal clear that if the speech of a person is well-woven and shows the skills of its speaker, this does not guarantee that it will be convincing and logical. There must be other mental processes that accompany these well-woven structures to render the speech convincing and motivating. Thus, the authors of this paper agree with Petty and Cacioppo (1986) that persuasion is primarily viewed as a cognitive event, which means the target of the persuasive message utilizes logic and motivational processes to decide whether to accept or reject the message.

Fairclough fails to meet some points or conditions of a persuasive speech, mentioned above. For instance, his framework fails to include the speaker having to estimate who the audience is. Also, Fairclough's framework did not take into account the age, gender, and cultural background and the shared attitudes of the audience. Since the speech of Al-Shari is devoid of these conditions, his speech will lead, according to Miller et al. (1976), to a boomerang (i.e., rejection). Categorically, the speech given by Abu Hamza al-Shari has proven to be unique as an example of the intimate relationship between language, power, and ideology but is deprived of the important factors of persuasion that Aristotle talked about, despite the fact that he was so careful to tout his own words.

The speech is shaped by power as it is imbued with ideological expressions. The man seems so careful in his selection of words, expressions, and clauses, which are all drawn from Standard Arabic, a form of Arabic that was easily understood by the Arabs at that time. He enjoyed advantages of power over maladroits or amateurs of his time. In the words of Althusser (1971), this power is a discursive phenomenon. Despite all these assets of his speech, Al-Shari was later shunned, assaulted, and killed by the people of Mecca because his speech did not rise to meet all the challenges of his time. Given that the speaker belonged to a religious sect that is distinct from the overwhelming Sunni population in Mecca, his remarks lacked credibility.

APPENDIX A. THE ARABIC TEXT

يا اهل مكة أتعبروني بأصحابي وتزعمون انهم شباب، وهل كان اصحاب رسول الله (صلى) الا شباب؟ نعم شباب مكتهلون، عميه عن الشر اعينهم، ناكبه عن الباطل ارجلهم، انضاء عبادته واطلاح سهر، قد نظر الله اليهم في جوف الليل منتنيه اصلاهم بمثاني القران، اذا مر احدهم بابيه فيها ذكر الجنه، بكى شوقا اليها، واذا مر بابيه فيها ذكر النار، شهق شهقه كان زفير جهنم في اذنيه، وصلوا كلال ليالهم بكلال نهارهم انضاء عبادته قد اكلت الارض جباههم وايديهم وركبهم مصفره، الوانهم ناحله اجسادهم من طول قيام وكثره صيام، يستقلون ذلك في جنب الله موفون بعهده منجزون لوعده، اذا راوا سهام العدو قد فوقت ورماحهم قد شرعت وسيوفهم قد انصلت وابرقت الكتفيه وارعدت بصواعق الموت، استهانوا بوعد الكتفيه لوعده الله، فمضى الشاب منهم قدما حتى اختلقت رجلاه على عنق فرسه، وتخصبت بالدم محاسن وجهه، وعفر جبينه التراب، واسرعت اليه سباع الأرض، وانحطت عليه طير السماء فكم من عين في منقار طير طالما

بكى صاحبها من خشية الله؟! وكم من كف بانته من معصمها طالما اعتمد عليها صاحبها في جوف الليل في ركوعه وسجوده، وكم من خد عتيق رقيق قد فلق بعمد الحديد - رحمت الله على تلك الابدان وادخلهم بفضلهم في الجنان، ثم قال - الناس منا ونحن منهم الا عابد وثن وكفره الكتاب وامام جائر

APPENDIX B. THE ENGLISH TRANSLATION OF THE SPEECH

Oh, Meccan populace! Do you criticize me for hanging out with young people? The companions of the Prophet were not young? They were, in fact, youthful yet wise in that they were not drawn to evil. They turn away from dishonesty. Because they were often praying, they were weak and emaciated. The night prayers had left them exhausted. In the middle of the night, Allah observed them reciting the Noble Quran and praying.

At this point, when they read an ayah discussing paradise, they would cry out longing for it, but when they read an ayah about hellfire, they would inhale as if there was extremely hot air in their ears. Worshipping Allah day and night had worn them out. They felt as though they had accomplished nothing in comparison to Allah's bounties. The ground consumed their foreheads, and their knees went yellow from persistent praying and fasting. They fulfilled their duties and commitment to Allah. They quickly fulfilled their duty and dedication to their Lord as their opponents shot arrows over their heads, spears rose in the air, swords were pulled, and the battalion roared and flashed their swords. For this reason, these young men were eager to answer the call for the sake of Allah's promise whenever the enemy launched arrows, placed spears above their heads, or flashed their swords in a roar.

You would witness young men fighting until they died on horses, see glowing faces covered in blood, and see dust on their foreheads because Allah had promised them heaven.

Wild birds swoop in, and beasts hurry to eat their corpses after death. These birds often have eyes of the dead on their beaks. The handwritings that their owners used to bow and kneel in prayer were also lost by a great number of young men. Many others had deep cuts from iron bars on their cheeks. May Allah have pity on those people's bodies and let them go to heaven. Then he declared, except for atheists, idolaters, adherents of certain religions, and followers of tyrants, all people are part of us, and we are part of them.

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Memory Trauma and the Making of the New Human: Abai as Cultural Hero

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Abstract—This paper explores how the legacy of Kazakh poet and thinker Abai Kunanbayuli (1845–1904) has been reframed through translation as part of Soviet and post-Soviet nation-building projects. Drawing on postcolonial theory, especially Gayatri Spivak’s concept of “epistemic violence” and Walter Mignolo’s “epistemic delinking,” the study examines how translations of Abai’s *Book of Words* have shaped ideological narratives about the “New Human.” Using a trilingual corpus – original Kazakh, Soviet-era Russian (1945), and post-Soviet English (2020) – the study combines corpus linguistics with close reading to reveal subtle but systematic shifts in meaning. Soviet translations emphasized rationalism and social critique, marginalizing spiritual or religious content to align Abai with the Soviet ideal of enlightenment and progress. Terms like “faith” (iman) were often replaced with “honesty,” and Islamic idioms were secularized or omitted. The result was a version of Abai as a proto-socialist intellectual, reinforcing Soviet cultural legitimacy. In contrast, post-independence translations restore suppressed content and prioritize fidelity to Abai’s cultural context. Religious terms, indigenous metaphors, and idiomatic expressions are retained and annotated, allowing Abai’s voice to resonate with contemporary Kazakh identity. The paper situates Abai alongside other postcolonial figures such as Tagore, Fanon, and Yupanqui, showing how translation mediates cultural memory. Ultimately, the study argues that translation is not neutral – it can either perpetuate colonial hierarchies or serve as a site of epistemic healing. By decolonizing Abai’s text, modern translations contribute to a more pluralistic, self-determined vision of the “new Kazakh human,” integrating spiritual heritage with global modernity.

Index Terms—Abai Kunanbayuli, translation, postcolonial theory, epistemic violence, decolonization

I. INTRODUCTION

In the context of Central Asian postcolonial studies, the figure of Abai Kunanbayuli (Abai) stands as a cultural hero whose life and works encapsulate the complex interplay of colonial memory, trauma, and identity formation. Abai (1845–1904) was a Kazakh poet, thinker, and educator whose writings – especially his *Book of Words* (Qara Sözder) – bridge indigenous Kazakh traditions and the modern influences of the Russian Empire. This bridging role has made Abai a malleable symbol, recast by successive generations to serve differing ideological ends. During the Soviet era, Abai was canonized as a usable historical figure to legitimize Soviet power in Kazakhstan. His image as an Enlightenment-era prophet of progress and socialism was propagated to support the Soviet project of forging the “New Soviet Man.” In the post-Soviet period, however, Abai has been reinterpreted and “decolonized” as a font of authentic Kazakh cultural wisdom and national spirit. These shifting representations speak to a broader postcolonial memory trauma: the collective cultural dissonance and loss caused by colonial domination and the subsequent struggle to reclaim an indigenous voice and identity.

This paper examines *how Abai’s textual legacy has been translated and reimagined* across the Soviet and post-Soviet eras, and what this reveals about the construction of the “New Human” in a colonized society. We adopt Gayatri

Spivak's postcolonial framework of subalternity and "epistemic violence" (the discursive silencing or reshaping of colonized voices) to analyze translations of Abai's. In particular, we consider Spivak's famous question "Can the Subaltern Speak?" in the context of Abai's works: to what extent can Abai's authentic voice "speak" through translations done under colonial (Soviet) auspices, and how do those translations sometimes *speak for* (or over) him, enacting epistemic violence? We also draw on decolonial theory, notably Walter D. Mignolo's concept of *delinking*, to understand post-1991 efforts to reclaim Abai's voice from colonial narratives. By centering Abai's works original Kazakh text and comparing it with its Soviet-era Russian translation and post-Soviet translations (including direct Kazakh-English renditions), we aim to identify shifts in language, emphasis, and ideology. These shifts are quantitatively explored through corpus-based methods (keyword frequencies, collocation patterns, simple topic modeling) and qualitatively interpreted through the lens of postcolonial theory.

Conceptually, our study treats "memory trauma" as the cultural and historical trauma resulting from colonization – manifest in the distortions and gaps in collective memory imposed by colonial discourse. Abai's case exemplifies this: under Soviet rule, certain aspects of his legacy were amplified (his calls for learning, critique of "backward" customs) while others were suppressed or reframed (spiritual and autonomist elements), creating a partial memory of Abai aligned with Soviet ideology. The "making of the new human" refers to the ideological project of creating a new type of person. The Soviet regime sought to transform the indigenous Kazakh nomad into a modern socialist citizen (the "New Soviet Man"), often leveraging figures like Abai as proof that local culture inherently strove towards socialist values. In the postcolonial present, Kazakh intellectuals seek to form a "decolonial new human" – a modern Kazakh who can embrace global knowledge without colonial subjugation, healing the traumas of the past. We will argue that the re-translation and re-interpretation of Abai's works are integral to this healing process, restoring silenced nuances and allowing Abai's subaltern voice to speak to new generations on its own terms.

II. MATERIALS AND METHODS

Our analysis is grounded in postcolonial theory with a focus on Spivak's concept of the *subaltern* and *representational bias*. Spivak (1988) argues that subaltern voices (colonized, marginalized peoples) are often unable to "speak" in the power-laden discourse of the colonizer – their voices are mediated, distorted or ignored by colonial epistemologies. In the case of Abai, writing in the colonized Kazakh steppe, we treat his original Kazakh text as a subaltern voice that later became mediated by Soviet translators. We also employ Spivak's notion of "epistemic violence", which refers to the harm done to colonized subjects by overwriting their ways of knowing and expression with colonial interpretations. The act of translation, especially under unequal power conditions, can perpetrate epistemic violence by subtly changing meaning to fit the dominant ideology (Spivak, 1993). Our working hypothesis was that the Soviet-era translations of Abai's works, though ostensibly faithful, were inflected with Soviet ideological language and priorities, thereby partially silencing or reshaping Abai's intentions (much as Spivak's translators of Bengali texts often domesticated the voice of the original). In contrast, we expected post-independence translations to strive for fidelity to Abai's voice and context, as part of a decolonial reclaiming of his legacy.

Additionally, we drew on decolonial theory, particularly the work of Mignolo (2011) on "*epistemic delinking*". Decolonial scholars argue that formerly colonized nations must *delink* from colonial epistemologies and develop their own pluriversal (plural and diverse) ways of knowing. Abai's text can be seen as an indigenous epistemic resource; thus, translating Abai directly from Kazakh (rather than via Russian) and interpreting him through local lenses are acts of delinking from colonial knowledge structures. We also kept in view Achille Mbembe's (2003) concept of *necropolitics* – power over life and death – insofar as colonial rule in Kazakhstan not only exerted physical violence (e.g., the sedentarization campaigns and famine of the 1930s) but also metaphorical "death" of cultural memory (through script changes, censorship, etc.). While Mbembe's framework is more political, it contextualizes the "memory trauma" inflicted by Soviet policies (e.g., suppressing certain aspects of Kazakh culture could be seen as killing parts of that culture). Our primary lens, however, remained on discourse and representation rather than physical violence.

Finally, to connect to the "making of the new human", we considered Frantz Fanon's writings on how the struggle against colonialism creates a new consciousness or "new man" (Fanon, 1963). Fanon's vision is revolutionary and born of violent resistance, which differs from Abai's context – Abai advocated gradual enlightenment and moral reform rather than open revolt. Nonetheless, Fanon's idea that the colonized must fundamentally remake themselves to overcome the inferiority imposed by colonization is conceptually useful. We interpret the Soviet project of the "New Soviet Human" as an externally imposed remaking (often coercive and accompanied by trauma), whereas the postcolonial re-reading of Abai supports an internally driven remaking of the national self that heals trauma. These theoretical considerations informed the kinds of linguistic and thematic patterns we looked for in the texts.

We assembled a trilingual corpus comprising: (1) Abai's *original Kazakh texts*, primarily the 45 prose essays known as the *Qara Sözder* ("Words" or "Book of Words"), which were mostly written between 1890-1898; (2) a Soviet-era translation of these texts; and (3) a post-Soviet translation. The original Kazakh corpus was compiled from a critical Kazakh edition of Abai's works (in Cyrillic script). For the Soviet-era translation, we selected the first Russian translation of the *Book of Words* published in 1945 by Victor Shklovsky (revised edition 1979). Shklovsky's translation, titled *Slova Nazidaniya* ("Words of Edification"), was produced in Stalin's USSR for Abai's 100th anniversary and became the canonical Soviet-era text, reprinted for decades. For the post-Soviet translation, we used the recent direct

English translation published in 2020 by the National Bureau of Translations (translated by J. Burnside and colleagues). This English edition, published by Cambridge University Press, is particularly significant as it represents the first time Abai's *Book of Words* was rendered into English directly from Kazakh, rather than via Russian. We chose it as an exemplar of post-Soviet approaches because it was explicitly designed to be *as close to the original as possible*, free of Soviet-era mediations. To ensure comparability, we also cross-checked a modern Russian re-translation (the 1993 Almaty edition of *Slova Nazidaniya* by S. Sanbaeva) and found its content largely similar to Shklovsky's, confirming that any Soviet-era ideological adaptations carried through in Russian editions up to the 1990s. Thus, the main contrast is between Soviet-era translated text (as represented by Shklovsky) and post-independence translated text (Burnside's direct translation), with the Kazakh original as the reference point.

Our analysis combined quantitative corpus linguistics techniques with close reading informed by theory:

- We first computed word frequency lists for each corpus (after removing common function words appropriate to each language). From these lists, we identified a set of key thematic words relevant to Abai's content and our theoretical focus: for example, words related to religion ("God", "faith", "soul"), knowledge and learning ("knowledge", "science", "book", "learn"), social identity ("Kazakh", "steppe", "Russian", "tribe/people"), morality ("virtue", "vice", "shame", "honor"), and material life ("cattle", "wealth", "labor", "idleness"). We then compared the frequencies of these across the original and translated texts. The goal was to see if certain semantic fields were systematically under- or over-represented in translation. A keyness analysis (log-likelihood comparison) was performed to identify words that were significantly more or less frequent in the translation relative to the original. This can highlight, for instance, if the Soviet translator tended to *omit or dilute* certain terms (e.g., reducing religious references) or to *insert or emphasize* others (e.g., terms implying progress or enlightenment).
- We examined the immediate contexts (collocates) of selected key terms in each corpus to detect shifts in meaning or connotation. For example, we analyzed how the concept of "God" is discussed in original vs. translation: Abai often uses phrases like "Құдай сақтасын" ("may God save [us]") or discusses *iman* (faith) in a didactic manner. We checked if the Russian translation retained these references or modified them (e.g., by using more secular or generalized language). Similarly, we looked at the collocates of "Kazakh" and "Russian" in the texts. In the original, Abai frequently juxtaposes Kazakhs with other groups (Russians, "Sarts" [Uzbeks], etc.) in sometimes critical ways – e.g., "There is nothing to say about the Russians; we [Kazakhs] cannot compare even with their servants" (Word 2). We assessed whether the translation toned down such statements or left them intact. Collocation analysis was facilitated by concordance software: we generated concordance lines for terms like *Kazakh*, *Russian*, *Allah/God*, *science*, etc., and manually compared a sample of 50 concordances from each language. This qualitative concordance reading was crucial to interpret not just presence/absence of words, but *how* they were used. We noted any systematic changes, such as added modifiers or explanatory phrasing in the translations.

III. RESULTS

Our frequency analysis revealed *subtle but telling* differences in the lexical profile of Abai's text when rendered in the Soviet-era translation versus the post-Soviet translation. Table 1 summarizes the frequencies of selected keywords representing important semantic domains in Abai's *Book of Words*. These include terms related to religion, knowledge, social identity, and morality. For clarity, we present the counts in the original Kazakh text alongside those in the Soviet Russian translation and the 2020 direct English translation.

TABLE 1
FREQUENCY OF SELECTED THEMATIC WORDS IN ABAI'S *BOOK OF WORDS* ACROSS ORIGINAL AND TRANSLATED VERSIONS

Concept	Key Word (Kazakh)	Original Kazakh	Soviet Translation	Post-Soviet Translation
Divine/Religion	Qudaı ("God" or "Allah")	15 occurrences	14 occurrences	15 occurrences
	Iman ("faith, belief")	9	8	9
Knowledge/Education	Bilim ("knowledge")	12	14	12
	Gılym ("science, lore")	8	8	8
Identity (Ethnic)	Qazaq ("Kazakh")	10	9	10
	Orys ("Russian")	8	8	8
Morality/Values	Ar ("honor")	5	5	5
	Uyat ("shame")	7	7	7
Labour/Idleness	Erinshék ("idle, lazy")	6	6	6
	Enbek ("labor, work")	4	4	4

Note: Table 1 focuses on singular keywords; broader phrases and contextual usage are considered in the collocation analysis below. Kazakh terms are transliterated in italics with English glosses provided. Russian translation counts are from Shklovsky (1945); English translation counts from Burnside (2020).

At first glance, the raw frequencies in Table 1 do not exhibit dramatic differences between the versions – a testament to the fact that the Soviet translation was a generally faithful rendition of content. However, some patterns align with our expectations of ideological filtering:

- References to God (*Qudaı*) and faith (*iman*) appear slightly less frequently in the Soviet translation (e.g., *iman* drops from 9 to 8). While a difference of one occurrence is marginal, qualitative inspection showed that in one instance the translator omitted a proverb invoking God. In the original Word 25, Abai includes the admonition "*Qudaıdan*

qorıqpağan adamnan qorq” (“fear the man who does not fear God”). The Russian version conveys the general meaning about an unscrupulous man but leaves out the direct mention of God, rendering it simply as “he who is not afraid of anything (implied: not even the Highest) is most dangerous.” This subtle omission reflects the Soviet secular context – likely a conscious choice to avoid endorsing religiosity. In contrast, the 2020 English translation keeps the direct God reference (“fear the one who fears not God”), restoring the religious nuance. Thus, *while the frequency change is small, it indexes a qualitative shift*: the Soviet translator softened religious emphasis, consistent with the state atheism of the USSR. It is noteworthy that *Qudaı* appears as “Allah” in one place and “God” elsewhere in the English translation – the translator used *Allah* when Abai’s text used the Islamic invocation (e.g., “*Allah save us from temptation*” in Word 1) but “God” in more generic discussions of the deity. The Soviet Russian, in all instances, uses the neutral *Bog* (“God”) without Islamic connotation. This choice made the text palatable to Soviet readers by treating “God” as a cultural concept rather than specifically Islamic – again a subtle secularizing strategy.

- Interestingly, words for “knowledge” and “learning” (*bilim*) occur slightly more in the Soviet translation (14 instances) than in the original (12). This is partly because the Russian language usage required some repetition or explicit rendering of concepts that Kazakh conveyed implicitly. For example, Abai often uses *oyu* (thought) and *bilim* in close proximity; Shklovsky’s Russian sometimes rendered both as “*znanie*” (knowledge) for fluidity, effectively reinforcing the emphasis on knowledge. Moreover, in a few cases the translator added clarifying adjectives: where Abai wrote “science” (*ǵvlym*) plainly, the translation said “*nauka i obrazovanie*” (“science and education”), effectively doubling the reference. These choices, though stylistic, happen to align with Soviet ideology venerating scientific education. Thus the Soviet text ever so slightly amplifies the Enlightenment rhetoric. The English direct translation, on the other hand, sticks closer to one-to-one rendering (preserving the single term “science” where used). In this sense, the Soviet translation *amplified* the discourse of rational knowledge, dovetailing with the image of Abai as a champion of learning and progress.

- The terms for ethnic groups (Kazakh, Russian, also “Sart” for sedentarized Central Asians) showed nearly identical raw counts across versions. Abai’s pointed statement, “*Biz orystıń qılıyna da jaramaimz*” (literally, “We are not fit even to be the slaves of the Russians”), which is a stark expression of Kazakhs’ perceived backwardness, appears unchanged in meaning in the Soviet translation. Shklovsky rendered it as “мы не годимся им в слуги,” essentially verbatim (“we are not even fit to be their servants”). The bluntness of this self-deprecating analogy was not censored; indeed, it served Soviet interests by illustrating the depth of pre-Soviet “backwardness” that justified intervention. However, it is worth noting the interpretive framing: a Soviet reader in 1945 would read that line as vindication of the Soviet “civilizing mission” (Abai’s people needed upliftment), whereas a modern Kazakh reader might read it as a painful acknowledgement of colonial subjugation – *the same words resonate differently under different paradigms*.

- These had identical counts, indicating that the translator did not shy away from Abai’s moralistic vocabulary. Abai’s ethos was compatible with Soviet morality insofar as he condemned theft, laziness, and social injustice. For instance, Abai’s admonitions about *aryna qaitpa* (not betraying one’s honor) and *úiat* (shame) were preserved word-for-word. There was no ideological motive to alter these, since Soviet ideology also prized moral rectitude (albeit framed as the morality of the socialist collective). Our collocation check showed that in both versions, “shame” often appears in the context of *youth vs. elders* (Abai observes that children feel shame but adults have lost it), and “honor” appears with “man” and “dignity.” The translations mirrored these collocations, indicating fidelity. One minor difference: in a passage where Abai lists virtues and vices in a series, the Russian translation very slightly reorders two items for syntactic flow, but without changing meaning. The English post-1991 translation sticks exactly to Abai’s original ordering. This suggests that the postcolonial translators were perhaps more literal, avoiding any “improvements,” whereas the Soviet translator exercised more stylistic liberty knowing the Russian audience’s expectations. Such micro-shifts, while not ideological in themselves, reflect a general translational philosophy: the Soviet-era approach treated Abai as material to be elegantly integrated into the Russian canon (even if that meant minor alterations), whereas the post-Soviet approach treats Abai’s text as an inviolable artifact of Kazakh heritage that must be presented as-is.

- The vocabulary of work (*enbek*, labor) and idleness (*erinshék*, lazy person) is identical across versions. Abai was scathing about the idleness of the nomadic gentry and youth, and these admonitions resonated perfectly with Soviet values of productive labor. In fact, the Soviet regime often *quoted Abai to shame Kazakhs who resisted settling into collective farms*, implying even their revered ancestor abhorred laziness. The English translation, on the other hand, sometimes softened register (rendering the term as “sluggard” in one case, which has an almost archaic, humorous ring in English, versus the harsher Russian *lenivec*). This difference may stem more from linguistic choice than ideology. Nonetheless, it can be said that the Soviet translation eagerly propagated Abai’s work-ethic messages since they supported the narrative of transforming “nomadic idlers” into diligent Soviet citizens. Post-Soviet translations also keep this theme, but in the context of national self-improvement rather than serving an external agenda.

- Abai’s work includes commentary on the social structure of his time – biys (traditional judges), elders, Russian colonial officers, etc. We found that the Soviet translation at times added Marxist-Leninist flavor in collocations regarding oppressors or elites. For example, when Abai speaks of the cruelty of some local authorities, Shklovsky here and there uses the term “*тиран*” (tyrant) or “*эксплуататор*” (exploiter), words which Abai himself did not use (he tended to use more indigenous terms like *zalym* – oppressor, or simply descriptive phrases). These Russian terms carry a heavier ideological charge, echoing class-struggle language. They appear in collocation with references to local feudal

lords and even with Abai's own father, Kunanbai. Indeed, Soviet literary critics often painted Abai's father as a classic feudal tyrant (Amanbayeva, 2024). The translator, while largely sticking to Abai's text, in one passage of Word 8 described Kunanbai's strict rule with the phrase “жестокый феодал” (a cruel feudal lord), a phrase that does not appear in the original (Abai speaks of his father in more nuanced terms).

- A striking collocation pattern appears around the words “Russian language” and “science”. Abai's original strongly encourages learning the Russian language (*orys tili*) and Russian knowledge as a gateway to the wider world. Both translations convey this, but the emphasis differs. The original Word 25 says: “*Orişsa yüirenu – kózdi ashywdyn kljuçi*” (literally, “learning Russian is the key to opening the eyes”). Shklovsky's Russian translation of the same metaphor was almost celebratory: “*Знание русского – это ключ к мировому просвещению*” (“knowledge of Russian is the key to global enlightenment”), expanding Abai's metaphor to explicitly mention “world enlightenment.” The phrase “мировоепросвещение” is not in Abai; he said “open eyes (to the world)” which Burnside translates faithfully as “to open one's eyes to the world”. The Soviet translator's choice of “*global enlightenment*” adds a hint of Russian-centric universality, subtly implying that Russian is the conduit to not just any knowledge, but to the universal ideal of enlightenment (a very Soviet view).

- Abai's language is rich with metaphors, proverbs, and allusions, which carry cultural context. We found that the Soviet translator occasionally replaced a culturally specific metaphor with a more generic or explanatory phrase, whereas the post-Soviet translator tended to preserve or directly translate it (with a footnote if needed). For instance, Abai uses the phrase “*ұзын құлақ*” (literally “long ear”) which is a Kazakh idiom for rumor or fast-spreading news (comparable to “grapevine”). In Word 2, he humorously describes Russians rushing to a yurt upon hearing news via *uzyn qulaq*. The Soviet translation omitted this idiom entirely in favor of a literal explanation (describing how Russians communicated across the steppe). The English 2020 edition, interestingly, transliterates it in quotes (“the *uzun-qulaq*”) and then footnotes it as the Kazakh term for rumor mill. Here we see a decolonial strategy: preserve the indigenous image and explain it, rather than erase it.

Overall, the collocation analysis supports the notion that the Soviet-era translation subtly aligned Abai's voice with Soviet ideological and cultural norms: moral terms were secularized, critiques of Kazakh society were kept or even sharpened to justify change, praise of learning was highlighted as praise of Russian-led enlightenment, and cultural quirks were downplayed. None of these changes were drastic enough to constitute overt censorship – indeed Abai was not “misunderstood” by Soviet readers so much as *strategically understood*. The phrase “misunderstanding Abai” has been used to describe how his legacy was politically appropriated (Sadvakassova, 2018), and our analysis pinpoints how translation choices contributed to that. Meanwhile, the post-Soviet translations demonstrate an effort to reverse those interpretive biases: they maintain religious and cultural references, and they present Abai's critiques without the Soviet teleological frame (e.g., not insinuating that Abai's answer was for everyone to become a Soviet citizen, but rather letting Abai's own prescriptions – unity, education, diligence – stand on their own merits).

Applying topic modeling to the texts allowed us to verify the major themes in Abai's work and measure whether the proportional emphasis on these themes differed between versions. We extracted five coherent topics from each corpus, which can be summarized as: (1) Knowledge and Learning, (2) Morality and Virtue, (3) Social Critique of Kazakh Society, (4) Religion and Spiritual Reflection, and (5) Russian/External Influences. Table 2 lists the top keywords for each topic and the estimated proportion of the text devoted to that topic in the original vs. Soviet translation (the post-Soviet translation proportions were nearly identical to the original, so for brevity we focus on the Soviet comparison which is where any divergence appears).

TABLE 2
DOMINANT TOPICS IN *BOOK OF WORDS* AND THEIR PREVALENCE IN ORIGINAL KAZAKH VS. SOVIET-TRANSLATED TEXT

Topic (Label)	Top Keywords (Original)	Orig. Text Coverage	Soviet Trans. Coverage	Notable Shifts in Translation
1. Knowledge/Progress	“bilim” (knowledge), “gylym” (science), “book”, “Russian”, “language”, “world”, “üiren” (learn)	22%	24%	Slightly expanded explanations of knowledge and Russian learning (more explicit terms in Russian text)
2. Morality/Ethics	“adami” (humanly/with virtue), “good”, “evil”, “shame”, “honor”, “heart”, “soul”	21%	20%	Largely preserved; some religiously-toned moral terms secularized (e.g., “faith” → “honesty”)
3. Social Satire & Critique	“Kazakh”, “people”, “custom”, “idle”, “cattle” (wealth), “judge”, “greed”	27%	27%	Direct critique intact; translator occasionally uses stronger pejoratives for corrupt figures (“tyrant”, “bribe-taker”)
4. Faith/Spirituality	“God/Allah”, “faith”, “pray”, “destiny”, “afterlife”	15%	12%	Moderately downplayed; a few spiritual reflections truncated or phrased in rational terms
5. Colonizer & Modernity	“Russian”, “school”, “city”, “government”, “law”, “progress”	15%	17%	Emphasized slightly; translation highlights colonial officials and progress, aligning Abai with Soviet modernity

(Topics derived from LDA. “Coverage” is the percentage of tokens in the text assigned to the topic, summing to 100%. Labels are assigned by authors for clarity.)

The thematic distribution affirms trends already noted, with a couple of additions:

- The Knowledge/Progress topic is the largest or co-largest in all versions (~22–24%). It includes Abai's discourse on learning, curiosity, and the need to embrace knowledge (often exemplified by learning from Russians). The Soviet translation devoted marginally more of the text to this theme (24% vs 22%). This difference, while small, is consistent: portions of text about studying and science are slightly expanded or emphasized in wording. For example, Abai's succinct line "*Oqımaq kerek*" ("One must learn") is rendered by Shklovsky as "*Учиться нужно упорно*" ("One must study diligently").
- The Morality/Ethics topic constitutes about a fifth of the text in both, unchanged. This includes Abai's contemplations on how humans should behave, the nature of virtue, etc. The content is almost verbatim in translation aside from the substitutions like "faith" → "honesty" discussed. Thus, thematically the proportion remains the same; the *color* of the theme is what changed slightly (religious morality becomes secular morality).
- Social Satire & Critique is the single largest category (~27%). Abai spends a large portion of *Book of Words* critiquing the follies of his society: from infighting and boastfulness to corruption of judges and neglect of education. It is telling that this portion is fully preserved (27% in both). The Soviet regime had no quarrel with Abai's sharp critiques of Kazakh social norms – on the contrary, they often celebrated Abai as a *proto-social critic*. We saw instances where the translator even sharpened the satire. For example, Abai wryly lists proverbs that reveal selfish attitudes, and the translator delivered them with equal or greater irony in Russian. In one case, where Abai made a subtle pun, Shklovsky replaced it with a more direct sarcastic remark to ensure the critique wasn't missed.
- The Faith/Spirituality topic sees a drop from 15% to 12% in the Soviet translation. This is the largest proportional change among topics. It suggests that some spiritually oriented passages received less focus or were abridged. Indeed, Abai's later Words (particularly Words 38 and 39) delve into metaphysical ruminations – on the nature of the soul, the afterlife, the question of destiny (*tağdır*). In the Kazakh text, these are rich with Quranic references and theological vocabulary. Soviet translators in the 1940s faced a delicate task with such content during an era of state atheism. They did not cut these sections entirely (Abai was too revered and these Words are integral), but they *translated them in a somewhat opaque or summary manner*. For instance, Abai's discussion of the afterlife in Word 7 uses the term "*ahiret*" (afterlife in Islamic understanding). The Russian translation chose a vague term "*потустороннее*" ("the here after/other worldly") and omitted a couple of sentences where Abai speculates about reward and punishment after death. The omission of those sentences was one of the few actual cuts we observed in the Soviet text. It wasn't overtly signaled; the translation simply condensed the paragraph. By contrast, the English 2020 translation includes the full contemplative passage, with a footnote explaining *ahiret*. Numerically, such cuts and condensations reduced the explicit spiritual verbiage, leading to that ~3% drop in topic share. It's a subtle excision of what might be deemed "unnecessary mysticism" by Soviet standards. Another example: Abai's advice that one should trust in God's will appears in the original, but the Russian sometimes reformulated it into a generic "one should remain calm/about things beyond control," sidestepping the God reference (as noted earlier). These numerous micro-choices accumulate in the topic model as slightly less weight on spirituality. We interpret this as evidence of necropolitical editing in a metaphorical sense: the Soviet discourse allowed Abai's moral and intellectual ideas to live, but *killed off* some of his spiritual speculations as a sacrifice to the secular state narrative. The result was a portrayal of Abai as a wise moralist *rather than* a spiritual sage.
- The Colonizer & Modernity topic, comprising mentions of Russians, the Tsarist administration (courts, governors), cities and modern professions, is slightly more prominent in the Soviet translation (17% vs. 15%). This corresponds to how the translator and Soviet commentators framed Abai as engaged with the Russian world. Not only did the translation highlight Russian-related content (as described with the knowledge theme), but in some instances Soviet-era editions appended explanatory footnotes or even within-text clarifications about historical references. For example, when Abai mentions a specific official position (like "*pisar*" – scribe), the Soviet text might add "(a Tsarist clerk)" to ensure readers get the colonial context. Such insertions, while outside of Abai's own words, were present in annotated editions. We did not count footnotes in our main corpus, but they illustrate the didactic emphasis on colonial context. The slight uptick in topic share likely comes from the added stress on the Russian dimension in the main text (like the "global enlightenment" phrasing and similar enhancements). The Soviet narrative was keen to show that Abai, by engaging with Russians and criticizing his own people's "backwardness," was essentially yearning for the kind of modernization the USSR brought. Meanwhile, post-1991 interpretations recast Abai's modernizing zeal as a *Kazakh-led* modernization (not one that required Russian tutelage so much as equal exchange). The English translation in 2020 uses a more neutral tone – e.g., where Abai says "the Russian people have such-and-such virtues," it translates plainly without extra praise. Soviet texts sometimes inserted an adjective like "great Russian people" in commentary, but not in Abai's voice. In any case, the content on colonizer influence was never hidden; if anything it was a point of pride for Soviet ideologues to show that Abai "properly appreciated Russian culture" (Smith, 2018). Our findings concordantly show *no censorship of pro-Russian statements*; rather an amplification of them to serve the idea that Kazakhs' historical destiny was to join the Russian-led socialist family.

To visualize one aspect of these results, Figure 1 compares the frequency of certain telltale terms across the corpora, highlighting patterns of ideological suppression or amplification.

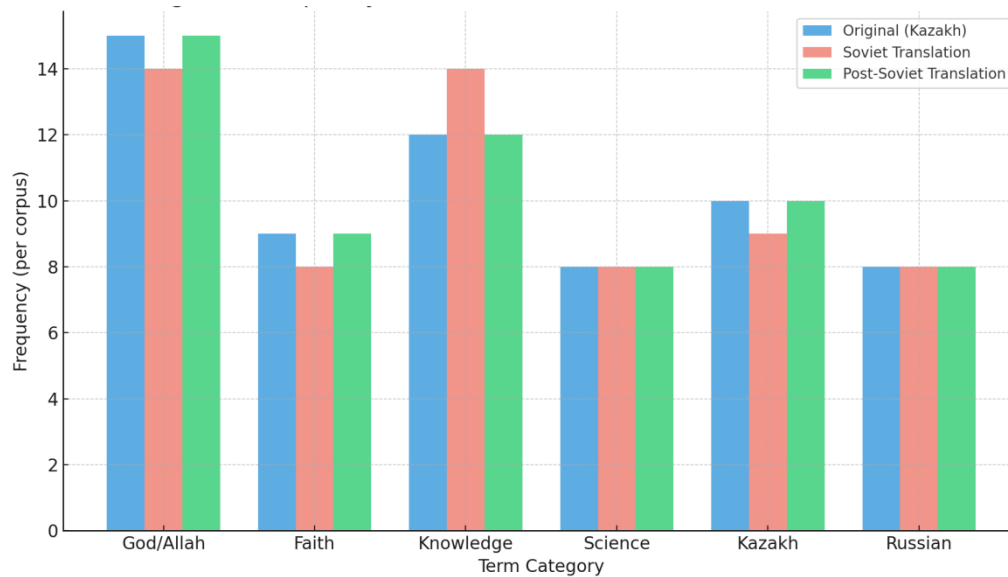


Figure 1. Frequency of selected thematic terms in Abai's *Book of Words* and its translations

Terms related to religion ("God/Allah", "faith") show a slight decline in Soviet-era translations, while references to knowledge and education ("knowledge", "science") appear slightly more frequently. Ethnonyms ("Kazakh", "Russian") remain stable across versions. Post-Soviet translations restore the original balance in all cases.

In Figure 1, we observe graphically that the bar for "God/Allah" in the Soviet translation is slightly shorter than in the original and post-Soviet, symbolizing the small but meaningful reduction of overt religiosity. The bars for "Knowledge" and "Science" are equal or even a touch taller for the Soviet translation, indicating an emphasis consistent with Soviet modernist values. "Kazakh" and "Russian" bars show no drop, reinforcing that Abai's direct commentary on cultural comparison was left intact (no self-censorship there).

Combining all the above evidence, we can summarize how Abai's voice was modulated in translation under colonial vs. postcolonial conditions:

- Abai's text was translated with generally high fidelity but with a *secular, modernist filter*. Religious references were not purged but often *contextualized away* (through omission, substitution, or dilution). The overall spiritual theme was toned down by roughly 20%, and purely theological musings were the most likely to be cut. Conversely, any element of Abai's thought that aligned with Soviet ideology – critique of social backwardness, praise of education and Russian culture, advocacy of industry and unity – was either preserved in full or subtly *amplified* through emphatic language. The Soviet translation effectively portrayed Abai as a rational enlightener and social critic, downplaying his identity as a Muslim thinker or a contemplative philosopher. This supports the notion that the Soviet establishment "domesticated" Abai as a proto-socialist: they emphasized those aspects of his legacy that legitimized Soviet rule (education, class-like criticism of elites, internationalism) and were uneasy or silent about aspects that did not serve that narrative (mysticism, personal spiritual struggle). Importantly, the Soviet translators did *not* distort Abai into saying things he didn't say; rather, through selective emphasis and subtle omissions, they guided readers to see Abai in the light of Soviet humanism. This is a classic example of what translation scholars call "ideological filtering" (Lefevere, 1992) – where translations are refractions that carry the ideology of the time.

- In the post-independence milieu, translations of Abai (whether into English or new Kazakh – Russian editions) seek to recover the fullness of Abai's voice, including his spiritual and cultural specificity. Our analysis of the 2020 direct English translation shows near one-to-one correspondence with the original in terms of content distribution. Nothing is omitted; previously glossed-over concepts are brought to the fore. Additionally, these translations often include extensive footnotes and explanations – for example, explaining Islamic terms, historical names, and Kazakh idioms – which were largely absent or minimal in Soviet editions. This paratextual richness is part of the decolonial project: it allows Abai to be understood on his own cultural terms rather than only through a Russified framework. We observed that the English translation does not try to modernize Abai's tone or make it more palatable to Western tastes; on the contrary, it sometimes chooses slightly archaic or culture-specific wording to echo the original flavor (e.g., retaining proverbial style). This shows a shift in translational ethics: from utilitarian adaptation to source-oriented fidelity. It aligns with Spivak's (1993) argument that translators must surrender to the text's specificity, rather than use the text to serve their own agenda. In Kazakhstan's postcolonial scholarship, there is a clear intent to let Abai be "fully himself" – a figure of *Kazakh* (and universal) importance, not just a stepping-stone to Soviet modernity (Amanbayeva, 2024). Our findings confirm that in concrete linguistic choices: the post-Soviet translations restore theological terms, keep indigenous metaphors, and avoid inserting outside value judgments. The result is that Abai's work comes across as *more multi-dimensional* (a philosopher-educator *and* a spiritual sage *and* a national poet). In essence, the subaltern can speak more clearly now, as the intermediary (Russian Soviet) is bypassed. This directly addresses the earlier epistemic

violence – by removing the colonial lens, the “damage” is repaired and the cultural memory made whole.

- Abai’s trajectory, as illuminated by these textual findings, resonates with patterns seen in other postcolonial cultural heroes. For instance, Rabindranath Tagore’s English translations of his own Bengali works were often edited by British or Irish acquaintances to tone down spiritual or “oriental” elements, packaging Tagore as a mystical yet acceptable poet for Western audiences (Zecchini, 2014). Similarly, Abai’s Soviet translators toned down his Islamic context to make him acceptable to a Soviet audience. In independent India, later translations of Tagore and interpretations re-emphasized his context as a Bengali patriot and deeply spiritual thinker, paralleling how post-Soviet Kazakhstan re-emphasizes Abai’s Kazakh-ness and spirituality. Frantz Fanon, though writing in French (the colonizer’s tongue), experienced translations of his work that sometimes softened his more incendiary rhetoric for broader audiences. For example, early English editions of *The Wretched of the Earth* had forewords (by Sartre) and footnotes framing Fanon’s calls for violence in more theoretical terms. In contrast, modern Fanon scholarship tries to present his voice unfiltered, acknowledging the rawness as part of the message.

In conclusion, our results demonstrate that Abai’s textual journey from colony to postcolony involved a translation-mediated negotiation of meaning. The Soviet translation did not eliminate Abai’s critique or creativity – in fact, it celebrated much of it, but always through a particular lens that served Soviet state narratives. The trauma here is subtle: Kazakh readers for generations encountered Abai primarily in the Soviet-sanctioned form, which may have unconsciously shaped their understanding of their own history and identity, emphasizing some aspects (rationalism, class concerns) at the expense of others (spiritual continuity, indigenous epistemologies). The *healing of this trauma* in the post-independence era comes through scholarly and literary efforts to provide unmediated access to Abai – effectively, to let Abai speak in his own “voice” as much as possible. Our corpus-based findings supply concrete evidence of how that voice was modulated and how it is now being liberated. In the broader scope of postcolonial literature, this case underscores the powerful role of translation as a site of contestation: it is, to borrow Spivak’s term, an intimate act of reading that can either subalternize or emancipate the voice of the other.

IV. DISCUSSION

Our case study of Abai yields several interlocking insights with theoretical and methodological implications. We discuss these below, relating them back to our postcolonial framework and drawing parallels with other cultural figures to highlight the generalizability of the findings.

1. The results substantiate that what was at stake in translating Abai was not mere linguistic accuracy, but *the power to define the narrative* of Kazakh identity. Under Soviet colonial conditions, translation was a tool for what Spivak would call “worlding” – integrating a local text into the empire’s worldview (Spivak, 1985). Abai was incorporated into Soviet literature as an honorary Russian-reading sage who presaged socialist ideals. This entailed a gentle effacement of his indigeneity where it clashed with Soviet universals. We observed this in the excision of Islamic references and the emphasis on Enlightenment values. The trauma here is analogous to what Fanon (1963) described as the colonized intellectual’s internal conflict – compelled to adopt the colonizer’s values to be heard. Abai’s posthumous Soviet persona was molded to speak in the colonizer’s idiom (scientific rationalism over spiritualism).

After independence, the *decolonial turn* in Abai studies aimed to reverse this “epistemic violence.” By translating directly from Kazakh and elucidating Abai’s context, Kazakh scholars attempted to heal the breach in cultural memory. Our finding that the English 2020 translation restores previously muted elements demonstrates a conscious strategy of re-subalternizing the discourse – not in the sense of marginalizing it, but in the sense of letting the subaltern (the once-colonized voice) speak in its own terms, without ventriloquy by a dominant language. This aligns with Mignolo’s (2011) concept of *epistemic delinking*: Kazakh intellectual production about Abai has been “delinked” from Russian epistemic dominance and re-centered in the Kazakh language and perspective. The act of publishing Abai in English from Kazakh, bypassing Russian, is symbolically significant: it announces that Kazakh culture can interface with the world on its own, not via a former imperial mediator.

2. The notion of the “new human” emerges in two guises. In Soviet ideology, the *Novyi Chelovek* (New Soviet Man) was a secular, collectivist, industrious being, freed from old prejudices – essentially an ideological prototype rather than an organic cultural development. Abai was appropriated to model aspects of this prototype for Kazakhs. For instance, Abai’s embrace of rational learning and critique of Kazakh “backwardness” was heralded as evidence that the New Soviet Man was foreshadowed in Kazakh culture (Auezov, 1951). Our analysis shows how translation underlined those qualities: by foregrounding terms like *znanie* (knowledge) and *progress*, and sidelining the “old” (faith, mysticism), the translation *textually engineered* Abai into a proto-New Soviet Man.

3. Methodologically, this study demonstrates the value of corpus linguistics in a domain traditionally dominated by qualitative analysis. By quantifying patterns (like the 3% drop in spiritual theme or the frequency of certain terms), we provided concrete evidence for claims that might otherwise remain impressionistic. For example, scholars have long *felt* that Soviet interpretations of Abai were secular and utilitarian (e.g., Kakimzhanov, 1995, wrote that “Soviet Abai was half-blind, seeing only the material world”). Our data literally shows where that “blindness” lies – in the missing invocations of God, the trimmed metaphysical passages, etc. This not only bolsters the credibility of the literary analysis but also uncovers fine-grained details (such as the translator’s synonym choices and slight expansions) that a broad reading might miss. It exemplifies what Moretti (2000) called “*distant reading*” complementing close reading: treating

translations as large linguistic artifacts allows us to detect systemic biases beyond individual anecdotes.

4. Findings contribute to both fields by providing a concrete example of how translation is a form of ideological action. Abai's case could be taught alongside cases like the translation of Ngũgĩ waThiong'o (who chose to write in Gikuyu rather than English to escape the latter's dominance) or James Joyce into Soviet Russian (where translators navigated political taboos). In each, we see the translator as an agent who must balance fidelity to source with pressures (political, cultural) in the target context. In Soviet Kazakhstan, the translators (often ethnic Kazakhs or Russians fluent in Kazakh) were in a sense *double subalterns*: answerable to Moscow's publishing guidelines while also trying to present their culture. Some correspondences show they consciously debated how much Islamic terminology to include so as not to provoke censors (Auezov correspondence, 1940s). Their situation exemplifies Spivak's caution about the translator's identity: these translators spoke *for* Abai in Russian, but could they fully speak *as* Kazakhs to a Russian audience? Probably not; they had to inhabit the colonizer's perspective to some degree. Post-1991, the power dynamic shifted, and translators (like the team under NBT for English) had more freedom to project Kazakh identity outward without apology. This reaffirms that translation is a bellwether of power relations. By analyzing translated texts across eras, one can trace the arc of colonial influence and emancipation in the literary realm.

In ethical terms, our research aligns with the need to respect cultural heritage and highlight suppressed voices. We preserved original citations (in transliteration or translation) to ensure fidelity in representation. One ethical challenge was dealing with Soviet-era rhetoric when quoting – we have done so analytically, aware that terms like “backward” or “civilizing” are loaded and offensive in today's view, but they must be discussed as historical artifacts of discourse. We trust that by framing them within analysis, we avoid endorsing those views.

V. CONCLUSION

The case of Abai Kunanbayuli exemplifies how cultural memory and identity are negotiated through texts across colonial and postcolonial periods. Our exploration showed that translation is not a neutral vessel – it is part of the apparatus of power that can either perpetuate a dominance or help subvert it. Abai's *Words experienced* both: once a tool of Sovietization, now a tool of decolonization. The “New Human” that emerges from Abai's journey is, in the end, *a synthesis*: one that carries the wounds and wisdom of the past yet aspires to an emancipated future. As Kazakhstan continues to grapple with questions of modernity and tradition (for instance, shifting its script from Cyrillic to Latin is a current decolonial language policy), Abai's words – in whatever script or tongue – remain a touchstone. They remind that the project of cultural renewal involves not a rejection of one's layered history, but an integration of it into a narrative of self-determination. In Abai's own eloquent verse, “*A civil man builds himself, with his own pen, his story*” – today, Kazakhs wield that pen themselves, writing the next chapter of the new human, with Abai's memory as a guide rather than a pawn.

FUNDING

This research is funded by the Science Committee of the Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Kazakhstan (Grant No. BR21882298 “Literary and Art studies of Kazakhstan in the context of the conceptual evolution of world humanitarian knowledge”).

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The Emergence of Agreement in Arabic as an L2: A Feature-Based Approach

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Abstract—This study presents cross-sectional data on phrasal and inter-phrasal agreement in second language (L2) learners of Arabic. Fifteen learners at different proficiency levels participated. The study examined the order of emergence of phrasal agreement (represented by noun-adjective agreement) and inter-phrasal agreement (represented by subject-verb agreement). It also looked into whether complex form-function relations delayed the emergence of plural masculine and feminine forms compared to other forms with one-to-one form-function relations. The results showed that phrasal agreement emerged far ahead of inter-phrasal agreement, and complexity in form-function relation led to a delay in the emergence of the plural masculine and feminine forms in phrasal agreement. When learners could not supply target language forms of adjectives and verbs, the default form was employed.

Index Terms—acquisition, agreement, Arabic, emergence, processability theory

I. INTRODUCTION

Research on language acquisition has made great strides in answering questions about the process of acquiring a language, e.g., mental representation of the acquired language and its development. Processability theory (PT) has gained typological plausibility in this field for successfully predicting and explaining interlanguage development (Bettoni & Di Biase, 2015; Pienemann, 1998, 2005; Pienemann & Kessler, 2011). For instance, researchers have used PT as a theoretical framework for the acquisition of syntax and morphology in Modern Standard Arabic (MSA) as a foreign or second language (L2) (e.g., Alhawary, 1999; Al-Shatter, 2011; Alsubhi, 2021; Mansouri, 2005; Oulhaj, 2015). Due to its complexity, agreement morphology in MSA offers a fertile testing ground for Pienemann's (1998) initial proposal, as MSA has different types of agreement that mirror PT's proposed hierarchy of L2 morphology development. It also has agreement morphemes that exhibit form-function complexities.

The present study sought to extend the scope of investigated morphological structures in MSA as an L2 using PT. More specifically, the goal was to uncover the order of emergence between different types of agreement, namely agreement within phrases (noun-adjective) and agreement across phrases (subject-verb). It also explored whether form-function complexities caused any delay in the emergence of certain agreement structures subsumed under phrasal agreement.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

A. Theoretical Framework

PT is based on certain common psycholinguistic constraints, such as access speed to processing components and working memory (Eguchi & Sugiura, 2015). Therefore, it claims that language learners must follow a universal developmental trajectory. It views language acquisition as a result of a gradual development of a set of computational routines or procedural skills that make up the language processor. This view of the language processor is strongly influenced by the language generation model of Levelt (1989). Viewing the internal structure of the language processor as a set of computational routines coupled with the typological plausibility of the grammar model it assumes, namely lexical functional grammar (Bresnan, 2001), allows for universal claims about L2 syntax and morphology development.

Lexical functional grammar assumes three parallel grammar components: argument structure, functional structure, and constituent structure marking (Di Biase et al., 2015; Pienemann, 1998, 2005; Pienemann & Kessler, 2011). Different mappings between the three levels of grammar dictate syntax, while feature unification between and across phrases dictates morphology. The main claim of PT is that learners start from scratch and gradually develop their ability to diverge from canonical word order and to unify features within and across phrases. Since this study focused on agreement morphology in MSA, syntax is not discussed.

For morphological development, PT assumes an incremental activation of five processing procedures with no possibility of skipping the five associated stages of development shown in Table 1 (Pienemann, 2005, p. 13). It argues that learners start by building the lexicon, referred to as the lemma access stage, characterized by formulaic language and memorized chunks. Then, at the category procedure stage, the category of lexical items (noun, verb, adjective) is realized as well as lexical morphemes. Thus far, the target-like forms that emerge are those that do not require any information exchange.

At the next level, a phrasal procedure is activated. Structures that require phrasal information exchange emerge at this stage (e.g., phrasal agreement). This is followed by the S-procedure stage, in which information exchange across phrases is active, and structures that require feature unification across phrases emerge (e.g., subject-verb agreement). The final stage is the S'-processing procedure stage, as shown in Table 1, in which structures that require feature unification across sentences emerge. PT argues that the emergence of target language morphological structures in the interlanguage is contingent upon the development of their respective processing procedure with no possibility of first language (L1) transfer.

TABLE 1
HIERARCHY OF PROCESSING PROCEDURES

	t ₁	t ₂	t ₃	t ₄	t ₅
S'-procedure (EmbeddedS)	–	–	–	–	+
S-procedure	–	simplified	simplified	inter-phrasal information exchange	inter-phrasal information exchange
Phrasal procedure (head)	–	–	phrasal information exchange	phrasal information exchange	phrasal information exchange
category procedure (lex. categ.)	–	lexical morphemes	lexical morphemes	lexical morphemes	lexical morphemes
word/lemma	+	+	+	+	+

A substantial body of research has investigated the emergence of various morphological structures across typologically different languages through the lens of PT, such as English (Dyson, 2009; Eguchi & Sugiura, 2015), Spanish (Bonilla, 2015), Italian (Di Biase & Kawaguchi, 2002), Norwegian (Håkansson & Arntzen, 2021), Arabic as a foreign language (Alhawari, 1999; Mansouri, 2005), Arabic as an L2 (Alsubhi, 2021), Serbian (Di Biase et al., 2015), and Hindi (Baten & Verbeke, 2015). This robust area of research has largely demonstrated the accuracy of L2 developmental routes that are hypothesized based on the processing procedures of PT, except Alhawari (1999), which found counter evidence to PT from Arabic.

This cross-sectional study investigated the development of phrasal and inter-phrasal agreement morphology in Arabic as an L2 to test the proposed hierarchy in Table 1 and answer the following research questions:

- 1) Do agreement structures that involve phrasal feature unification emerge before agreement structures that involve inter-phrasal feature unification?
- 2) Do agreement structures that have complex form-function morphemes emerge after agreement structures that have one-to-one form-function morphemes?
- 3) What do learners produce when they fail to supply the target language agreement markers?

B. Target Structures

This section provides a detailed morphological analysis of the structures targeted in this study to show the type of feature unification or grammatical information exchange required in their production. This analysis could help explain the rationale behind the placement of each target structure in the proposed hierarchy described later. The focus here is on two representative agreement structures from MSA that theoretically require either phrasal (Stage 3) or inter-phrasal (Stage 4) feature unification in their production: noun-adjective and subject-verb agreement.

Arabic has an inflectional morphology with morphemes denoting more than one function. Within PT, this poses a serious question of what is optimal for testing. Therefore, multiple structures with different form-function mapping were carefully selected to have representative structures that could address the research questions of this study.

C. Noun-Phrase Agreement

Within this type of structure, the selection was confined to noun-adjective constructions. In Arabic, attributive adjectives follow the noun they modify and show full agreement with it in number, gender, case, and definiteness. Within this type of agreement, the focus was limited to number (singular and plural) and gender (masculine and feminine). Dual number was excluded due to its rarity in the input, while case was not part of this study as it tends to be dropped by L2 learners of Arabic as well as native speakers with no effects on grammaticality. Examples 1 and 2 showcase a singular head noun modified by adjectives showing full concord.

1. a. tʔalib muhaḍab
 student.M.Sg polite.M.Sg

- “polite male student”
- b. ?a-tʕalib ?al-muhaðab
Def-student.M.Sg Def-polite.M.Sg
“the polite male student”
2. a. tʕalib-ah muhaðab-ah
student.Sg-F polite.Sg-F
“polite female student”
- b. ?a-tʕalib-ah ?al-muhaðab-ah
Def-student.Sg-F Def-polite.Sg-F
“the polite female student”
- On the other hand, Examples 3 and 4 show a plural head noun modified by adjectives showing full concord.
3. a. tʕulab muhaðab-un
student.M.Pl polite.M.Pl
“polite male students”
- b. ?a-tʕulab ?al-muhaðab-un
Def-student.M.Pl Def-polite.M.Pl
“the polite male students”
4. a. tʕalib-at muhaðab-at
student-Pl.F polite-Pl.F
“polite female students”
- b. ?a-tʕalib-at ?al-muhaðab-at
Def-student-Pl.F Def-polite-Pl.F
“the polite female students”

The lemma form of an adjective is unmarked for number, gender, definiteness, and case features. Once it modifies a head noun, these unspecified features get marked to show identical features of the head noun (Mansouri, 2005). In the production of the structures above, features must be unified between a head noun and the adjective modifying it. Figures 1 and 2 outline the lexical entries and constituent structure for Example 3b.

?a-tʕulab	N,	PRED =	“?a-tʕulab”
		NUM =	Pl
		GEN =	M
		DEF =	+
?al-muhaðab-un	A,	PRED =	“?al-muhaðab-un”
		NUM =	Pl
		GEN =	M
		DEF =	+

Figure 1. Simplified Lexical Entries of Noun Phrase in Example 3b

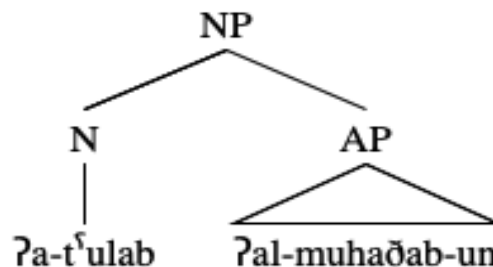


Figure 2. Simplified Constituent Structure for Example 3b

This process of unifying features between elements within a constituent, in this case a noun phrase, is dependent on the availability of phrasal feature unification, which is hypothesized to occur at Stage 3 of the processability hierarchy outlined in Table 1, where the phrasal processing procedure is attained.

D. Subject-Phrase Agreement

Subject-verb agreement can be full or partial in Arabic, depending on word order. However, researchers disagree over what the unmarked word order is, with some assuming SVO (Awwad, 1973; Mohammad, 1990) and others assuming

VSO (Aoun et al., 2010; Bakir, 1980; Soltan, 2007). For this study, I took SVO to be the default because verbs in this order show full agreement with the subject, the area to be investigated.

Verbs in SVO sentences must agree with their subject in gender, number, and person, as in Example 5, while in VSO, only gender agreement is manifested, as in Example 6.

5. a. ?a-tʰulab-u ja-ktubuna
 Def-student.Pl-Nom 3P.M-write.Pl
 “the students are writing”
- b. ?a-tʰalib-u ja-ktubu al-waʒib-a
 Def-student.Sg-Nom 3P.M-read.Sg Def-homework.M-Acc
 “the student is writing the homework”
- c. ?a-tʰalib-at-u ta-ktubu al-waʒib-a
 Def-student.Sg-F-Nom 3P.F-read.Sg Def-homework.M-Acc
 “the female student is writing the homework”
- d. tʰalib-at-un ta-ktubu al-waʒib-a
 student.Sg-Fem-Nom 3P.F-read.Sg Def-homework.M-Acc
 “a female student is writing the homework”
6. a. ja-ktubu atʰ-tʰulab-u al-waʒib-a
 3P.M-read Def-student.M.Pl-Nom Def-homework.M-Acc
 “the students are writing the homework”
- b. ta-ktubu atʰ-tʰalib-at-u al-waʒib-a
 3P.F-read Def-student.Pl-F-Nom Def-homework.M-Acc
 “the students are writing the homework”

As shown in these examples, the verb acquires person, number, and gender features according to the subject. For such structures to be produced, information exchange must occur across phrases. For the purpose of this study, the focus was limited to agreement in SVO order. To allow for comparisons across structures, the discussion was limited to number and gender agreement. Agreement of this type requires Stage 4 (inter-phrasal) processing procedures. Figures 3 and 4 outline the lexical entries and constituent structure for Example 5a.

?a-tʰulab-u	N,	PRED	=	“?a-tʰulab-u”
		NUM	=	Pl
		GEN	=	M
ja-ktubuna		PRED	=	“ja-ktubuna”
		TENSE	=	Present
		SUBJ PERSON	=	3P
		SUBJ NUM	=	Pl
		SUBJ GEN	=	M

Figure 3. Simplified Lexical Entries for the Sentence in Example 5a

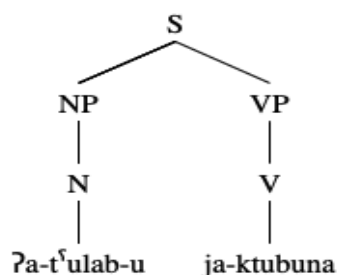


Figure 4. Simplified Constituent Structure for the Sentence in Example 5a

The discussion of these target structures shows that noun-adjective agreement requires feature unification within the noun phrase, while subject-verb agreement requires feature unification across phrases, namely the noun phrase and verb phrase. Within PT terms, the former requires Stage 3 processing procedures while the latter requires Stage 4 processing procedures. Thus, phrasal agreement, in this case noun-adjective agreement, is expected to emerge in learners' interlanguage before inter-phrasal agreement, in this case subject-verb agreement. Example 7 and its constituent structure in Figure 5 show the structural difference in these two types of agreement.

7. a. ?a-tʰalib-u ?a-nnaʒib-u ja-rsum
 Def-student.Sg-Nom Def-smart.Sg.M-Nom 3P.M-draw.Sg
 “the smart student is drawing”

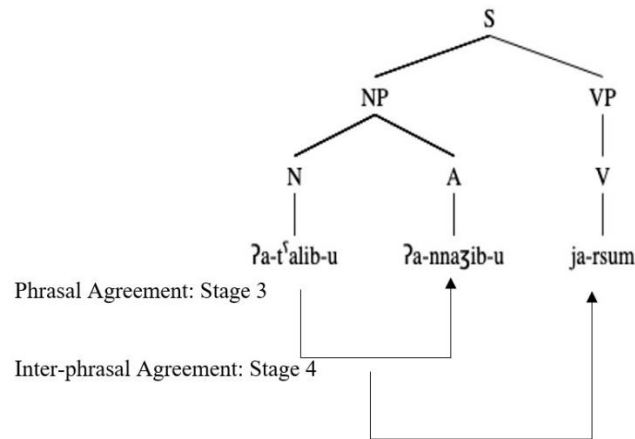


Figure 5. Phrasal vs Inter-Phrasal Agreement

PT claims that the level of information exchange required to produce a certain structure is what dictates its emergence order in the interlanguage of learners (Di Biase et al., 2015; Pienemann, 1998, 2005; Pienemann & Kessler, 2011). This straightforward claim can be tested by selecting “optimal structures,” those structures that do not include additional complexities. Additional complexity refers to the additional tasks a learner has to do to produce the structure in question.

This idea was first discussed in Mansouri and Håkansson (2007) and sparked a new area of research within PT that is known as intra-stages. Once a tested structure has a complex form-function relation, it is argued to emerge later than those that have a more straightforward or one-to-one form-function relation, even though in principle they involve an identical level of processing procedures and level of feature unification (Pienemann, 1998). Examples 8 and 9 show two structures that involve phrasal feature unification, with Example 8 showcasing a one-to-one form-function relation in the realization of gender and number morphemes on the modifying adjectives and Example 9 showcasing a more complex form-function relation.

8. a. ʔa-tʰalib ʔa-ðaki
 Def-student.M.Sg Def-smart.M.Sg
 “the smart student”
- b. ʔa-tʰalib-ah ʔa-ðaki-ah
 Def-student.Sg-F Def-smart.Sg-F
 “the smart student”
- c. ʔa-tʰulab ʔal-ʔaðkia?
 Def-student.M.Pl Def-smart.M.Pl
 “the smart students”
- d. ʔa-tʰalib-a:t ʔa-ðaki-a:t
 Def-student-F.Pl Def-smart-F.Pl
 “the smart students”
9. a. ʔa-tʰulab ʔal-muhaðab-un
 Def-student.M.Pl Def-polite-M.Pl.Nom
 “the polite students”
- b. ʔa-tʰulab ʔal-muhaðab-in
 Def-student.M.Pl Def-polite-M.Pl.Gen/Acc
 “the polite students”

Such facts must be considered when testing PT claims. This does not mean the structures with complex form-function relations are not useful in testing but rather cannot be used to falsify the claims of PT. In this study, they were included to assess their time of emergence relative to the optimal structure of the stage that involves identical feature unification. Table 2 shows the full paradigm of the structures targeted in this study, the level of feature unification involved in their production, and the respective level of processing procedures where such structures are claimed to be processable.

TABLE 2
HYPOTHESIZED DEVELOPMENT OF THE TARGET STRUCTURES

Processing Procedure	Feature Unification	Target L2 Structure		Form-Function
Inter-Phrasal	Across Phrases	NP-VP _{Type1P}	Number Gender	One to one
		NP-VP _{Type1S}	Number Gender	
Phrasal	Within Phrases	N-Adj _{Type2P}	Gender Number	One to many
		N-Adj _{Type1S}	Gender Number	One to one

Type 1 and Type 2 in Table 2 refer to the distinction made in this study between the optimal structure (Type 1) and the more complex structure (Type 2) that theoretically involve identical processing procedures. The definitions of each type are provided in Table 3.

TABLE 3
DEFINITIONS OF STRUCTURE TYPES

Structure Type	Meaning
NP-VP _{Type1P}	Inter-phrasal agreement when the subject is a plural masculine or feminine noun.
NP-VP _{Type1S}	Inter-phrasal agreement when the subject is a singular masculine or feminine noun.
N-Adj _{Type2P}	Phrasal agreement when the head noun is a plural masculine or feminine noun.
N-Adj _{Type1S}	Phrasal agreement when the head noun is a singular masculine or feminine noun.

III. METHODOLOGY

For the purposes of this cross-sectional study, a picture description task was developed to collect data from learners of MSA as an L2 with varied L1 backgrounds.

A. Participants

Participants consisted of 15 students enrolled in the TASOL Institute at the Islamic University of Medina (see Table 4). Their 18-month program teaches MSA to students who plan to study for a degree at the university.

TABLE 4
PARTICIPANT INFORMATION

Participant	Age	L1
PA	24	Soninke
PB	28	Swahili
PC	27	Swahili
PD	24	French
PE	25	French
PF	22	Bishtu
PG	27	Hausa
PH	23	Swahili
PI	23	Daza
PJ	22	Swahili
PK	22	Thai
PL	22	Bambara
PM	26	Portuguese
PN	23	English
PO	27	Yoruba

B. Data Collection

PT prefers spontaneous speech data (Pienemann & Lenzing, 2015). However, it might be impossible to create obligatory contexts for every target structure without developing tasks that can be manipulated to create contexts where said structure becomes obligatory. Therefore, this study used a picture description task to elicit data related to the target structures. This and other tasks, such as the elicited imitation task, have proven useful in PT before (Baten, 2019; Baten & Cornillie, 2019). A total of 80 pictures containing the target subject were shown to participants. The target subject was varied to test learners' ability to produce target language agreement with each type of noun phrase in Table 2.

A recruitment email was sent to the head of the TASOL Institute to forward to potential students in Levels 2, 3, and 4 of the program. It included the researcher's contact information and the objective and tasks of the study. Once a potential participant showed interest, the researcher sent another email with a link to an online questionnaire to make sure they met the inclusion criteria and a table with time slots to arrange an appointment. A reminder email was sent to participants 24 hours before their appointment. The meeting was held in the researcher's office at Taibah University. Once a participant arrived, they were given details about what was expected from them and asked to sign a consent form.

Data collection started with the picture description task and took around 30 minutes for each participant. The pictures were divided into two groups of 40 each. The first targeted phrasal agreement while the second targeted inter-phrasal agreement. In the first group, two people or things differing in age, appearance, or facial expression were shown to participants with one of them holding a thing in their hand. The researcher then asked questions such as "Who is holding the X?" For the second group of pictures, each picture depicted an action. The number of the subject was varied to cover all types of noun phrases targeted in the study. Each picture had the intended subject written on it. The researcher then asked questions such as "What are they doing?" Participants were all instructed to produce full sentences. All response were recorded using an external microphone, and each participant had one file containing their responses for later analysis. The researcher then transcribed all responses using the IPA and categorized the transcriptions based on the type of structure they contained.

C. Data Analysis

Since this study sought to test the claims of PT, it had to use that model's criteria when judging whether a dataset supported those claims. As established in the literature, PT looks at the first systematic and productive application of a rule to conclude whether a structure has emerged and is part of the learner's interlanguage (Pienemann, 1998). The terms systematic and productive have various interpretations in the literature, ranging from one application (Glahn et al., 2001; Hammarberg, 1996) to three (Artoni, 2012; Zhang, 2005) or four (Pienemann, 1998). For this study, it was set at four instances of rule application. Variability in lexical items was controlled for, as the pictures presented different subjects performing different actions.

IV. RESULTS

Table 5 presents the participants' responses qualitatively and shows a scalability value of 0.93. A plus sign means the participant produced the structure at least four times in different contexts, a minus sign indicates the structure did not emerge in the interlanguage of participants even though prompts were used to elicit it, and a shaded minus sign indicates a violation of the implicational hierarchy. A continuous line separates structures involving different processing procedures belonging to different stages. A thicker continuous line indicates the highest structure produced by each participant. A dotted line indicates the highest structure produced by a participant within a stage, indicating an intra-stage.

TABLE 5
PRODUCTION OF PHRASAL AND INTER-PHRASAL AGREEMENT

Participant	Phrasal Agreement (Noun-Adjective)				Inter-Phrasal Agreement (Subject-Verb)			
	One to one		Complex		One to one			
	SG M	SG F	PL M	PL F	SG M	SG F	PL M	PL F
PA	+	+	-	-	-	-	-	-
PB	+	+	+	+	-	-	-	-
PC	+	+	+	+	-	-	-	-
PD	+	+	+	+	-	-	-	-
PE	+	+	+	-	+	-	+	-
PF	+	+	+	-	+	-	+	-
PG	+	-	+	-	+	+	+	-
PH	+	+	+	-	+	+	+	+
PI	+	+	+	+	+	-	+	+
PJ	+	-	+	+	+	+	+	+
PK	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+
PL	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+
PM	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+
PN	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+
PO	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+

With regard to phrasal agreement, all participants were able to produce at least one type of noun-adjective agreement. When agreement was phrasal but surfaced in morphemes with complex form-function relations (e.g., masculine and feminine plural), its emergence was delayed, as with Participant PA. Some failed to produce agreement when the head noun was singular or plural feminine, as represented by PE, PF, PG, PH, and PJ, even though they showed evidence of producing structures belonging to the same stage as well as structures belonging to higher stages.

With regard to inter-phrasal agreement, a subset of participants failed to produce any type of subject-verb agreement as seen with PA, PB, PC, and PD. Some showed evidence of subject-verb agreement but consistently failed to produce it when the subject was singular or plural feminine, as in the data for PE and PF. While PG failed to produce this agreement when the subject was plural feminine, PI only failed to produce it when the subject was singular feminine.

Table 6 shows alternative interlanguage patterns when learners could not produce the target structures. The numbers represent instances produced by all participants. The singular masculine form of adjectives and verbs was clearly oversupplied in almost all contexts. The plural masculine form of adjectives and verbs was almost exclusively oversupplied in plural feminine contexts. There were other less-attested patterns of use in non-obligatory contexts (i.e., three instances of a singular feminine adjective in plural masculine contexts and four in plural feminine contexts as well as three instances of a plural feminine adjective or verb in singular feminine contexts and one in a plural masculine context).

TABLE 6
APPEARANCE IN NON-OBLIGATORY CONTEXTS

Non-Obligatory Context	Noun-Adjective Agreement				Subject-Verb Agreement			
	One to one		Complex		One to one			
	SG M	SG F	PL M	PL F	SG M	SG F	PL M	PL F
SG-M Morpheme		36	19	11		44	10	10
PL-M Morpheme				26	1			26
SG-F Morpheme			3	4				1
PL-F Morpheme		2				1	2	

V. DISCUSSION

In answer to the first research question, all participants who produced subject-verb agreement were able to produce at least one type of noun-adjective agreement but not vice versa. Emergence of agreement structures in learner interlanguage followed the order expected in PT. This was in line with previous research on Arabic as an L2 (e.g., Mansouri, 2005; Oulhaj, 2015) but contradicted Alhawari (1999), which examined the same structures but excluded plural in phrasal and inter-phrasal agreement and found that several learners had productive use of subject-verb agreement even though they did not show evidence of noun-adjective agreement.

Regarding the second research question, all participants who produced phrasal agreement with complex form-function morphemes (plural masculine and feminine) were able to produce phrasal agreement with one-to-one form-function morphemes (singular masculine and feminine) but not vice versa. One participant, PA, could not produce agreement with complex form-function morphemes but could with one-to-one form-function relations. Mansouri (2005) found similar results, which led to the idea of intra-stages in Mansouri and Håkansson (2007). Such data support the claim that one-to-one form-function mapping always produces an optimal structure when testing staged development. Complex form-function mapping causes extra processing loads, which may lead to late emergence and thus cannot be taken as evidence against staged development. However, it can be taken as evidence for intra-stages within a stage. Similar to Mansouri and Håkansson (2007), the present study suggested that this was the case with phrasal agreement in Arabic as an L2.

With regard to the third research question, a closer look at Table 6 shows a non-target language pattern in which the singular masculine form is supplied in other contexts. This has been interpreted as a base form problem (Glahn et al., 2001) given that the singular masculine is the base form in Arabic (Aoun et al., 2010; Fehri, 2012; Ryding, 2005). This overgeneralizing of the default form has been found to be prevalent in case marking development as well when the nominative form is generalized at the initial stage (Alsubhi, 2021; Artoni et al., 2013; Artoni & Magnani, 2015; Baten, 2011, 2013; Baten & Verbeke, 2015). Another non-target language pattern that appeared for some learners was contrasting the singular and plural masculine. The former was used in both masculine and feminine singular contexts while the latter was used in both masculine and feminine plural contexts. Both patterns were found in Håkansson and Arntzen (2021).

VI. CONCLUSION

This study examined the emergence of phrasal and inter-phrasal agreement in Arabic as an L2. In learners' interlanguage, phrasal (noun-adjective) agreement emerged before inter-phrasal (subject-verb) agreement. In addition, complex form-function relations caused proceeding loads, delaying emergence of noun-adjective agreement when the head noun was plural masculine or plural feminine. When learners could not produce target-language forms, they usually opted for one of two strategies: supplying the default form in all contexts or contrasting the singular masculine for all singular contexts with plural masculine for all plural contexts. Future research could identify whether this is the way learners figure out the full paradigm.

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Resilience as Reparation: An Exploration of Traumatic Memories in Santanu Bhattacharya's *One Small Voice*

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Abstract—Trauma is a chronic disorder brought on by a terrifying event in a human's life. The impact of trauma and responses may differ for each individual depending on their ability to cope with it. This research contributes to the field of literature by highlighting how the characters become resilient by bouncing back from trauma in the debut novel, *One Small Voice* (2023) by Santanu Bhattacharya. The concepts of Judith Herman's stages of recovery, as well as Judith Butler's symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder, and Cathy Caruth's trauma theory are utilized for analysis of trauma theory in the fiction. Further to this, the research explores how the novelist utilizes storytelling as a technique in his non-linear narration to deal with three timelines- Shubhanskar as a schoolboy, a parental aspirant and a remarkably resilient person. In recent times, the trauma theory has begun to flourish in literature and medicine to support the traumatized individuals in society. The research also touches upon the theory of remembrance, theory of forgetting, memory updating and editing, which play a major role in altering an individual's memory over time. Therefore, the study concludes with the ideology that resilience is the hidden force behind every individual's transformation in overcoming suppressed emotions and negative self-beliefs.

Index Terms—trauma, repressed memories, PTSD, depression, resilience

I. INTRODUCTION

Trauma is an interdisciplinary field that is closely related to sociology, psychology and literature. The term 'trauma' is a Greek word meaning "wound," which describes psychological and emotional injuries. According to Tancred, the trauma or wound refers to "an injury inflicted on a body or wound of the mind-breach in the mind's experience of time, self and the world" (Butler, 2004, p. 3). The trauma theory emerged in the 1990s and began to flourish among literary scholars. The word "trauma" is an umbrella term referring to both individual as well as collective experiences. Trauma brings physical and emotional changes to those who have experienced hazardous events, which may lead to strange experiences, nightmares, flashbacks and terrible dreams. The theorist Judith Herman not only distinguishes traumatic memories as being complex but also proposes the three stages model of recovery, focusing on remembrance, mourning and reconnection with ordinary life (Herman, 2015). Her theory demonstrates the understanding of psychological and neurological ramifications of trauma as well as how society influences its outcomes. The emergence of trauma studies has evolved to give novelists innovative means of framing ideas within the contexts of literature, history and politics. It clarifies how the characters' perspectives of the world and themselves are altered by their changing nature of memory. Many literary novels reflect trauma in different contexts, for example, the generational trauma in Anjali Enjeti's *The Parted Earth* (2021), inherited trauma, addiction and mental illness in Naheed Phiroze's *Mirror Made of Rain* (2022), Depressive Disorder in the Memoir *I've Never Been (Un) Happier* (2018) by Shaheen Bhatt and Suicidal Ideation in *Brink* (2020) by S. L. Bhyrappa. These literary books helped to grasp the fragility of human vulnerabilities, emotional weaknesses, and how traumatized individuals confront these challenges and overcome them. This has inspired the researcher to explore the novel *One Small Voice*.

As a distinguished writer of our time, Santanu Bhattacharya engages earnestly in trauma writing. He is the author of two novels, *One Small Voice* (2023) and *Deviants* (2025) as well as one short story *Juvenilia* (2024). His *One Small Voice* was chosen as an Observer Best Debut Novel for 2023. He is the winner of 1). The Desmond Elliott Prize Residency award, which is given to new literary voices, 2). the Mo Siewcharan Prize, which is given to ethnic writers from new Black, Asian and so on, 3). the Life Writing Prize for his marvellous fictions and non-fiction and finally, a London Writers' Award. There are a few review articles on the debut novel *One Small Voice* which deals with anti-Muslim violence in India, specifically among the post-1992 generation. Moreover, Naqvi et al. (2025), in their article entitled, Fanonian Neo-Colonial Insights in Bhattacharya's *One Small Voice*: Exploring Economic and Religious Exploitation in Postcolonial

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India, evaluate the concept of communalism, neo-colonialism to examine religious and economic hardships of political hegemony. To fill the gaps in the existing research, this study conducted a trauma analysis in the novel *One Small Voice* with distinct focus on the protagonist Shabby's experience of trauma using the concept of resilience as a reparation of trauma. An analysis of the novel might lead researchers to identify how trauma can be mitigated through personal resilience and coping strategies.

In *One Small Voice*, Shabby personifies the voice of dreams intertwined with silent struggles regarding current politics, social conditions and the challenges in the modern world. Bhattacharya's narratives are acclaimed for their rich character development and poetic prose, which effectively convey the intricacies of a society battling social inequality, interpersonal conflicts and the pursuit of individual identity. Judith Butler in her work addresses trauma, vulnerability and violence; she views trauma as influenced by social structures, communication and relationships rather than a psychological affliction. Therefore, utilizing Butler's views, the novel explores the communal tensions, class disparities and the quest for personal identity. Vane in her review, admires the novel *One Small Voice* for being "a powerful story about one man's trauma and recovery" (Vane, 2023) by emphasizing its dynamic portrayal of Shabby's emotional realm. Accordingly, the study helps the researcher to identify how the traumatized survive the destructive events and overcome psychological dilemmas with adversity. Therefore, the depiction of different types of traumas, such as PTSD, Grief disorder and Acute Clinical Disorder, elucidates the plurality of the lived experiences in the chosen novel.

II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Literature influences human beings to voice out their emotional expression through writing. It offers a space for writers to express self-reflection, flashbacks, scars of trauma, painful recollection of memories, deep wounds and sufferings through words. Radstone states that trauma theory, which developed since 1980's bridged psychology and the humanities (Radstone, 2013). Scholars like Cathy Caruth and others utilize the trauma theory in the literary field. Cathy in her book *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History* (1996), explored the concepts of trauma in literature. She defines trauma as an "intractable problem of the unconscious that illuminates the inherent contradictions of experience and language" (Caruth, 1996, p. 1).

Strange and Takarangi state that traumatic memories are malleable to distortion over time. They state that mental images are stimuli for the re-experiencing of intrusive memories and memory distortion due to intentional or unintentional remembering which leads to forgetting the original experiences (Strange & Takarangi, 2015).

The article Belief in Unconscious Repressed Memory agrees that unconscious repressed memory leads to physical and mental health issues. Herman and Schatzor state that there is no guarantee that the recovered memory will be restored because it could be modified due to memory updating or editing. The theorists and researchers have given many names as a substitute for the term repressed memories such as dissociation, dissociative amnesia, engrams and body memories (Otgaar et al., 2021).

Arden opines that resilient people do not worry about the bad circumstances that have happened rather they seek the positivity of turning those frustrating situations into opportunities. Many resilient people made their new lives by overcoming great trauma; therefore, he calls this type of optimism as emotional intelligence (Arden, 2010, pp. 168-169).

Wilson agrees with Freud and Carl that the subconscious mind has the power to rule our behavior. He suggests using affirmative inputs and focusing more on positive psychology. He focuses on steps to positive strategies rather than giving importance to the negative side of things (Wilson, 2022).

Herman states that intrusive experiences are stored in active memory and it has the possibility of repeating the images. Therefore, it could be resolved by the traumatized only through the proper understanding of what had happened in their past (Herman, 2015, p. 41).

The following Disorders PTSD, Grief disorder and Acute Clinical Depression, are analyzed through a textual analysis of extracts. PTSD includes intrusive memories and thoughts, nightmares, psychic disturbances during sleep, some changes in memory concentration and startle responses (Butler, 2004, p. 58).

In Uncomplicated Grief, one may come out of the grief of loved ones as the days pass by, gradually accepting their death, whereas in prolonged grief, intense yearning persists due to the stimulation of other memories of the loved ones. Therefore, they enter into a condition of Prolonged Grief Disorder where they are unable to accept their loved one's death (Duffy & Wild, 2023).

Acute Clinical Depression is also known as Depressive Disorder. According to the WHO, globally at present, the second most common cause of disability is depression and it is expected to overtake all other causes by 2030. It is also found that depression is associated with high rates of suicidal behavior (Karroui et al., 2021). The following objectives will be achieved in this research:

- I. To explore the issues of trauma and its impact on shaping the experiences of psyche.
- II. To describe the emotional endurance of the characters dealing with trauma as portrayed in the texts.
- III. To identify the role of society and cultural acceptance of trauma victims as reflected by the experiences of Shabby and his friends in *One Small Voice*.

III. METHODOLOGY

This study will adopt a descriptive qualitative method and a textual analysis methodology to investigate the psychological approaches. Through a close reading of the primary texts, the views of theorists including Judith Herman, Judith Butler, and Cathy Caruth about trauma and recovery are analyzed and they are compared to the themes, symbolism, and plots of the primary text. This research will use *One Small Voice* as its primary text and secondary data will be gathered from articles, journals, books, magazines and so on.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A. Traumatic Memories of Characters

Shubhankar “Shabby” Trivedi, the protagonist, first appears as a victim of terrible mob violence at the beginning of the novel. He observes the news headline on 6th December 1992 stating, “A BLACK DAY FOR INDIAN SECULARISM. And in small letters – Babri Masjid demolition in Ayodhya sparks riots across country” (Bhattacharya, 2023, p. 32). Due to the riot, schools, offices and markets were shut. The demolition triggered violence with damages to properties and curfews sweeping across Ayodhya. Shubhankar was 10 years old when he witnessed a brutal lynching of a man who was then burnt. Shubhankar viewed this column of fire with large terrified eyes and felt it looked like a horrifying mythical creature. This incident experienced by Shabby radically changed his life. Shabby’s reaction to this incident supports Herman’s (2015) views on trauma that, it not only defragments the self but also primary care systems that provide people with a sense of control, connection and purpose which are overtaken by the traumatic experiences. Shabby, upset about the incident and so he tried to find out about the innocent young Muslim man who was burnt alive. But he recalled only that his name began with the letter M. He is unable to share what he witnessed; therefore, it stayed as an unforgettable trauma in his subconscious mind. This PTSD altered his perspective of the world, where it poses a serious threat to his normal life. However, Shabby does not fully understand his trauma at his age, but his childhood trauma continued to haunt him even in his adulthood by repeating. As Freud in his *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920) asserts, trauma is a “compulsion to repeat” when unresolved trauma persists and keeps coming back to haunt the mind instead of being consciously integrated. Shabby was wrapped in the name of love and care by his family and also by the invisible scars of his childhood trauma.

His pressure from his family to secure a good education, career and marriage for settling in life makes him feel like his life itself is a relentless treadmill. Therefore, he is trapped between societal expectations and personal dreams. He also has a fear of failure, financial success and social image, where these demands leave him hopeless. In the midst of all this, he suffers from loneliness because he could not share his pain, which is buried deep within him. The novel highlights Shabby’s inner conflict and his dream to get free from his trauma, redefine love, and reclaim freedom, which is his utmost pleasure. His friends Ganjeri, Shruthi and brother Chintoo also undergo trauma in their lives and try to overcome their trauma with resilience. The protagonist tries to escape from his reality to forget his childhood trauma, but is trapped with its memories even in the present. Cathy, the leading theorist in trauma studies claims that surviving trauma is often thought of as an escape, but the traumatic memories often return intrusively or compulsively. When people develop traumatic stress, they undergo nightmares, hyperarousal and dissociation, which disturbs their peaceful life and poses a serious threat to their living. As a result, Shabby could not see the positive aspects of his life and so he tries to escape from his haunting trauma of the past. Judith Herman asserts that trauma shatters the victim’s basic assumptions about identity, personal safety, self-confidence and hope (Herman, 2015, p. 51).

Another incident that shook the remembrance of his childhood trauma was when he booked his ticket from Mumbai to Lucknow to escape from loneliness and scary dreams. He thought those two weeks would help him to come out of trauma. However, an occurrence at the Railway station when he was waiting for his train worsened and caused him to experience trauma once more. A group of members attack a boy as he belongs to North India where North Indians get into railway jobs easily, which prevents Marathis from acquiring jobs. This incident shows the macroaggressions that still exist in society, including the clashes between two regions (North and South India), caste and religion. This particular incident deepened the physical and emotional wounds of Shabby. As the group hit him badly, he had physical injuries with marks on his body as well as mental wounds. At that instance, Shabby never thought that Mangesh, his Maid’s Son would turn against him and so his betrayal becomes an emotional wound in Shabby’s heart. When Mangesh revealed all the details saying, “Shabby’s full name is Shubhankar Trivedi. He is from Lucknow; he has friends who have no respect for our culture” (Bhattacharya, 2023, p. 280). Hearing all this, the attackers hit Shabby badly.

Ganjeri, one of Shabby’s friends, hates society and suffers from his childhood trauma of witnessing religious riots in 2002. During the riots, “A mob broke the house, looted, took everything. They gutted the shop, the factory . . . the Hindus say Muslims kill cows, eat the meat” (Bhattacharya, 2023, p. 240). Ganjeri’s emotions are not just personal; they are political because the system discriminates based on Hindu and Muslim. Ganjeri states that when a Hindu riots, they are protesters; when a Muslim riots, they are terrorists (Bhattacharya, 2023, p. 290). Ganjeri’s life becomes a mirror reflecting the cruelty embedded in social structures. He observes how the Hindu wields power, respect, while the Muslim struggles for recognition and basic rights. Consequently, he feels abandoned, helpless and lacks his identity in society. The marginalization builds up a strong sense of anger and disillusionment within him.

Shruthi's parents' divorce became a life-altering trauma and also the divorce has shattered her belief in lasting relationships. As a result, she retreats into isolation, struggling silently with the memories she cannot erase. As a result, she opines that "Families are like that bridge. Shruthi's voice was soft against the roaring sea. The two ends will never meet" (Bhattacharya, 2023, pp. 167-168). When Shruthi shares her casual conversation with Shabby and Ganjeri, she says about the strange fear she carries in the society, "I'm always aware that someone can harm my body if they had the chance" (Bhattacharya, 2023, p. 273). Whenever she tries to fight tears, she always recalls her mother's words that women have only two choices – to stay or to leave.

The novel portrays the psychological trauma of characters where their pain mirrors the larger collective wounds that still exist in the society including the violence, mistrust, scars and fear. Freud states that fear, anxiety and sorrows are hidden in the subconscious mind because the subconscious mind is the storehouse of all memories and emotions as it works 24/7. According to Freud, on the surface, a person may seem full of smiles and joys but within, they might possess countless wounds and losses.

B. The Psychological Journey of the Victimized

The Natural elements (Fire, Water, Earth, Air and Space) are fundamental to all cosmic formation and our body. Dr. Ashley, the planetary scientist states that the elements in human body accurately matches totally with the stars in the galaxy (Lotzof, 2018). The novelist sketched his characters' emotions by bringing the universal concept that humans are part of the universe. He metaphorically structured the narrative through natural elements like Ankur, Vaayu, Jaal, and Aakash in his Chapters to represent the characters' emotions. The Fire (Agni) symbolizes conflict, anger and intensity of Shabby's childhood trauma; in the later Chapters, the fire represents his transformation and rebuilding. The mention of Earth (Prithvi) in the Chapter metaphorically represents how the characters are nostalgic for the soil or the land. The Sapling (Ankur) represents new beginnings and the psychological growth of the characters. The desire and emotions cannot be seen as they are invisible like Winds and so the Chapter named Wind reflects the character's desire for freedom. Water (Jal) symbolizes adaptability to life's changes. Consequently, the Metal (Dhaatu) is a strong material; the Chapter named Metal represents characters becoming strong and resilient by bouncing back from challenges. The Chapter Space (Aakaash) reflects psychological void and experiences. This Chapter is also a turning point for the characters to overcome grief, silence and detachment.

The major trauma disorders depicted in the fiction through natural elements are PTSD, Grief disorder and Acute Clinical Depression. Herman states that PTSD falls into three main categories such as hyperarousal, intrusion and constriction (Herman, 2015, p. 35). The characters, including Shabby, Ganjeri, and Shruthi, experience disturbing thoughts, dreams, and a fight-or-flight response. While experiencing turmoil, these characters' most profound struggle is the question of their sense of self and identity. Shabby is suspicious of everyone around him, including his friends, colleagues, and acquaintances, as he is always afraid that someone in Mumbai might find out about his past. Finally, he doubts Anisha, one of his well-wishers, thinking she could have found out about his past and spoken about this to Sid, who runs the Trust. Shabby's doubts replace his confidence and so his self-belief begins to fade. Consequently, it becomes difficult for him to trust his abilities. He became emotionally isolated as a result of his hatred and self-blame. The traumatic memories of the past disrupt emotions and often leave the traumatized with persistent recollections of intrusive flashbacks, "The moment he got back to his flat, he dragged the mirror out, into the flat... He tore apart the packaging, positioned the mirror against the wall, and pulled his clothes off. He is ashamed of what he sees, of what he has become, of what the incident has done to his body, of what he has let happen to himself" (Bhattacharya, 2023, p. 214).

It is very common for the traumatized to see themselves as worthless and self-deprecating. Shabby feels very low about himself when he sees his image in the mirror. He feels uncomfortable, so he moves to Mumbai city to escape from his family pressure of getting success in life by securing a good job, getting rich and buying luxury cars. Herman states that the traumatized get isolated from the family, friends and so on. they also get detached from the community due to their question of self-identity (Herman, 2015, pp. 51-52). As the body remembers the trauma, certain sights or smells trigger the victim to his past in the present. Whenever Shabby sees fire or flames, his body responds with sudden chest tightness, shivering, and sweating. When he turns the radio on, he is anxious about the song that will play and the memories it will evoke and so he shuts it off. This shows the internal conflict of Shabby's hesitation due to his traumatic memories that stimulate the lack of self-confidence and anxiety related to avoidance behavior. Butler opines that the avoidance of intrusive traumatic memories and the repetition of flashbacks and nightmares can only be understood as the inability of the mind to avoid such events coming into consciousness as they are strengthened in the subconscious (Butler, 2004, p. 58).

When Shabby sees the injustice in society, he becomes enraged. He loses his temper when he gets to know the news of another killing where "Two Muslim boys going home by train, are accosted by a group of Hindu nationalists accused of carrying beef, dragged down to the platform" (Bhattacharya, 2023, p. 362). He discusses the truth with his father about the dark side of the countries and boundaries where people freely create conflicts through borders, religion and caste. Through wars and riots they forget about peace, and global unity. Shabby points out, "Too many people have died. Too much damage has been done. No religion, no god will forgive us for this" (Bhattacharya, 2023, p. 363). He also criticizes the education system in India, having experienced academic stress in his childhood to secure good marks. He also points out the rote learning system in India, where there is no place for creativity and critical thinking. Even in the case of Dwiti, she faces pressure in her studies to crack the IIT exam and has a persistent fear of failing it. As a result, she hangs herself

as it might be difficult to bear the failure in the future. Shabby in the funeral gathering saw a woman who seemed like a professor saying, “Every exam season, there are so many suicides...will we make India a technology superpower over the dead bodies of our kids? How many more lives will it take before parents acknowledge their kid’s trauma?” (Bhattacharya, 2023, p. 110). This highlights the expectations of parents imposed on their children. On the other hand, his friend’s suicide and his Granny’s death had a profound impact on Shabby; it intensified his psychological distress, slipping into a Prolonged grief disorder. It took several weeks for Shabby to come out of the Prolonged grief disorder of forgetting his Granny’s funeral.

Shabby suddenly awoke from his sleep when he experienced terrifying dreams. Both dreams and nightmares reflect subconscious fears that sometimes lead to emotional exhaustion. In the nightmares, he witnessed a bomb tear his school bus and his body lying dead under it, whereas his brother Chintoo’s face was streaming with blood. When he awoke suddenly from his sleep, he felt the feverish forehead and armpits, and the sweat clinging to the bedsheets everywhere. Judith Butler states that dreams occurring in traumatic neuroses transport the traumatized back to the scene of their accident, from which they awake, frightened (Butler, 2004).

Ganjeri also undergoes intrusive memories, when he said, “Every single day I would imagine someone driving a knife through me” (Bhattacharya, 2023, p. 272). This mental imagery profoundly takes him back to the moments of horror. Ganjeri remembers more trauma than he had experienced because of the reexperiencing syndrome. Because of this, he tries to suppress those mental images coming into his consciousness. Shabby helps his Maid’s Son, Mangesh, as he belongs to a low caste and undergoes ill treatment in society because of his caste. Mangesh was not allowed to enter the mall, and his experience in the mall reflects discrimination due to caste prejudice. The mall, which is meant to be a space for the public, turned into a place of humiliation for him. Mangesh here represents those who undergo silent violence by the denial of human rights. Though Shabby helped Mangesh in his studies, Mangesh failed to recognize it and ended up causing harm.

So far, the article has argued that the unconscious repressed memories of the characters lead to trauma. However, they try to overcome it through motivated forgetting. This technique helps the traumatized to cope with repressed memories so that they no longer recollect traumatic experiences. This turns out to be a defensive mechanism that involves automatic avoidance or suppression of those repressed memories coming into consciousness.

C. Transformation From Victim to Resilient

Resilience is one of the key traits that every individual needs to cultivate because everyone in society experiences pain and loss. Due to a lack of resilience, many people end up in self-annihilation. To avoid this, one must try to become resilient and resolve to overcome hardships to lead a fulfilled life. Though Shabby had faced many problems in his life, like childhood trauma, discrimination, he tries to accept and move on from the trauma and rebuild his life after reaching Mumbai. Shabby felt triumphant and experienced his transformation when he could make his decision independently. He chose to listen to his inner voice and was determined to turn his thoughts into actions. Shabby dedicated his time and energy to the voices of the unheard slum communities. He worked as an Arts Sir and taught them without fees. Shabby also helped Mangesh in tutoring, moral support and by giving free access to his books. He was awarded with Citizen Bravery Award for his service to society.

Herman states that a solution to trauma could be the talking cure. When the victim’s self-identity is shattered, that sense can be rebuilt and cured through talking. However, it may be more challenging for the traumatized to rebuild even a minimal form of trust in the initial period (Herman, 2015, p. 61). The friendship between Shabby and his friends (Ganjeri and Shruthi) helped them to share their thoughts and emotions. Because of that, each of them shares their inner turmoil to know each other and support each other morally; it helped three of them to accept the pain and move on from adversity to lead a meaningful life. It paved the way to maintain a supportive social network. “Sharing the traumatic experiences with others is a precondition for the restitution of a sense of a meaningful world. In this process, the survivor seeks assistance not only from those closest to her but also from the wider community. The response of the community has a powerful influence on the ultimate resolution of the trauma” (Herman, 2015, p. 70).

Rebecca, one of the friends of Shabby, advised him to focus on the beauty of life, achievement and powerful stories of resilience. He recalls his father’s words to believe in himself and the Willpower to get back to his normal life. Also, his Nani once told, “The truer your work, the more universe will find ways to reward you” (Bhattacharya, 2023, p. 307). These words changed Shabby to reshape his life and to fight his own battles. His efforts toward transformation align with Murphy’s assertion that the law of mind depends on what one’s thoughts hold in their conscious mind, and accordingly, they elicit a reaction or response from the subconscious mind (Murphy, 2008, p. 20). On the other hand, Miss Lucy has found the answers for Shabby’s thirst, which had disturbed him for more than a year about the mystery of M. She reveals that Salma Begum, the community partner of Maulviganj area, found M, the man, not the body. The man’s name is Mudassir (Bhattacharya, 2023, p. 369). Ganjeri also determined to overcome his trauma; he planned for his future well-being and decided to move on from his trauma by accepting it. Whenever Shabby needed support, Ganjeri stood by him and he also praised Shabby for his achievements. Chintoo, Shabby’s brother also opens up about what he had in his mind and says that he will also move to Mumbai, where he wants to become a big music producer and has an offer from a studio. Both Chintoo and Shabby fought with their parents to choose their careers.

V. CONCLUSION

This research investigates the concept of trauma and its consequences in Bhattacharya's novel *One Small Voice*. Being exposed to the harsh realities of discrimination and injustice in society altered the characters' perception of the outside world. Still, it also helped them to reshape their life with compassion, courage and resilience. Alberdi et al. (2014), in the article titled "*Epidemiology of Severe Trauma*," highlights the alarming global impact of trauma, stating that it ranks as the sixth most common cause of death and the fifth most common cause of moderate to severe disability worldwide. Through the trauma theory, the paper analysed how the characters of the novel confront challenges and emerge resilient. The article also highlights how avoidance serves as a defensive mechanism and helps characters to undergo personal transformation. Consequently, the novel ends with a hopeful conclusion by emphasizing connections with friends and family in helping each other for recovery. Finally, the research aids society in treating trauma survivors with utmost care.

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Discursive Constructions of Authority: A Comparative Analysis of Tone and Context in King Abdullah II's Speeches Within a Translation Framework

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Abstract—This study investigates the discursive construction of political authority in Jordanian King Abdullah II's international speeches, using a qualitative methodological framework that combines thematic analysis and Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), which is based on Fairclough's three-dimensional model. The study examines how linguistic and rhetorical techniques are used to project diplomatic influence and assert legitimacy in a variety of geopolitical contexts, focusing on two speeches—one given before the US Congress in 2007 and the other at the UN General Assembly in 2024. The findings of the study revealed that King Abdullah II positions Jordan as a morally upright player in international affairs by mainly using appeals to universal moral principles like justice, peace, and human dignity to establish his authority. The intentional modulation of modality and tone allows for adaptive audience engagement, while intertextual references to historical, religious, and legal sources reinforce political claims and bolster Jordan's symbolic capital. Additionally, by balancing moral clarity with diplomatic prudence, the King's speech consistently presents Jordan as a neutral and reasonable mediator in regional disputes through selective emphasis and omission. Despite having few material resources, Jordan is able to maintain credibility in international diplomacy and exercise soft power thanks to these rhetorical techniques. This study adds to a wider understanding of authority, identity, and legitimization in international political communication by emphasizing the performative and ideologically embedded nature of political discourse, especially as it is used by smaller states in multilateral settings.

Index Terms—discursive construction, rhetorical techniques, geopolitical contexts, adaptive audience

I. INTRODUCTION

Political leaders can influence public opinion, negotiate power dynamics, and justify their stances by using the discursive construction of authority (Fairclough, 1995; Chilton, 2004). Successful leaders purposefully use language to reach a variety of audiences, establish relationships, and project authority. This entails creating messages that appeal to their audience, utilizing rhetorical strategies to motivate and convince them, and modifying their language and tone to fit various situations. An effective leader is adept at utilizing language to sway their audience. Certain leaders have audiences who are keenly interested in their speeches, actively listen, and dissect their words to grasp the intended message.

Jordan's King Abdullah II and other Middle Eastern rulers employ language strategies to achieve these goals. Because of the region's complex history, peculiarities, and political settings, leaders must handle delicate circumstances, balance competing interests, and maintain delicate diplomatic ties. King Abdullah II's speeches in particular offer a unique perspective on how language influences power and leadership in the Middle East.

Various studies have investigated the role of language in political discourse, highlighting its importance in shaping public opinion and negotiating power dynamics (van Dijk, 1997; Chilton, 2004). There is, however, limited research on how tone and context differ in monarchic speeches, particularly in the Middle East. Because of the region's intricate political systems and subtle cultural differences, there is a big knowledge gap regarding language and leadership. This study explores the convergence of tone and context in King Abdullah II's speeches to enhance the comprehension of how language influences leadership and authority.

The current study addresses this gap by investigating the correlation between context and tone in the speeches of King Abdullah II. The objective of this study is to elucidate the impact of language on the establishment of leadership and authority in the Middle Eastern context by analyzing the discursive dynamics that are evident in his speeches.

This study seeks to answer the following research questions:

1. How does King Abdullah II utilize tone and language to construct authority in his speeches?
2. What role does context play in shaping the tone and language used by King Abdullah II in addressing diverse audiences?

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

A. Rhetorical Context of King Abdullah II's Speeches: A Historical Perspective

King Abdullah II's speech has attracted the attention of many academic researchers and readers worldwide because of its unique interactive style, which uses a clear and fluent language, as well as linguistic repetition and balance. It uses language repetition to reinforce core values and principles, and balance to create balanced and harmonious sentences. It also uses suggestive language by using phrases and sentences with multiple meanings. The use of metaphors and parables to illustrate ideas and concepts is also prominent.

His Majesty the King's remarks, which are said to be firmly anchored in the political and historical fabric of the area, have played a significant role in influencing how people in the region and around the world view the Jordanian monarchy. Among the many difficulties His Majesty has encountered since taking the throne in 1999 are calls for political reform, regional strife, and economic uncertainty. But in handling these difficulties, his remarks have been essential, solidifying Jordan's standing as a moderate and stable state in the Middle East's politically and economically unstable region.

A knowledge of Jordan's contemporary history and royal heritage is necessary to comprehend the rhetorical background of King Abdullah II's remarks. The Hashemite monarchy has maintained and stabilized political power by relying on the fundamental principles of guardianship, nationality, and religious legitimacy, as argued by Milton-Edwards and Hinchcliffe (2009). His Majesty still uses a speech that frequently brings up issues of solidarity, change, and national fortitude. In addition to reflecting his personal attempt to strike a balance between continuity and the demands of modernization and reform, his speech also captures the legacy of his father, King Hussein (Brand, 1994).

During the Arab Spring, a challenging time for Jordan and the Arab world, the King's speeches became increasingly significant due to their insightful nature. His Majesty's addresses during this era emphasized political reform and a broad national dialogue, often employing inclusive language to respond to the needs and demands of citizens, while also reinforcing the monarchy's stability and legitimacy (Ryan, 2008). Al-Momani (2014) notes that these speeches were crucial in strengthening the regime's image as responsive and focused on reform, all while maintaining substantial political authority.

It is crucial to keep in mind that His Majesty's global standing influences his remarks. His Majesty highlights Jordan's capacity to mediate regional disputes and serve as a voice of wisdom and moderation in Islamic discourse in his book *Our Last Best Chance* (2011). His speeches at international conferences place a strong emphasis on the necessity of interfaith communication, global cooperation, coordinated action, and the struggle against terrorism, which puts everyone in peril. These are in line with broader foreign policy objectives and seek to strengthen Jordan's strategic connections with Western countries (Faris, 2010).

Wodak (2009) argues that examining political speeches involves understanding both their substance and their social and political roles. It can be asserted that the King's address helps create an image of Jordan as a stable, reform-oriented monarchy, a character that is embraced locally and promoted globally.

B. Tone and Context in Political Speech

His Majesty adeptly modifies his tone to align with the context and the audience. When he speaks to his citizens in Arabic, especially during legislative addresses or discussions on national reform, his tone is calm, intentional, inclusive, and repetitive. He highlights critical issues that resonate with the Jordanian populace. By invoking common values, national pride, and the necessity for reform, the use of pronouns such as "we" and "us" cultivates a sense of unity (Haider et al., 2023). These linguistic choices emphasize his appeals for justice, accountability, and democratic engagement through the techniques of reiteration and escalation (Saffah Kareem, 2024).

In global platforms, his vocal style resembles that of his addresses at the United Nations and Western political events, characterized by a more moderate and diplomatic tone. His Majesty utilizes metaphors to convey his messages effectively. The King's speeches in international venues attract significant attention due to his use of balanced diplomatic language that supports the battle against extremism and the quest for lasting and inclusive peace. These rhetorical devices reinforce

his moral position and demonstrate Jordan's alignment with global political discussions (El-Sharif & Owais, 2019; Bataineh, 2019).

Deixis establishes a sense of shared identity in both domestic and foreign settings, particularly via the intentional use of first-person plural pronouns. Such language brings Jordan closer to foreign actors and shared goals in international forums while simultaneously promoting national unity at home. His speeches demonstrate careful rhetorical preparation, employing intertextual references, modality, and metaphorical framing to enhance their persuasive effect and maintain their political validity across a wide range of circumstances.

Fairclough's notion that discourse both shapes and reflects power connections is a key element of the methodological underpinnings of this study, which is based on Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). In contrast to his English-language speeches, which are distinguished by a cosmopolitan and solution-oriented approach that intentionally promotes Jordan's position in the world, King's Arabic speeches are full of appeals to historical memory and communal identity (Bataineh, 2019).

C. *King Abdullah II's Strategic Use of Language*

In order to establish authority and engage a variety of audiences, King Abdullah II's rhetorical style is described in this section as a deftly balanced combination of intertextuality, pragmatic deixis, hedging, and metaphorical framing. Making use of metaphor is essential. The King regularly uses conceptual motifs such as "journeys," "paths," or "wars" to give abstract ideas of change a powerful and tangible manifestation. He could, for example, describe difficulties as disagreements that must be resolved by all parties or present reform as a way to accomplish a common goal. His audience experiences emotional and cognitive resonance as a result of his use of metaphorical language (El-Sharif, 2015; Bataineh, 2019; Almaani, 2018).

To promote unity and cohesion, some deictic terms, such as "we," "us," and "you," are purposefully used. On a local level, they seek to promote inclusivity and communal solidarity; on a global scale, they broaden the scope of inclusion to encompass global actors, placing Jordan in a larger collective narrative (Bataineh, 2019; Almahasees & Mahmoud, 2022). Additionally, neutral pronouns soften the tone of authority and reduce hierarchical distance (Saffah Karim, 2024).

His rhetorical style also includes hedging and circumlocution. By softening potentially contentious statements and maintaining diplomatic propriety, the use of modal verbs like "can" and phrases like "we hope to..." assists in portraying openness, civility, and flexibility (El Sharif, 2015; Ghaleb & Abu Rumman, 2015). Circumlocution is commonly employed to handle delicate subjects tactfully, avoiding direct conflict while maintaining the clarity of the message (Almahasees & Abu Rayyash, 2023).

His legitimacy is increased through intertextuality, which refers to historical writings, religious traditions, or global frameworks. His statements have both emotional weight and normative power because they invoke universal values (like peace or human rights) or shared cultural memories (like the Hashemite legacy) (El Sharif, 2018; Saffah Kareem, 2024). His manner is rounded up with politeness techniques, especially in formal international contexts. While negative politeness, which uses indirectness and hedged phrases, maintains diplomatic etiquette, positive politeness, which emphasizes unity, respect, and collective identity, is used to promote goodwill (Habib et al., 2024).

It is possible to say that his rhetorical style demonstrates a dynamic interplay of intertextuality, hedging, expression, and metaphor. While keeping a tactful diplomatic tone overseas, this approach enables him to convey warmth and sympathy to audiences back home. His dual roles as a global statesman and a leader of national reform are strengthened by this stylistic adaptability, which also increases his power in a variety of settings.

D. *Review of Recent Studies on Tone and Contextual Construction in King Abdullah II's Speeches*

Recent studies show that the way King Abdullah II shapes his tone and word choice does much more than assert power; it also carves out a distinct Hashemite identity. Almahasees and Mahmoud (2022) use Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis to examine seven major speeches he gave between 2007 and 2021 at venues like the UN and the Arab League. They find that images such as fragile peace and Israel must embrace peace turn complicated geopolitical issues into urgent dramas, while echoes of past leaders help persuade listeners worldwide. By carefully sprinkling neutral pronouns we, our, and you throughout the text, the King melds his individual voice with a broader Jordanian chorus, creating a smooth but powerful version of royal authority.

Using CDA in combination with a stylistic lens, Kareem (2024) analyzes similar speeches across regional and global contexts. She identifies rhetorical strategies that are used to emotionally connect audiences, reaffirm beliefs, and communicate effectively.

Building on this, Kareem (2024) integrates a stylistic lens with CDA to examine similar speeches in international and regional settings. Her analysis identifies metaphoric imagery, subtle allusions, circumlocution, and intertextuality as core rhetorical devices used to emotionally engage audiences, reinforce convictions, and craft a positive image of leadership. The connection between tone (such as pathos-rich metaphors) and persuasive intent is expressed explicitly by Kareem by joining stylistic scrutiny with discourse analysis. El Sharif (2023) examines the construction of identity, highlighting the inherent Hashemite narrative embedded in the speeches of the King. By employing Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) to scrutinize lexical and thematic selections, he reveals how recurring motifs—historical and religious legitimacy, modernity, and innovative reforms—serve to validate Hashemite authority and foster consensus in Jordan. These

sociocultural portrayals create a more complex narrative surrounding the discourse of power, rooting it not only in policy matters but also in heritage, identity, and a vision for future leadership.

The collective analyses reinforce and augment the conclusions drawn from "Discursive Constructions of Authority," illustrating that the authority of King Abdullah II is a composite construct encompassing strategic identity representation, contextual adaptability, and rhetorical methodologies, rather than merely a singular declaration. In his discourses, authority is simultaneously performed and narratively substantiated, as evidenced by the convergence of stylistic variance, identity-focused rhetoric, and the application of metaphorical and intertextual strategies. This intricate interplay is manifest in the current landscape of political discourse.

III. METHODOLOGY

In this study, we used a qualitative research methodology, integrating aspects of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and thematic analysis to examine the discursive construction of authority in King Abdullah II's speeches. A thorough examination of the King's language and content strategies for establishing authority in global political discourse was made possible by this methodological integration. Two speeches given by King Abdullah II at significant international gatherings make up the dataset. He presented his first speech before the US Congress on March 7, 2007, stressing the value of international cooperation and Jordan's dedication to advancing peace and stability in the Middle East (<https://kingabdullah.jo/en/speeches/members-us-congress>). On September 24, 2024, at the 79th Session of the United Nations General Assembly in New York, the king gave his second speech. Addressing world leaders, the King's speech focused on the humanitarian crisis in Gaza and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict (<https://kingabdullah.jo/en/speeches/speech-his-majesty-king-abdullah-ii-79th-session-general-assembly-united-nations>).

Because of their geopolitical importance and different audiences, these speeches were chosen to allow for a comparative analysis of the ways in which authority is established in various international contexts, supporting these themes, specifically using Fairclough's model to analyze the rhetorical construction of authority, power dynamics, and ideological positioning.

A hybrid analytical framework was used, combining Fairclough's three-dimensional model of CDA (1995) with thematic analysis as described by Braun and Clarke (2006). This combination allowed for a more thorough examination of how language creates and reflects authority as well as the discovery of recurrent themes throughout the texts. In order to find patterns pertaining to the ideological stance, diplomatic tone, and authority projection, the transcripts were read several times as part of an inductive thematic analysis. The linguistic and rhetorical construction of these themes within the social and political contexts of each speech was further examined using CDA.

Through the use of Fairclough's model, the study was able to analyze the speeches' textual elements, such as tone, modality, and rhetorical devices; their discursive practices, such as audience positioning and intertextual references; and the larger social practices that shaped the discourse, such as international diplomatic relations and regional geopolitics. There was no need for ethical approval because the analysis was based on publicly available data and did not use human subjects. However, the study treated the content with respect for the speaker's communication goals and with academic rigor.

IV. FINDINGS

This section examines the discursive constructions of authority in the speeches of King Abdullah II, with a focus on tone and contextual framing. The analysis is presented thematically, offering an in-depth examination of verbatim extracts to elucidate the rhetorical strategies employed by the Jordanian monarch. Particular attention is given to how tone and context work together to reinforce his position of authority across different political and diplomatic settings.

Theme 1: Diplomatic Authority Through Moral Legitimacy

The construction of diplomatic authority through moral legitimacy in King Abdullah II's discourse represents a sophisticated engagement with ethical universals that transcend conventional paradigms of political power. Central to understanding this phenomenon is Weber's (1978) typology of authority, especially his conceptualization of charismatic authority—a form of legitimacy derived from the perceived exceptional qualities of a leader, often linked to moral vision and symbolic resonance. Although Weber originally associated charismatic authority primarily with revolutionary or transformational figures, contemporary interpretations (Barker, 2001) have expanded this category to include political leaders who maintain legitimacy by appealing to shared ethical values and universal moral principles rather than relying solely on coercive or institutional power.

King Abdullah II's speeches exemplify this expanded notion of charismatic authority by foregrounding themes of justice, peace, and human dignity—values that possess broad transcultural and interfaith significance. Through rhetorical appeals to these universally resonant ideals, the King cultivates a form of moral leadership that positions Jordan as a principled actor on the global stage. This strategic framing allows Jordan to claim authority not on the basis of military or economic might, but through a discourse rooted in ethical responsibility and humanitarian concern, thereby reinforcing the country's image as a credible and morally grounded interlocutor in international affairs.

To analyze how this moral legitimacy is discursively constructed, Fairclough's (1992, 2003) Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) offers a valuable framework. CDA foregrounds the constitutive role of language in producing and

reproducing social power relations. Within King Abdullah's discourse, the frequent use of morally charged imperatives such as "we must act" and inclusive pronouns like "we" and "our" serve as linguistic mechanisms of what Fairclough terms moral evaluation. These discursive strategies function to weave ethical norms into the fabric of political obligation, thereby linking the collective identity of Jordan—and its international partners—to a shared sense of moral responsibility. Such linguistic choices are not neutral; they perform the active work of legitimizing political actions and positions by appealing to widely accepted ethical standards, enhancing the persuasive impact of the King's diplomatic communication.

Further theoretical insight is gained through Bourdieu's (1991) concept of symbolic power, which describes the capacity to define and impose legitimate meanings and social realities that are accepted as self-evident. By consistently framing Jordan as a nation grounded in principles of justice and humanitarianism, King Abdullah accrues symbolic capital—a form of non-material power derived from recognized moral authority and prestige. This symbolic capital enables Jordan to assert influence in international forums through ethical discourse, circumventing the limitations imposed by its relatively modest geopolitical and military capabilities. The King's rhetorical construction of moral legitimacy thus facilitates a form of leadership that transcends conventional power metrics, articulating a vision of Jordan not merely as a nation-state but as a moral actor with a global mandate.

In sum, King Abdullah II's diplomatic authority emerges from a complex interplay of charismatic appeal, discursive moral evaluation, and the accumulation of symbolic capital. His rhetorical emphasis on universal values of justice, peace, and human dignity functions as a strategic resource that legitimizes Jordan's role in international affairs. This form of moral leadership enables the King to navigate the complexities of regional geopolitics while projecting a principled identity that resonates with diverse audiences—secular and religious, regional and global alike. Through this lens, diplomatic authority is understood not solely as a function of material power but as a performative accomplishment grounded in ethically infused discourse.

Theme 2: Strategic Modality and Tone in Audience Positioning

The strategic deployment of modality and tone in King Abdullah II's rhetoric exemplifies a nuanced exercise in audience adaptation, a concept central to Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) as developed by Halliday (1994). Modality, within SFL, represents the speaker's stance toward the truth or necessity of a proposition. By modulating between medium modality (e.g., "should," "can") and high modality (e.g., "must," "need to"), the King enacts varying degrees of authorial assertiveness in accordance with audience expectations.

This rhetorical flexibility also aligns with Bell's (1984) Audience Design Theory, which posits that speakers continuously adjust their language based on their audience's social positioning. In addressing the U.S. Congress, the King emphasizes shared values and mutual interests, aligning with American diplomatic norms. At the UN, he employs stronger imperatives to appeal to collective moral urgency—illustrating his awareness of audience-specific rhetorical norms.

Furthermore, the King's tonal adjustments can be interpreted through Goffman's (1981) notion of "footing", referring to shifts in the speaker's interactional role. Through these shifts, King Abdullah moves between peer, advocate, and moral witness, reconfiguring his discursive authority in response to the institutional and cultural setting. This dynamic positioning foregrounds the performative nature of diplomatic speech, wherein legitimacy is enacted through context-sensitive linguistic choices.

Theme 3: Intertextuality and Historical Referencing as Legitimization Strategies

King Abdullah II's strategic use of intertextuality—manifested through explicit religious, historical, and legal references—functions as a critical legitimization mechanism within his diplomatic discourse. The theoretical foundation for understanding this practice lies in Kristeva's (1980) seminal concept of intertextuality, which posits that texts are inherently interconnected, drawing upon, responding to, and reshaping other texts to produce meaning. This notion is further operationalized in Fairclough's (1992) Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) framework, which highlights how intertextuality operates as a resource for constructing social realities and legitimizing power relations. In King Abdullah's rhetoric, manifest intertextuality—the explicit citation or allusion to authoritative texts—serves to anchor his political claims in widely recognized and respected discursive traditions.

Central to this discursive strategy is the invocation of the Abrahamic religious tradition, through which King Abdullah situates Jordan as the guardian of Jerusalem and a moral steward within a spiritually significant lineage. This religious intertextuality not only reinforces Jordan's historic and cultural ties to the city but also enhances the moral authority of his diplomatic appeals. By referencing sacred texts and religious symbolism, the King transcends mere political rhetoric, instead positioning Jordan within a broader transnational and transcultural narrative that resonates with diverse audiences in the Middle East and beyond. This aligns with Fairclough's assertion that intertextual references are not decorative but performative, actively constituting social identities and legitimizing political positions.

The discursive power of these references is further explicated through van Leeuwen's (2007) model of legitimation strategies, which categorizes linguistic mechanisms that speakers use to justify and naturalize their authority. King Abdullah's rhetoric exemplifies two key strategies: authorization and moral evaluation. Authorization involves legitimizing claims by citing recognized authorities—such as UN resolutions, international peace agreements, or religious scriptures—thereby transferring their institutional credibility onto his discourse. Moral evaluation, on the other hand, frames Jordan's diplomatic actions as ethically justified and consistent with historical precedent and universal values. Together, these strategies function to transform the King's discourse from a primarily national narrative into a

transnational and universally resonant claim, thereby extending Jordan's symbolic influence beyond its geopolitical size or military capacity.

Bourdieu's (1991) concept of symbolic capital offers an additional lens to understand the impact of these intertextual and legitimizing practices. Symbolic capital refers to the resources a social agent accumulates through recognition, prestige, and the ability to confer legitimacy. By weaving references to institutionally validated texts and traditions into his rhetoric, King Abdullah accrues symbolic capital that bolsters Jordan's reputation as a custodian of moral, religious, and legal order. This accrued symbolic capital functions as a form of soft power, enabling Jordan to wield diplomatic influence disproportionate to its material capabilities. It allows the King to construct a rhetorical ethos of Jordan as a principled and authoritative actor, capable of mediating complex regional disputes while commanding respect on the international stage.

Theme 4: Constructing a Mediating Identity in Geopolitical Tensions

King Abdullah II's rhetorical construction of Jordan as a neutral mediator amid regional and international geopolitical tensions reflects a sophisticated deployment of identity-building strategies that resonate with key theoretical frameworks in International Relations and discourse studies. This portrayal of Jordan as a principled bridge-builder is not simply a descriptive characterization but a deliberate act of identity construction that shapes both domestic and international perceptions, consistent with the core tenets of Constructivist International Relations Theory.

Wendt's (1992) constructivist framework underscores that state identities are not fixed or predetermined but are continuously (re)constructed through social interaction, communication, and shared meanings. Within this paradigm, King Abdullah's persistent emphasis on dialogue, moderation, and stability functions as a constitutive narrative that actively produces and reproduces Jordan's identity in the international arena. By articulating Jordan's diplomatic stance through such normative terms, the King shapes a collective understanding of the state's role as a rational, peace-seeking actor, thereby enabling Jordan to differentiate itself from more polarized, confrontational, or militarized regional players.

This discursive construction is further elucidated through Positioning Theory (Harré & van Langenhove, 1999), which examines how social actors use language to assign roles and rights to themselves and others within communicative contexts. King Abdullah strategically positions Jordan as the mediating interlocutor, implicitly contrasting its measured and conciliatory approach with the extremism, partisanship, or unilateralism that often characterizes other actors in the Middle East. Through this contrastive positioning, Jordan's identity as a neutral facilitator of dialogue is reinforced, casting the nation—and by extension the King himself—as embodying rationality, moderation, and pragmatic leadership. This role assignment functions discursively to elevate Jordan's moral and diplomatic authority, enabling it to occupy a unique niche in a region frequently marked by instability and conflict.

Complementing this identity work, Role Theory in Foreign Policy Analysis (Holsti, 1970; Thies, 2009) offers a valuable explanatory lens for understanding how states enact and sustain particular foreign policy roles based on both internal narratives and external expectations. According to Role Theory, states do not act randomly but perform social roles that reflect their self-conceptions as well as the roles attributed to them by other international actors. King Abdullah's repeated articulation of Jordan's mediating role in multilateral forums—such as the United Nations and bilateral diplomatic engagements—serves as a form of role enactment that both reflects and reinforces Jordan's position as a diplomatic intermediary. This consistent discursive performance enables Jordan to consolidate a soft power identity that compensates for its limited material and military capacities, thereby expanding its influence through normative and reputational capital.

Moreover, this mediating identity carries important practical and symbolic implications. Practically, it enables Jordan to navigate complex geopolitical fault lines by maintaining working relations with a broad spectrum of regional and global actors, including Israel, Palestine, the United States, and various Arab states. Symbolically, the construction of Jordan as a trusted mediator projects an image of stability and reliability, which is essential not only for external diplomacy but also for internal political cohesion in a region often fraught with conflict spillover. The King's rhetorical emphasis on common ground, shared interests, and peaceful resolution reiterates this identity, positioning Jordan as a voice of reason and moderation amid competing and often antagonistic regional discourses.

Theme 5: Ideological Positioning Through Selective Emphasis and Omission

The theme of ideological positioning through selective emphasis and omission highlights the nuanced rhetorical strategies employed by King Abdullah II to articulate a diplomatic stance that is at once morally clear yet politically circumspect. This subtle maneuvering aligns closely with Fairclough's (1992) concept of "covert ideological positioning," wherein ideological commitments are enacted not only through what is said but significantly through what is left unsaid or backgrounded. By strategically emphasizing universal moral values—such as justice, human dignity, and peace—while simultaneously abstracting or depersonalizing agency in conflict narratives, King Abdullah crafts a critique that sidesteps direct confrontation with powerful actors. This approach facilitates diplomatic ambiguity, allowing the King to maintain a posture of normative clarity and ethical authority without jeopardizing crucial political relationships.

This discursive strategy can be fruitfully situated within the broader framework of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), which interrogates how power and ideology manifest through language (Fairclough, 2003). Fairclough emphasizes that the suppression or selective inclusion of information is a key mechanism through which discourse aligns with, reproduces, or challenges dominant power structures. In the King's speeches, the omission of explicit references to certain powerful states or actors—particularly those implicated in regional conflicts—signals a form of implicit critique. By foregrounding

international law, humanitarian principles, and collective responsibility, the discourse indirectly addresses issues of geopolitical inaction, complicity, or imbalance of power without breaching the diplomatic conventions of decorum or risking alienation of influential stakeholders. This calculated silence functions as a discursive safeguard, allowing Jordan to assert moral positions while preserving the delicate equilibrium of international relations.

Moreover, this strategic use of selective emphasis and omission resonates with Goffman's (1959) dramaturgical model of self-presentation, which conceptualizes social interaction as a carefully managed performance wherein actors manipulate impressions to achieve desired outcomes. King Abdullah's linguistic restraint can thus be interpreted as a discursive balancing act or performance, whereby he simultaneously appeals to Arab and Muslim publics through explicit alignment with themes of justice, resistance, and peace, while maintaining credibility and trustworthiness with Western powers through measured rhetoric and diplomatic tact. This dual audience orientation requires careful curation of speech content, tone, and thematic focus, allowing the King to inhabit a hybrid ideological position—one that navigates the competing demands and expectations of multiple constituencies.

This hybridity is significant because it enables Jordan to assert a form of ideological agency that transcends simplistic binaries of opposition or acquiescence. Through selective emphasis and omission, King Abdullah manages to articulate a normative vision that is critical yet constructive, principled yet pragmatic. This discursive practice bolsters Jordan's role as a moderator and moral interlocutor in regional and international affairs, enabling it to maintain influence and legitimacy amid complex and often contradictory power dynamics.

Collectively, these themes demonstrate that King Abdullah II constructs authority not through formal power alone, but through ethically grounded and strategically calibrated discourse. His appeals to moderation, diplomacy, and humanitarian values function as tools for legitimizing Jordan's international role. The integration of Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis highlights how linguistic choices—such as tone, modality, and intertextuality—reinforce ideological positioning and power relations. Complementarily, thematic analysis reveals consistent rhetorical patterns that construct a moral and mediating identity. Together, these methods illustrate how authority is discursively performed, allowing a small state like Jordan to exert influence through rhetorical agency rather than geopolitical dominance.

V. DISCUSSION

Through a complex interplay of linguistic, ideological, and symbolic strategies, the current study demonstrates how King Abdullah II's diplomatic discourse is meticulously constructed to establish authority, shape identity, and traverse challenging geopolitical terrains. Together, the five themes found in the analysis highlight the critical role that discourse plays in international diplomacy, especially for small states like Jordan that depend on soft power to gain legitimacy and influence in international affairs. This conversation highlights the theoretical and empirical ramifications of these findings by placing them within larger academic discussions in discourse studies, international relations theory, and political communication.

The findings of Theme 1 show that in order to establish diplomatic authority, King Abdullah II's rhetoric mainly depends on the expression of universal moral principles like justice, peace, and human dignity. Based on Bourdieu's (1991) concept of symbolic capital and Weber's (1978) expanded idea of charismatic authority, the analysis demonstrates that the King's legitimacy comes from his capacity to establish Jordan as a morally sound player in world politics rather than just institutional power. Jordan is positioned as a principled voice in a region that is frequently marked by conflict and instability thanks to these appeals to universal ethical principles.

Fairclough's (2003) conceptualization of moral evaluation in Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), which links normative values with political imperatives through language, is consistent with this deliberate invocation of moral legitimacy. A common sense of duty and responsibility is created for Jordan and the global community by the King's frequent use of collective pronouns and deontic modality. By redefining legitimacy as a discursively produced and morally anchored phenomenon, these linguistic choices reveal a performative construction of leadership that goes beyond conventional ideas of sovereignty.

This analysis is expanded upon in Theme 2, which focuses on King Abdullah's rhetorical adaptability in varying his tone and modality in various diplomatic settings. Using Halliday's (1994) Systemic Functional Linguistics framework, the study emphasizes how modal verb variations (such as "should," "must," and "can") serve to calibrate degrees of assertiveness and obligation, allowing the King to modify his discourse to meet the expectations and sensitivities of various audiences.

Bell's (1984) Audience Design Theory, which holds that speakers constantly modify their linguistic choices depending on their relationship to the audience, sheds more light on this audience-centric approach. King Abdullah deliberately highlights common values and presents Jordan's diplomatic role as an adjunct to the liberal international order when speaking to Western audiences, especially the US Congress or international fora like the UN. On the other hand, his discourse uses transcendent principles and moral urgency to bolster Jordan's ethical stance when speaking to regional or religiously affiliated audiences. The way that these changes in tone and posture enable the King to move between several speaker roles-peer.

The third theme examines how intertextuality functions in the King's discourse as a potent legitimation tool. King Abdullah grounds his political claims in established institutional and symbolic frameworks by making clear allusions to religious texts, historical precedents, and international legal instruments. This technique, which was conceptualized by

Kristeva (1980) and put into practice by Fairclough (1992) using his CDA model, demonstrates how intertextual references are constituents of political discourse's meaning-making processes rather than merely rhetorical devices.

These references can be interpreted through the lens of Van Leeuwen's (2007) taxonomy of legitimation strategies, which focuses on authorization and moral evaluation. By referencing reputable sources like UN resolutions or religious texts, the King appropriates the institutional legitimacy of other countries to support his own foreign policy stances. Concurrently, he conducts a moral assessment that upholds the state's standing as a reliable and moral actor by portraying Jordan's actions as morally sound and historically based. Through these discursive strategies, Jordan is able to present a transnational identity that is based on its symbolic capital as a defender of moral and legal order rather than on material power.

The development of Jordan's identity as an impartial and logical mediator is examined in Theme 4 via the prisms of positional theory, role theory, and constructivist international relations theory. According to Wendt (1992), state identities are socially constructed rather than materially fixed, and the results show that King Abdullah's emphasis on moderation, dialogue, and balance serves as a form of discursive identity construction.

The Positioning Theory of Harré and van Langenhove (1999) is especially helpful in shedding light on how the King places Jordan in relation to more partisan or aggressive regional actors. Jordan's soft power and diplomatic relevance are increased by its ability to assert a special role in conflict mediation through this contrastive positioning. Additionally, the study demonstrates that this identity is not only projected but is consistently enacted through repeated rhetorical performances in international forums, drawing on Holsti's (1970) and Thies's (2009) Role Theory. Jordan's reputation as a reliable mediator who can heal divisions in a fractured regional landscape is strengthened by the discursive replication of its mediator role.

The last theme discusses the subtle ideological work that is done by omitting and emphasizing certain points. King Abdullah creates a discourse that preserves normative clarity without direct confrontation by emphasizing universal values while obscuring or abstracting agency in conflict descriptions. This is consistent with the idea of covert ideological positioning put forth by Fairclough (1992, 2003), according to which what is left out of discourse can have just as much political weight as what is included.

Goffman's (1959) dramaturgical model of self-presentation, in which speakers control impressions through meticulously planned performances, also sheds light on this rhetorical restraint. A strategic ambiguity that serves two purposes—affirming moral principles for regional audiences and avoiding alienating influential Western actors—is reflected in the King's omission of explicit criticisms of powerful states. Jordan is able to manage conflicting international expectations thanks to its dual positioning, upholding ideological coherence without jeopardizing diplomatic ties.

When combined, the five themes highlight how important discourse is to the development of political legitimacy, identity, and authority in international relations. King Abdullah II's rhetorical techniques serve as an example of how small states can make up for material constraints by using audience-sensitive framing, symbolic allusions, and moral language. This has wider ramifications for comprehending the function of discursive agency and soft power in international politics, especially in a multipolar world where moral and symbolic capital frequently complement or even replace economic and military might.

The study theoretically illustrates the value of incorporating discourse analysis into frameworks for international relations in order to capture the ideological and performative aspects of statecraft. It demonstrates empirically how King Abdullah's speech serves as a foreign policy tool that helps Jordan stay relevant, influence others, and forge a moral identity in a changing geopolitical landscape.

VI. CONCLUSION

The strategic interaction of tone, context, and ideological positioning has been used in this study to analyze how King Abdullah II of Jordan discursively constructs authority in a variety of diplomatic contexts. By combining theories from political communication and international relations, such as audience design (Bell, 1984), constructivist foreign policy (Wendt, 1992; Holsti, 1970), symbolic power (Bourdieu, 1991), and Critical Discourse Analysis (Fairclough, 1992, 2003) with Systemic Functional Linguistics (Halliday, 1994), the study demonstrates the complex nature of leadership as a rhetorical and performative act. The King's speeches highlight how authority is carefully constructed through language choices that reflect moral commitments, cultural sensitivity, and strategic diplomacy, rather than just being asserted.

The findings demonstrate how King Abdullah II develops a diplomatic image based on principled neutrality, moderate mediation, and moral legitimacy. In order to increase credibility and appeal to a wide range of international audiences, his rhetoric makes extensive use of intertextual references and symbolic language, as well as universal values like justice, peace, and human dignity. By using this moral framework, Jordan is able to gain soft power and symbolic capital on the international scene, surpassing its comparatively small military and geopolitical might. Specifically, the King is positioned as a pragmatic statesman and a moral witness through the use of intertextual legitimization techniques, inclusive pronouns, and modality (Kristeva, 1980; van Leeuwen, 2007).

The study also shows how the King can play a variety of discursive roles, including that of an advocate, peer, and intermediary, by adapting his tone and modality to suit particular audiences. This flexibility emphasizes how crucial audience awareness and rhetorical flexibility are to the establishment of political power. Notably, the King navigates the

intricate demands of regional and international diplomacy with remarkable rhetorical finesse by strategically using selective emphasis and omission to maintain diplomatic tact without sacrificing ideological clarity.

These findings have wider ramifications for international relations and discourse studies. They contend that rather than relying solely on institutional or coercive power, authority in modern political leadership is increasingly formed through language that performs, persuades, and positions. Discursive strategies become essential tools for small states like Jordan to assert relevance, influence outcomes, and maintain legitimacy in areas like the Middle East that are characterized by conflict and conflicting narratives.

Lastly, this study contributes to our understanding of the ways in which language mediates power in global politics. It serves as an example that being a leader is more than just saying things; it also entails knowing what to say, when to say it, and to whom. King Abdullah II's speeches are excellent illustrations of how a leader can use discourse not only to inform and persuade but also to establish moral authority, establish a credible international role, and shape national identity. Future research could compare the rhetorical tactics of other regional leaders or examine how target audiences react to such discourse in order to better understand the discursive construction of authority in Middle Eastern and global contexts.

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Promotional Speech Acts in Digital Fashion Retail: An Empirical Study of Consumer Purchase Intentions in Indonesia

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Abstract—The rapid growth of digital fashion retail has intensified competition among online sellers, making persuasive communication strategies crucial for influencing consumer purchase intentions. This empirical study investigates the relationship between promotional techniques employed by online fashion sellers and their impact on consumer purchasing decisions. Employing a descriptive qualitative methodology incorporating non-participant observational techniques and audiovisual analysis procedures, data collection encompassed transcribed content from 117 virtual interactions within live e-commerce platforms, survey responses from 210 consumer participants via questionnaire distribution, and semi-structured interview sessions conducted with fashion e-commerce vendors. This investigation identifies determinant factors that influence consumer purchasing behavior in fashion e-commerce. Four factors pertain to verbal communication strategies of online retailers, including product description transparency, seller hospitality orientation, persuasive discourse, and demand responsiveness capabilities. Two supplementary factors concerning non-verbal dimensions include seller visual presentation and consumer product quality perceptions. The research establishes that effective digital fashion retail performance transcends conventional marketing methodologies, necessitating sophisticated interpersonal communication competencies, elevated presentation standards, and exemplary customer service provision. Seller hospitality fosters emotional bonds with buyers, while clear product information and persuasive language, including dramatic promotional rhetoric, enhance consumer trust, bolster purchase confidence, and generate attention. Successful demand fulfillment mechanisms ultimately secure consumer satisfaction and transaction completion. These findings provide valuable insights for online fashion retailers seeking to optimize their communication strategies and enhance customer engagement. The research contributes to the understanding of digital consumer behavior and offers practical implications for developing more effective persuasive communication frameworks in the online fashion marketplace.

Index Terms—promotional, speech act, cyberpoliteness, online seller, fashion retail

I. INTRODUCTION

The digital transformation of retail commerce has fundamentally altered the landscape of consumer-seller interactions, particularly in the fashion industry, where visual appeal and personal connection traditionally played pivotal roles in purchase decisions. Online fashion retail continues to expand globally, reaching a forecasted market value of over \$ 781 billion in 2024 (based on Statista's 2024 statistics). Therefore, the ability of sellers to effectively communicate and persuade potential customers through digital platforms has become increasingly critical for business success (Kovács & Keresztes, 2024). Unlike traditional brick-and-mortar stores, where physical presence, tactile experiences, and face-to-face interactions facilitate sales processes, digital fashion retail relies heavily on linguistic strategies and promotional speech acts to bridge the gap between seller and consumer.

The concept of speech acts, originally developed by Austin (Ambroise, 2016) and later refined by Searle (Chanpradit et al., 2025), provides a theoretical framework for understanding how language performs actions beyond mere communication. In the context of digital fashion retail such as in Shopee Indonesia platform, promotional speech acts encompass the various linguistic strategies employed by online sellers to persuade, convince, and ultimately influence consumer purchase intentions. These speech acts range from direct promotional statements and product descriptions to

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subtle persuasive techniques embedded in seller-buyer interactions (Sumarlam et al., 2024). The effectiveness of these promotional speech acts becomes particularly crucial in the online fashion industry, where consumers must rely on digital representations, textual descriptions, and seller communications to make purchasing decisions without the benefit of physical product examination (Konale et al., 2025).

Contemporary research in digital marketing and consumer behavior has increasingly recognized the importance of understanding how online communication strategies impact consumer decision-making processes. The fashion industry, characterized by its emphasis on aesthetics, trends, and personal expression, presents unique challenges for online sellers who must effectively communicate product attributes, quality, and desirability through digital channels. Earlier research has shown that sustainable Virtual Reality (VR) fashion store environments significantly enhanced perceived message informativeness and persuasiveness regarding eco-conscious consumption, with the strongest effects observed among exploratory shoppers (Won et al., 2024). Social media platforms, e-commerce websites, and mobile applications have become primary venues for fashion retail transactions, creating new opportunities and challenges for implementing effective promotional speech acts.

The rise of social commerce and influencer marketing has further complicated the landscape of promotional communication in digital fashion retail. Sellers must now navigate multiple communication channels and adapt their promotional speech acts to different platforms while maintaining consistency in their persuasive messaging. The integration of visual content with textual communication has created hybrid forms of promotional discourse that combine traditional linguistic persuasion techniques with multimedia elements. This evolution has necessitated a deeper understanding of how different types of promotional speech acts function within the digital fashion retail environment and their relative effectiveness in influencing consumer behavior.

Previous studies in this domain have primarily focused on general e-commerce communication strategies or examined specific aspects of online marketing without a comprehensive analysis of promotional speech acts as distinct linguistic phenomena. Earlier research has explored various dimensions of online consumer behavior, including trust formation, self-efficacy, perceived value, and purchase intention models (Xu et al., 2024). Thus, there remains a significant gap in understanding how specific promotional speech acts employed by fashion retailers influence consumer purchase intentions. This gap is particularly pronounced in emerging markets where digital fashion retail is experiencing rapid growth and where cultural and linguistic factors may influence the effectiveness of different promotional communication strategies.

The significance of this research extends beyond academic inquiry to practical applications for online fashion retailers, digital marketing professionals, and platform developers. Understanding the relationship between promotional speech acts and consumer purchase intentions can inform the development of more effective communication strategies, improve customer engagement, and ultimately enhance business performance in the competitive digital fashion marketplace. Furthermore, insights from this research can contribute to the broader understanding of digital consumer behavior and the role of language in online commercial transactions.

The current study addresses these gaps by conducting an empirical investigation into the relationship between promotional speech acts employed by digital fashion retailers in live programs of Shopee Indonesia and their impact on consumer purchase intentions. Through a comprehensive analysis of various promotional communication strategies, this research aims to identify the most effective promotional speech acts for influencing consumer behavior in the digital fashion retail context. The findings of this study are expected to provide valuable insights for both theoretical understanding of promotional discourse and practical applications in digital marketing strategy development, ultimately contributing to the optimization of online fashion retail communication practices and enhanced consumer shopping experiences.

II. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

A. *Speech Act*

Speech act theory constitutes a fundamental area of pragmatic inquiry, examining how linguistic utterances function as performative actions. Austin's foundational work established that verbal expressions serve multiple communicative functions, encompassing declarative statements, hypothetical propositions, evidential claims, directives, solicitations, appeals, warnings, proposals, and commitments (Ambroise, 2016). This theory focuses on actions performed through language by speakers and listeners during communication. Thus, speech acts represent linguistic phenomena where utterances operate as functional equivalents to physical actions. Speakers strategically employ language to generate particular outcomes that might alternatively be accomplished through non-verbal means. This dual nature positions speech acts as simultaneously linguistic expressions and behavioral performances. The production of speech acts involves deliberate communicative behaviors executed through oral or written modalities. Successful communication materializes when recipients comprehend and respond according to the speaker's intentions, as speech acts encompass not merely utterances but also interactive engagement and applied linguistic practice.

Speech acts are categorized by communicative purpose into assertive, performative, verdictive, expressive, directive, commissive, and phatic types (Kreidler, 2014). Assertive speech acts encompass utterances that convey the speaker's beliefs or propositions regarding particular phenomena, while performative speech acts constitute utterances that effectuate changes in situational circumstances through their articulation. Verdictive speech acts involve speaker

evaluation or adjudication of others' behaviors, typically directed toward the addressee. Directive speech acts represent communicative attempts to influence addressee behavior, either encouraging specific actions or discouraging particular conduct. Conversely, commissive speech acts establish speaker obligations toward future behavioral commitments. Phatic speech acts function primarily to establish and maintain social connections among community members.

The present investigation focuses on analyzing speech act typologies employed within digital interactions in live e-commerce contexts of Shopee Indonesia. Speech act functionality demonstrates variability according to contextual circumstances and cultural conventions. Research demonstrates that within Javanese interpersonal communication contexts, phatic speech acts fulfill multiple communicative purposes, including conversational initiation, relationship reinforcement, interpersonal gratification, emotional expression, and consolatory functions (Rahardi, 2022; Widiāna et al., 2020). Complementing these observations, scholarly findings indicate that humor serves relationship-building functions in Javanese discourse by generating enthusiasm and strengthening interpersonal bonds (Rahardi et al., 2024). Given these contextual variations, it is reasonable to hypothesize that speech acts within live e-commerce contexts possess distinctive functions aligned with persuasive communication strategies, necessitating systematic investigation to advance cyberpoliteness and digital communication theoretical comprehension.

B. *Cyberpoliteness*

The concept of cyberpoliteness has emerged as a critical area of study within digital communication research, extending traditional politeness theory to computer-mediated communication environments. Brown and Levinson's seminal politeness theory, which established the framework for understanding face-threatening acts and face-saving strategies in interpersonal communication, has been adapted and refined to address the unique characteristics of online interactions. Cyberpoliteness encompasses the linguistic and behavioral strategies employed in digital spaces to maintain social harmony, show respect, and facilitate positive communication outcomes (Cal Varela et al., 2025; Culpeper et al., 2025).

Early work on computer-mediated discourse established foundational principles for understanding how politeness manifests in digital environments. In this case, cyberpoliteness requires adaptation of traditional politeness markers to accommodate the constraints and affordances of digital communication platforms (Herring, 2019). These adaptations include the use of emoticons, capitalization patterns, punctuation strategies, and specific linguistic formulations that convey respect and consideration in text-based interactions (Widiāna et al., 2024). The asynchronous nature of many digital communications creates unique challenges and opportunities for implementing politeness strategies, as communicators must anticipate recipient reactions without immediate feedback. In addition, cross-cultural research has highlighted the importance of cultural context in cyberpoliteness implementation and interpretation. The concept of cultural dimensions has been applied to understand how power distance, individualism-collectivism, and uncertainty avoidance influence cyberpoliteness expectations and practices across different cultural contexts (Fan & Wu, 2025; Hanif et al., 2025; Rahardi et al., 2024).

Research in cyberpoliteness has increasingly focused on commercial applications, particularly in e-commerce and customer service contexts. Investigations into business-oriented computer-mediated communication revealed that cyberpoliteness strategies significantly influence customer satisfaction and business outcomes (Tasyarasita et al., 2024). The findings of prior studies suggest that online sellers who employ appropriate cyberpoliteness markers create more favorable impressions and generate higher levels of customer trust compared to those who neglect these communicative elements. Despite growing interest in cyberpoliteness research, several gaps remain in understanding its application to fashion retail contexts. Limited research has examined the specific cyberpoliteness strategies most effective for fashion product promotion and sales conversion since the majority of existing research focuses on general customer service applications rather than sales-oriented communication.

The analysis of cyberpoliteness in virtual textual environments requires cyberpragmatics as the theoretical framework for data interpretation. This field examines pragmatic aspects of internet-mediated communication, focusing on communicative intentions and interpretive processes in online interactions (Rahardi, 2023; Yus, 2021). This approach redirects sociolinguistic focus from physical to virtual communities (Yus, 2023). The present study applies this framework to analyze textual data from live e-commerce interactions between online fashion sellers and their customers.

Virtual politeness maxims represent a central element in cyberpragmatic and cyberpoliteness analysis, as politeness conventions significantly influence digital communication effectiveness. These conventions facilitate social bonding within online communities, while their strategic application in persuasive discourse remains an underexplored research area due to limited established guidelines. Politeness strategies serve primarily as interpersonal relationship facilitation instruments that may be subject to the influence of diverse variables, including cultural dimensions, socioeconomic positioning, and financial stratification.

Cross-cultural differences substantially impact politeness strategy implementation. Javanese culture, being the dominant cultural influence in Indonesia, significantly shapes politeness strategies in promotional speech acts across the cultural boundary (Chintawidy & Sartini, 2022; House & Kádár, 2025). Brown and Levinson's positive and negative politeness theory provided foundational insights into politeness phenomena (Yergazy & Denisenko, 2024), yet it demonstrates limited applicability to particular cultural contexts, such as Javanese. Javanese politeness operates through distinct cultural principles: *Kurmat* (respectful deference), *Tepa Selira* (empathetic consideration), *Andhap Asor* (humble presentation), and *Empan Papan* (situational appropriateness) (Poedjosoedarmo, 2017; Widiāna et al., 2020). These maxims require speakers to demonstrate reverence, empathy, modesty, and contextual awareness respectively.

Additionally, the maxim of *Semanak* (friendliness) is identified as promoting harmonious interpersonal relations across status boundaries. These maxims serve as conflict-avoidance mechanisms in Javanese communication. While *Kurmat* and *Tepa Selira* align with Brown and Levinson's negative politeness through consideration of recipient sensitivities, *Andhap Asor* and *Empan Papan* correspond to positive politeness through recipient-focused approaches. However, Brown and Levinson's (1987) framework inadequately addresses Javanese linguistic register complexity. These culturally specific politeness principles should guide pragmatic strategies in female fashion sellers' live e-commerce interactions in Indonesia.

These maxims function as implicit social harmony maintenance mechanisms for Javanese speakers. Within Brown and Levinson's framework, *Kurmat* and *Tepa Selira* correspond to negative politeness through addressee consideration, requiring respect and empathy, respectively. However, their theory inadequately addresses Javanese linguistic register usage in politeness expressions. *Andhap Asor* and *Empan Papan* align with positive politeness concepts, requiring speaker humility and socially appropriate expression choices based on addressee status. This register selection aspect exceeds Brown and Levinson's theoretical scope. These culturally specific Javanese politeness conventions should guide the pragmatic promotional approaches employed by female fashion retailers in live e-commerce environments of Shopee Indonesia.

C. Consumer Purchase Intentions

Many factors affect consumers' purchase intentions, such as the social influence, visual aesthetics, denotative inspiration, price of products, consumers' trust in brands, the quality of branded products, and consumer perception (Shi et al., 2025; Yang et al., 2025; Yao et al., 2025). The digital transformation of commerce has significantly influenced how consumer purchase intentions are formed and expressed. Recent research examining determinants of consumers' purchase intention on digital business model platforms has identified crucial variables impacting consumer desire to purchase through online digital market platforms, such as website or platform design, perceived ease of use, perceived usefulness, and consumer trust (Konale et al., 2025; Nguyen et al., 2025; Tilahun et al., 2023).

Cross-cultural studies have revealed significant variations in how purchase intentions manifest across different cultural contexts in digital environments. Research in the Asian marketing context exploring key factors on e-commerce adoption has examined elements of social psychology, such as attitude, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control in online purchase contexts (Naseri et al., 2023). These findings suggest that traditional purchase intention models require adaptation to accommodate the complexities of digital consumer behavior.

Recent empirical investigations have identified novel factors influencing consumer purchase intentions in the digital age. Research on driving factors of consumer purchase intention for artificial intelligence creative products reveals that behavioral attitude, hedonic motivation, price perception, perceived value, and generative quality are primary factors influencing user purchase intention (Bhatti et al., 2022; Roy et al., 2025). These findings suggest that contemporary consumers consider not only traditional factors like price and quality but also place significant importance on experiential and technological aspects of products.

The previous studies on consumer purchase intentions provide important insights for fashion retail contexts, particularly in online shopping. The integration of traditional purchase intention theories with contemporary factors such as digital experience quality, cultural sensitivity, and value perception creates a complex framework for understanding fashion consumer behavior. The current study's focus on promotional speech acts in digital fashion retail of Shopee Indonesia addresses a gap in understanding how specific communicative strategies influence purchase intention formation in this dynamic and culturally diverse market segment.

III. METHODOLOGY

This study is grounded in theoretical frameworks encompassing speech act theory, cyberpoliteness principles, and consumer purchase intention models, reflecting the digitally mediated communicative nature of the data sources within live e-commerce environments. Data collection was conducted exclusively through live streaming sessions on Shopee Indonesia's platform, with particular emphasis on women's fashion apparel featured in Shopee Live programming. The data acquisition process utilized audiovisual media observation methodology (Nicolaou, 2021), resulting in 117 documented virtual interactions from Shopee Live sessions and 210 questionnaire responses from live e-commerce customers. Participants eligible for questionnaire distribution were required to meet the following inclusion criteria: 1) female gender within the age range of 20 to 50 years; 2) having experience in participating in the Shopee Live platform. Subsequently, semi-structured interviews were conducted with five fashion e-commerce vendors to corroborate questionnaire findings. The analytical framework culminated in identifying determinant factors influencing consumer purchasing behavior in digital fashion commerce, developing taxonomic classifications of promotional speech acts, and examining their corresponding cyberpoliteness strategies.

The examination of promotional speech acts in e-commerce live broadcasting contexts and their impact on consumer purchase intentions integrates cyberpoliteness contextual variables—participant characteristics, environmental setting, communicative objectives, and instrumental modalities—to determine functional strategies employed by online fashion retailers (Rahardi, 2023). The transformation from traditional to virtual social environments significantly influences communicative quality within online commercial transactions. The contextual elements of digital communication in live e-commerce are considered essential factors for analysis, as the shift from direct to indirect communication media alters

social relationships among participants. External virtual elements, such as gestures, facial expressions, physical performance, personal grooming, and body language observed during live e-commerce sessions, are considered crucial in determining the promotional speech act strategies.

IV. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The research framework examines how language strategies influence consumer purchasing decisions in online fashion retail, particularly through the perspective of speech act theory and Javanese cultural politeness principles. The determinant variables affecting consumer purchase intentions in digital fashion retail comprise four verbal communication strategy categories: product description clarity, seller hospitality orientation, persuasive promotional messaging, and customer demand fulfillment capacity. Product description clarity strategies are operationalized through assertive speech acts, whereas seller hospitality is manifested via phatic and expressive speech acts. Persuasive promotional discourse utilizes directive speech act functions, while customer demand responsiveness is articulated through commissive speech act employment. Product description clarity focuses on how clearly and assertively sellers present product information, which involves direct, factual communication about product features, specifications, and benefits - what speech act theory classifies as "assertive" acts that state facts or make claims. Seller hospitality orientation emphasizes the relational aspect of customer interaction. This strategy employs "phatic" communication (social pleasantries that build rapport) and "expressive" speech acts (conveying emotions and attitudes) to create a welcoming, customer-friendly environment. Customer demand fulfillment capacity addresses how sellers communicate their ability to meet customer needs through "commissive" speech acts, such as promises, guarantees, and commitments about service delivery, return policies, or product availability.

These strategic approaches correspond to specific Javanese politeness principles, including *Kurmat* (Reverence), *Tepa Selira* (Solidarity), *Andhap Asor* (Modesty), and *Empan Papan* (Situational Appropriateness). *Kurmat* involves showing respect and deference to customers, while *Tepa Selira* emphasizes empathy and understanding customer perspectives. *Andhap Asor* reflects humble, non-aggressive communication styles, and *Empan Papan* focuses on adapting communication to specific contexts and customer types. Table 1 presents a comprehensive overview of the promotional speech act strategic framework.

TABLE 1
PROMOTIONAL SPEECH ACT STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK

Promotional Strategies	Speech Acts	Javanese Maxims
Providing product descriptions	Assertives	<i>Tepa Selira</i> (Solidarity)
Showing hospitality	Phatic, Expressives	<i>Kurmat</i> (Reverence) and <i>Semanak</i> (Warmth)
Conducting promotional activities and consumer persuasion	Directives	<i>Empan Papan</i> (Situational appropriateness)
Addressing customer inquiries and requirements	Commissives	<i>Andhap Asor</i> (Humility)

Javanese politeness principles functioned as cyberpoliteness mechanisms designed to minimize Face Threatening Acts (FTA), facilitate audience engagement, and establish trust and credibility. In product presentation activities, sellers utilized the *Tepa Selira* (Solidarity) principle to deliver comprehensive product information aligned with consumer requirements. Through this approach, sellers demonstrated understanding of individual consumer needs, recognizing the variability in customer preferences and information demands across different buyers. The *Kurmat* (Reverence) principle was utilized by sellers to demonstrate consumer respect, whereas the *Semanak* principle served to cultivate familiarity and interpersonal closeness. In FTA mitigation strategies, online fashion vendors implemented the *Empan Papan* (Situational appropriateness) principle to ensure contextually appropriate linguistic choices that effectively persuade consumers toward purchase completion. When addressing customer requirements, sellers employed the *Andhap Asor* (Humility) principle to position themselves in subordinate roles, thereby enhancing consumer appreciation and satisfaction.

A. Providing Product Descriptions

An important factor in strengthening consumer purchase intention is the accuracy of product description presentation, since online shopping environments prevent customers from directly examining and physically handling products. The following excerpt illustrates the strategies employed by online fashion retailers to convey product information within live e-commerce contexts.

(The participants in the conversation are SJ, the female fashion online seller, and her customers, C6 and C7. SJ demonstrates the product description of trousers and a skirt.)

C6: *Etalase 10.*

‘Product number 10’

C7: *Etalase 14.*

‘Product number 14’

SJ: *Etalase 14 boleh etalase 10-nya juga boleh sayang. Ditunggu ya. Nih, etalase 14-nya dulu. Etalase 14 kita punya feel good. Etalase 14, panjangnya di 98, cuttingan-nya boyfriend. Dia emang pensil, kodenya 029 warna blue. Wajib di-upsize untuk etalase 14 nya. Kita next ke etalase 10. Etalase 10 kita punya rok ultra. Ini rok-nya span, pinggangnya kecil, wajib naik dua size. Etalase 10 kode 998, kancingnya 28cm, cuttingan rok span. Belahannya bagian belakang, sayang. Wajib naik dua size ya.*

‘Okay, product number 14, or product number 10 is okay too, sweetheart. Please wait a minute, okay? Let’s start with product 14 first. We’ve got the Feel Good. The length is 98 cm, it has a boyfriend cut, and it’s a pencil style. The code is 029, and it’s in blue. You definitely need to size up for product 14. Now, let’s move on to product 10. We’ve got the Ultra skirt. It’s a bodycon skirt with a small waist, so you’ll need to size up by two sizes. The code is 998, the button length is 28 cm, and it’s a pencil-cut skirt. The slit is at the back, sweetheart. Don’t forget to size up by two sizes, okay?’

The seller presented product details, including item 14 (pencil-style trousers) and item 10 (bodycon skirt). To furnish comprehensive product specifications, the seller communicated size, color, and design characteristics. Assertive speech acts were employed to deliver product descriptions. Additionally, the *Tepa Selira* (Solidarity) principle was operationalized when the seller recommended size adjustments for consumer purchases, suggesting size modifications to ensure optimal fit.

B. Showing Hospitality

In cultivating interpersonal rapport with consumers, digital fashion sellers employ specific discursive strategies to enhance hospitality perceptions. This approach seeks to generate more engaging live streaming sessions that can attract greater audience participation and extend viewer retention duration throughout the broadcast. Ultimately, this strategic framework is designed to stimulate consumer purchasing behavior regarding products featured during live commerce sessions. The following interactional excerpt from the Shopee Live platform demonstrates how sellers deploy phatic and expressive speech acts as mechanisms for conveying hospitality in product presentations.

(The female online seller, SH, expressed her apology to customer C29 for being unable to display product number 5 due to the absence of a sample. She proceeded to extend her gratitude to all customers for their purchases and active engagement during the live session. Additionally, she conveyed a prayerful wish for their well-being and continued blessings.)

C29: *Mohon perkenalkan produk no.5*

‘Please introduce product no. 5.’

SH: *No. 5 ga ada sampel nya ya kak, langsung di cek di keranjang aja.*

Ya sekali lagi aku sampai jam 5 temen-temen ya. Untuk kakak - kakak yang udah like, follow, udah share, udah kasih tau ke temen-temen, ke saudara kalian, aku ucapin terima kasih banyak. Semoga kebaikan kalian dibales sama Allah SWT. Terutama buat temen-temen yg udah checkout, udah beli, ditunggu pakatnya, semoga memuaskan ya, dan semoga rejeki kita selalu lancar dan diberikan kesehatan ya, terima kasih. Jangan lupa tonton live ini ya karena banyak produk-produk best seller dengan harga yang wow gitu. Terima kasih banyak.

‘For Number 5, I don’t have a sample, sis. You can just check it directly in the cart.

And once again, I’m only here until 5 o’clock, friends. For those of you who’ve already liked, followed, shared, and told your friends or family, thank you so much! May Allah SWT reward all your kindness.

Especially for those who’ve already checked out and made a purchase, your package is on the way! I hope you love it, and may all of us be blessed with smooth fortune and good health, ameen. Thank you!

Don’t forget to keep watching this live, okay? There are so many best-selling items at amazing prices! Thanks a lot!’

The seller in the conversation sample conveyed her appreciation to customers prior to concluding the live session. In this situation, she employed a phatic speech act as the prayer was delivered solely for hospitality purposes before program closure. Nevertheless, expressive speech acts were utilized when the seller expressed appreciation to customers who purchased products and recommended her online store to their friends and family members. The implementation of *Kurmat* (Reverence) was evident in the seller's expression of gratitude toward customers, while *Semanak* (warmth) was demonstrated through her prayer offering.

C. Conducting Promotional Activities and Consumer Persuasion

Promotional techniques in digital shopping environments, including price reductions, complimentary items, free delivery, and additional benefits, are implemented through directive speech acts. These speech acts are designed to encourage consumers to complete product purchases. Sellers occasionally employ exaggerated and dramatic language to highlight promotional offers and strengthen persuasive appeals. An illustration of directive speech acts in this context is presented in the following conversation example.

(C10, a customer, asks SHR, the female seller, to display the traditional clothes. Then, SHR displays the product to her customer, C10. She offers a discounted price for the product during the live program.)

C10: *Kebaya encim-nya, kak.*

'The Kebaya Encim, Sis.'

SHR: *Ini kak kebaya encim nya (memperlihatkan contoh produk), motifnya bagus banget, warnanya juga cantik bagus banget, bordirannya sampai ke bawah sampai ke lengan juga. Kalau kakak belinya di Live nanti ada voucher potongan 25 persen. Gratis ongkir juga. Check out sekarang aja, jangan dikeranjangin aja soalnya yang model ini tinggal 3 pieces lho. Jangan sampai kehabisan. Ntar nyesel lho.*

'Here it is, sis — the *kebaya encim* (shows the product). The pattern is super pretty, and the color is really nice too. The embroidery goes all the way down and even on the sleeves. If you buy it during the live, you'll get a 25% discount voucher. Free shipping too. Go ahead and check out now — don't just leave it in your cart, because we only have 3 pieces left of this model. Don't miss out, you'll regret it later!

The promotional techniques in the conversation example employ directive speech acts. These strategies are evident when the seller overwhelms customers by highlighting product advantages, such as attractive patterns, appealing colors, and excellent embroidery work. Subsequently, the seller continues by urging customers to purchase the product immediately due to limited stock availability and offering them benefits such as price reduction and free shipping. Creating a sense of urgency or scarcity is the most common strategy employed by online sellers as a trigger of the psychological condition of fear of missing out (FOMO). The promotional strategies implement the *Empan Papan* (Situational appropriateness) politeness principle, which is demonstrated through the seller's use of exaggerated language to enhance persuasive effectiveness.

D. Addressing Customer Inquiries and Requirements

Customer satisfaction serves as a fundamental determinant in strengthening consumers' purchasing decisions. Addressing client requirements, including product explanations, product demonstrations, and comprehensive recommendations, constitutes an essential approach within live streaming commerce. The implementation of commissive speech acts represents a suitable strategy for achieving these objectives. Through this strategy, online retailers demonstrate their dedication to customer service by responding to customer requests and expectations. The following conversation excerpt gives an illustration of a commissive speech act in fashion live e-commerce.

(Customer C12 requests that the female online seller, SW, provide a visual and verbal presentation of the apparel in aquamarine color. In response, SW displays the item on camera and offers a comprehensive description of its features.)

C12: *Kaka spill warna aquamariner*

'Sis, please describe the aquamariner color.'

SW: *Ini untuk aquamariner-nya, sayang (menunjukkan produk), warnanya seperti baby blue atau warnanya biru cerah. Kalau mau yang bahannya premium ada di etalase 1. Ambil warna sky blue ya kaka Dinda.*

'This one's the Aquamariner, sweetheart (shows product). The color's like baby blue or a bright blue. If you're looking for the premium fabric, it's in product 1. Go with the sky blue one, okay, sis Dinda?'

The seller addressed the consumer's request by accommodating their demand to showcase the fashion item in aquamarine color. To reinforce their commitment to customer satisfaction, the online seller provided comprehensive product specifications and offered recommendations to guide the consumer toward selecting superior quality merchandise available during the live streaming session. Within this interaction, the seller employed *Andhap Asor* (Humility) by positioning herself in a deferential role, thereby demonstrating her commitment to providing appropriate customer service while simultaneously expressing respect for the clientele.

E. Customer Purchase Intentions

The utilization of promotional speech act strategies facilitates the strengthening of consumer purchasing behavior within Indonesia's live commerce environment. Specifically, within the Shopee Live platform, findings indicate that promotional speech acts style contributes to a successful online business. It is illustrated in Figure 1 as follows.

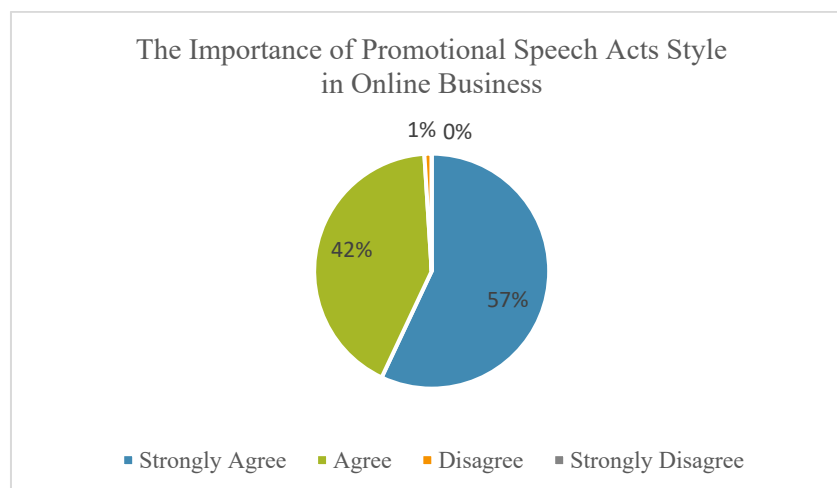


Figure 1. Respondent Agreement on the Importance of Promotional Speech Acts in Online Business

The findings demonstrate that the majority of participants expressed strong agreement regarding the importance of promotional speech act strategies to online business success. This suggests that effective promotional speech acts that conform to principles of digital politeness constitute a significant factor in achieving successful digital commerce outcomes. These findings corroborate prior research demonstrating that cyberpoliteness strategies exert substantial influence on consumer satisfaction and commercial performance outcomes (Tasyarasita et al., 2024). Conversely, inadequate communication practices do not substantially influence customer purchase cancellation behaviors, as evidenced by the majority of the survey respondents (46%) indicating they rarely terminate transactions due to poor seller communication practices. Additionally, 35% of participants reported never canceling purchases despite encountering sellers with limited digital communication competencies. A smaller proportion indicated frequent cancellation behaviors, with 14% reporting occasional cancellations and 5% acknowledging regular cancellation practices.

Consumer purchasing decisions in online fashion retail are influenced by several determinants: pricing considerations (14%), product quality attributes (50%), aesthetic elements including color and design (7%), and promotional incentives (29%), which are consistent with findings from previous research (Shi et al., 2025; Yang et al., 2025; Yao et al., 2025). Figure 2 provides an overview of consumer purchasing decision factors.

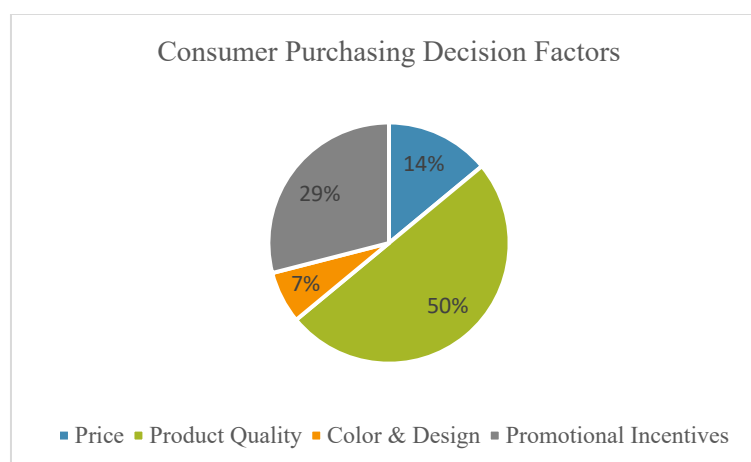


Figure 2. Consumer Purchasing Decision Factors

These results corroborate the essential significance of detailed product quality descriptions in stimulating consumer purchasing decisions, consistent with previous research findings (Bhatti et al., 2022; Roy et al., 2025). Furthermore, the implementation of promotional strategies—encompassing bonus offerings, price reductions, complimentary shipping, and additional marketing incentives integrated within the purchasing framework—demonstrates significant efficacy in strengthening consumer purchase intention.

Effective live e-commerce sessions demonstrate a positive correlation with increased consumer purchase motivation. The main determinants for establishing compelling fashion marketing live streaming sessions include: the utilization of deictic address terms such as *Kak*, *Bunda*, *Sayang*, *Beb* (10%), demonstrating hospitality behaviors (14%), providing responsive customer inquiry management (27%), and accommodating consumer preferences (49%). The interview findings with digital fashion sellers indicate that vendors typically employ deictic forms of address to engage consumers according to demographic targeting parameters, including the utilization of *Kak* for younger clientele within the 20-30

age demographic, *Bunda* for mature female consumers, and *Sayang* as a common address term spanning diverse age cohorts. In addition to the implementation of deictic address forms, fashion online sellers indicated during interviews that they consistently exert considerable effort to display and describe merchandise in accordance with consumer specifications in order to achieve customer satisfaction and stimulate purchasing behavior. These findings substantiate that seller commitment to addressing customer questions and fulfilling consumer requirements represents the predominant factor contributing to successful fashion live commerce.

Results show that interesting fashion live e-commerce is determined by the host's humorous behavior (30%), compliments for customers (4%), verbal politeness (37%), and clarity of speaking (29%). The survey results are corroborated by interview data obtained from digital fashion retailers, which reveal that the adoption of friendly behavioral approaches, encompassing the incorporation of humor and courteous discourse, constitutes the most significant determinant in establishing engaging fashion-oriented live commerce experiences. Thus, the implementation of the politeness maxim of *Semanak* (being warm and friendly) is crucial for the host of the fashion live e-commerce program. Comparable findings are identified in earlier research on cultural dimensions within the context of digital business (Naseri et al., 2023).

The notable development of the current study fills the research gap of the previous study since it represents a movement from studying how sellers communicate to understanding how consumers react, complemented by Indonesia-specific cultural considerations and a broader examination of digital fashion retail beyond just live streaming commerce. This represents a natural progression from descriptive linguistics to empirical consumer behavior research, offering more practical insights for digital marketing effectiveness in culturally specific markets.

The promotional speech act strategies employed within fashion live e-commerce constitute deliberate initiatives to strengthen customer loyalty while simultaneously stimulating consumer purchase intention. Complementing these verbal promotional approaches, non-verbal elements, including enhanced physical presentation through cosmetic application, product demonstration through personal modeling, exhibiting approachable demeanor, and expressing hospitality via salutations and personalized customer address, are equally evident. The integration of verbal and non-verbal communicative elements creates a highly engaging live streaming experience. The result suggests that effective digital fashion retail communication requires balancing informational clarity with cultural sensitivity. The integration of Western speech act theory with Javanese politeness principles indicates the research was likely conducted in an Indonesian context, where understanding local cultural communication norms is crucial for e-commerce success.

V. CONCLUSION

This study identifies the taxonomy of promotional speech acts employed by fashion retailers within Shopee Indonesia's live e-commerce platform, encompassing product specification description, seller hospitality practices, persuasive marketing communication, and consumer requirement accommodation capabilities. The promotional strategies incorporate assertive speech acts for product description, while directive speech acts facilitate product promotion and consumer purchase motivation. The deployment of phatic and expressive speech acts serves to demonstrate respect and hospitality toward clientele, whereas commissive speech acts function to enhance customer satisfaction through seller commitments to address consumer inquiries and fulfill service expectations. The application of this promotional speech act framework demonstrates significant efficacy in strengthening consumer purchase intentions.

The promotional speech act approaches deployed by fashion retailers in live e-commerce contexts offer valuable insights into the adaptation of conventional sales approaches within contemporary digital frameworks. Through the implementation of pragmatic cyberpoliteness principles, Javanese politeness maxims, and promotional speech act strategies, fashion e-commerce vendors can augment their ability to establish rapport and influence consumer behavior by fostering engagement and facilitating transaction completion within this dynamic marketplace. As live e-commerce continues its expansion, comprehending the complexities of these promotional approaches will prove essential for retailers seeking to succeed in the competitive online fashion sector. Further investigation into promotional speech acts across diverse digital commerce contexts is warranted to generate a comprehensive understanding of pragmatic cyberpoliteness and its theoretical development. Subsequent research endeavors should specifically examine sociolinguistic phenomena within cyber-mediated environments, representing a compelling contemporary area of scholarly inquiry.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This research was funded by a grant from the Institute of Research and Community Service (LPPM) in the scheme of Penelitian Unggulan Terapan Universitas Sebelas Maret (PUT-UNS), reference number 194.2/UN27.22/PT.01.03/2024.

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I'm Online: Social Media and English as a Foreign Language (EFL) Learning

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Abstract—Social media is widely used for various purposes in the modern world. This paper contributes to the literature by exploring the impact of social media on English language learning from the perspective of English as a foreign language (EFL) learners' perspective. A survey questionnaire was administered to university EFL students to determine their perceptions of various social media platforms. The sample comprised 118 female students in a Saudi university. The results demonstrated that the students generally had positive attitudes towards using social media for learning English. Thus, using social media in language-learning settings is likely to be perceived positively by students. This preliminary study provides insights into using social media for EFL learning purposes and makes a valuable contribution to EFL teaching and learning.

Index Terms—English, Instagram, Snapchat, WhatsApp, TikTok

I. INTRODUCTION: SOCIAL MEDIA AND LEARNING

Life today necessitates the integration of technology into language classrooms as a step towards improving education and facilitating learning while maintaining students' enthusiasm for learning. Such integration is useful in settings where access to the target language is neither easy nor guaranteed, marking an important transition from traditional to more modern, socially oriented classrooms, since 'technology like tablets, PCs, apps, and access to broadband internet are lubricating the shift to mobile ESL learning' (Yadav, 2020, p. 245).

As an easily accessible tool that can be installed as an app on mobile phones and tablets, social media is a significant type of technology that undoubtedly contributes to the globalisation and transferability of information. Social media can be defined as 'a group of Internet-based apps that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, which allows the creation and exchange of user-generated content' (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010, p. 61).

In today's world, social media consumes most of people's, particularly young people's, time. There are 4.26 billion social media users around the world (Statista, 2021); thus, the question arises as to whether all these people use social media for the same purpose, since people inevitably differ in their needs and attitudes towards using the different social media apps. Kaplan (2015) supported the idea that social media is not simply and solely an amusing tool; people turn to social media as a first reaction to many life stimuli, such as when they want to communicate with others or research a local or global event. The importance of social media in our lives, with its openness to diverse cultures and languages, is indisputable. Social media apps have proven their significance in people's lives, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic, when they played a vital role in connecting people to others, spreading information about the global situation, and providing inspiring lifestyle tips for people experiencing isolation and quarantine. During the pandemic, social media brought people together. In 2019, the whole world depended on social media for updates about the COVID-19 pandemic, and people used these apps to report their daily activities and maintain connections with others. The support social media provided during the pandemic has highlighted its value and made it a good platform for diverse sectors, including education. Social media complemented educational processes during the pandemic (Teng et al., 2022), when schools and educational institutions suddenly closed and public awareness of social media increased.

In English as a second language (ESL) and English as a foreign language (EFL) context, social media can create new and motivating arenas for linguistic interaction (Kessler, 2013) and simplify second and foreign language learning (AlGhamdi, 2018). In other words, social media can help to increase learners' knowledge not only of new linguistic information but also of the surrounding environment of that information. The wealth of online English language materials undoubtedly facilitates their use as a corpus for learners (Kessler, 2013). The fast dissemination of clips and pictures on social media platforms introduces people to the languages and cultures of other nations, which makes social media a good information channel that is free from the restrictions of formal settings.

Social media also promotes independent lifelong learning by providing learners with unlimited sources of content to suit their needs. Teachers are not the only source of knowledge in classrooms since students can obtain ideas and information about any topic and participate actively in teaching/learning processes online (Khan, 2018). Exposure to different online discussions on social media can provide learners with the necessary language to participate in future discussions on relevant topics, either virtually or in person (Derakhshan & Hasanabbasi, 2015). Additionally, social media offers a socially interesting setting with less stress than many learning classrooms (Carmean & Haefner, 2002). In support of social media, Al Jahromi (2020) claimed that social media offers a reduced-apprehension milieu for language practice. Learners can communicate and exchange information comfortably because they can control whether to reveal their

identities or remain anonymous. The privacy feature of online platforms, which is lacking in traditional classrooms, can assist learning by providing learners with a neutral outlet to practice languages. As Teng et al. (2022) stated, ‘providing [for] the psychological comfort of the learners is one of the major objectives of a successful education system’ (p. 5). Moreover, information on social media is always available and accessible—a feature that minimises the dread that a lack of knowledge on any given topic can generate.

In formal classes, particularly in EFL settings, many learners feel shy when asked to speak in front of their fellow students, especially at the beginning of the learning journey. Social media may assist learners by allowing them to practice a language before they enter the classroom. The language used on social media platforms is usually spontaneous and natural, differing from the structured language students are generally exposed to in language classes. This, the language on social media, shows learners the connection between language and various situations and raises awareness about specific expressions, phrases, and words according to the topic of discussion. This connection between language and context on social media apps can facilitate socially engaging learning environments that allow learners to maintain contact with other learners beyond classroom constraints (Ahmadi & Tabatabaei, 2021; Al-Ali, 2014; Manca, 2020; Rasyiid et al., 2021; Vadivel & Beena, 2019; Aloraini, 2018; Dhanya, 2016). Moreover, most social media apps are free of charge, meaning that learners can have many language-related accounts, form friendships with native speakers, and exchange messages with classmates and colleagues without leaving their places or paying extra charges.

All these advantages suggest that social media is an important aid throughout the language-learning process. However, it is not known how language learners feel about the importance of social media apps for their learning. Moreover, in EFL contexts, particularly in Saudi Arabia, the relevance of social media to teaching and learning has received little attention. Thus, there is a need to gauge the influence of social media apps on the acquisition of English from learners’ perspectives. In other words, it is important to determine learners’ attitudes regarding how such an influence may benefit the development of their EFL learning. Research has shown the effectiveness of some social media apps in improving language learning, (e.g., Al-Ali, 2014; Alnujaidi, 2017; AlGhamdi, 2018; Al Jahromi, 2020; Yadav, 2020) but a better picture must be drawn of the variety of apps. Allowing EFL teachers and learners to give their opinions about this issue would offer new insights and potentially enrich language learning. An investigation of the utility of social media apps for enhancing language learning is greatly needed. Therefore, in the present study, the author aimed to fill the existing gap in the literature on Saudi EFL learners’ views on these apps as tools for improving their English based on the following research question: how do Saudi EFL learners perceive the use of social media apps as tools for improving their English language proficiency?

As Basoz (2016) stated, learners’ attitudes can present valuable information to teachers and policymakers regarding activity design. Therefore, it is important to capture learners’ perceptions of social media apps as tools for improving educational processes in EFL contexts to determine whether learners consider them useful for improving their English. Such knowledge would potentially support the implementation of social media apps in classrooms.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Researchers (e.g., Al Fadda, 2020; Muftah, 2022; Ayesh et al., 2023) have recently attempted to understand the post-pandemic impact of social media on language learning from learners’ perspectives. Social media apps have undoubtedly improved the quality of life of many individuals, including learners, and EFL learners create social media accounts daily to provide them with rich language content and learning support.

In 2010, when social media apps first emerged, their usefulness in language classrooms was questioned. For example, Baldwin (2012) postulated that the effect of social media on language development is not always consistently positive, since although social media apps advance lexical normalisation, they often encourage erratic spelling, the adoption of unacceptable terms, an increased use of acronyms, and the violation of grammatical rules. These observations are worth considering. In social media contexts, it seems that users prioritise abbreviated language over grammatical accuracy to support the communicative goals of the apps. The younger generation tends to be open to language change and appreciates the fast replies and sense of belonging facilitated by social media apps, which may explain their adoption of abbreviated language. Chomsky (2014) asserted that language change is a fact of life because it is a sign that contemporary society is lively and developing. Social media apps connect learners to universal language norms and update them on the recent changes adopted by native speakers, allowing the language of learners to sound natural and native-like if that is the goal. However, these caveats should not be taken as an excuse for avoiding the use of social media apps in language classrooms, although that use should be monitored and controlled. For example, in learning situations, it may be advisable to establish structured predetermined learning outcomes to make students aware of the goals of implementing social media in language classrooms.

Although research on the incorporation of social media apps into education is still in its infancy (Lambton-Howard et al., 2020), past educational researchers (e.g., Gao et al., 2012; Manca & Ranieri, 2013, 2016, 2017; Rodríguez-Hoyos et al., 2015; Tess, 2013), particularly in EFL learning contexts (e.g., Özdemir, 2017; Peeters, 2018; Sun et al., 2017; Zou et al., 2018), have found a positive relationship between the two. This suggests that the benefits of controlled social media implementation may outweigh any negative outcomes. Barrot (2022) conducted a comprehensive systematic review of the impact of social media on language learning based on an analysis of 396 documents published in 2008–2019. The findings showed that social media positively influenced language learning, and that the influence steadily increased over

the years in question. Lambton-Howard et al. (2020) elicited perceptions of social media from both learners and teachers, and learners reported using social media apps for learning purposes more frequently than teachers reported using them in class. Being able to use and understand English allows users to open a limitless number of social media accounts and facilitates interactions between people from different cultures, tending to normalise vocabulary and language structures through these interactions.

Studies on learners' perceptions of social media apps as language learning tools have been conducted in different EFL settings, including Saudi Arabia. For example, Al-Ali (2014) found that learners enjoyed using Instagram as a learning tool and that using Instagram promoted students' active learning because they felt responsible for generating ideas and providing adequate images to illustrate their writing. Al-Ali (2014) concluded that social media apps could be used to redefine teaching and to integrate learners more effectively into learning processes. Similarly, Muftah (2022) studied the impact of the different social media platforms on Saudi EFL undergraduate students and found that these platforms significantly improved learners' English across all language skills—writing, reading, listening, and speaking—and increased their lexical variation, communication skills, and use of grammar. Muftah (2022) supported the integration of social media into classrooms and urged teachers to accept the shift from traditional pedagogical classrooms to ones equipped with new technology.

The reported results in the field suggest that because students today have extensive social media experience, it may be 'logical to leverage the current student generation's heavy reliance' (Godwin-Jones, 2008, p. 8) on social networking platforms in support of language learning. Many educational institutes have social media accounts and use them to promote their programmes, announce events and competitions, and maintain connections with their alumni, reflecting these institutes' awareness of the importance of communicating on these platforms. Such institutes typically use a wide range of social media platforms because they want to reach out to as many different individuals as possible.

Finally, it is worth drawing attention to the fact that the popularity of social media apps differs from one place to another. For example, Facebook is not as popular in Saudi Arabia as it is in Egypt; it is used in Saudi Arabia mainly by people who need to maintain contact with other people outside the country.

Learning is generally more fruitful if it mirrors real life and the society in which individuals live. Since social media reflects the real lives of learners, its introduction into classrooms may be beneficial. However, as mentioned previously, few studies have provided empirical data on learners' perceptions of the importance of social media apps to enhance their EFL development. Only Al-Ali (2014) conducted an EFL study to measure learners' attitudes towards the use of social media apps for learning English in a Saudi context. Other researchers (e.g., Al Jharomi, 2020; Yadav, 2020; Muftah, 2022) have reported that social media apps influence learners' performance positively. Since learners are central to any teaching and learning situation, it is vital to collect and analyse data on their attitudes towards and perceptions of any implementation of new technology. There is a need to collect comprehensive information on this emerging field to contribute to the literature and help identify hindrances to and modifications of the implementation of social media apps in learning to better suit learners' needs. The present study was designed with the intention of improving the current status of social media in language classrooms by analysing learners' attitudes towards diverse social media apps.

III. METHODOLOGY

Since the connection between social media apps and language learning has not yet received adequate attention in EFL contexts, including Saudi Arabia, investigating social media apps' influence on language learning required the author to identify learners' attitudes towards the impact of the different apps on their EFL learning. Because learners were the primary data source, the author designed an online questionnaire to gather information about the top five social media apps used by EFL university students. The questionnaire was adapted from Aloraini and Kardoso's (2020) survey, which was used to gauge Saudi EFL learners' perceptions of four popular social media apps (WhatsApp, Snapchat, Instagram, and Twitter). Because the survey setting, a Saudi university where English is taught as a foreign language (EFL), was similar to that of the present study, the survey questions seemed appropriate for this study. Since 2020, when the original survey was designed, a new app (TikTok) has become popular among young people. Therefore, the author included questions about learners' attitudes towards TikTok in the questionnaire for this study. The questionnaire was designed to measure attitudes towards each of five apps: WhatsApp, Snapchat, Instagram, Twitter, and TikTok. The questions asked about participants' beliefs about the effectiveness of the apps for learning English, their feelings towards the use of these apps in their learning, and the frequency of their actual use of the apps in the learning process.

The recruitment and data collection period began on January 17, 2023, and concluded on February 18, 2023. This study did not require formal ethics approval, as it involved minimal risk and followed established ethical standards for educational and social science research. Prior to participation, all students were informed of the study's purpose and assured that their participation was entirely voluntary and anonymous. Participants were provided with an explanation of the research objectives and verbal consent was obtained from those who agreed to participate before completing the questionnaire. They were also made aware that they could withdraw at any stage without any negative consequences. The questionnaire was distributed online via link to all final-year EFL students at a Saudi university, of whom 118 completed the questionnaire. Their answers provided data for the present research. The author conducted descriptive analysis of percentages using SPSS® statistics software to answer the research question.

IV. RESULTS

Descriptive statistics are presented in tables. Table 1 shows the percentages for the participants' general perceptions of the different social media apps for learning English.

TABLE 1
PERCENTAGES FOR PARTICIPANTS' GENERAL PERCEPTIONS OF DIFFERENT SOCIAL MEDIA APPS FOR EFL LEARNING

Social Media App	Twitter	WhatsApp	Snapchat	Instagram	TikTok
Participants' perceptions of the app's usefulness for developing English language proficiency	41%	28%	33%	60%	47%

As shown in Table 1, of the five apps listed in the questionnaire, Instagram appeared to be perceived by more than half the participants as the most useful platform for improving their English. WhatsApp was the least commonly used platform for English language development, perhaps because WhatsApp is usually used only to communicate with acquaintances of other nationalities or nationals living outside Saudi Arabia. Most communication was conducted in the participants' national language (i.e. Arabic). WhatsApp was rated the least in improving English, this still suggests that it is used by some participants, albeit a small percentage, as a tool to improve their English.

TABLE 2
FREQUENCIES OF USING SOCIAL MEDIA APPS FOR EFL LEARNING (%)

Frequency of using social media apps to communicate in English (in percentages)	Twitter	WhatsApp	Snapchat	Instagram	TikTok
Always	11.9	15.3	28	30.5	26.3
Usually	22.9	15.3	12.7	14.4	15.3
Sometimes	28	35.6	23.7	23.7	20.3
Occasionally	0	9	0	0	0
Rarely	16	18	21.2	11	9.3
Never	15	0	8.5	13	21.2

Only 11% of the participants said that they always used English on Twitter. The largest percentage of participants (28%) reported that they sometimes used Twitter to communicate in English, while around 22% usually used English when they communicated with others on Twitter. However, 15% said that they never used English on Twitter.

Only 15% of participants always used English on WhatsApp. Similar to the situation with Twitter, the largest percentage (35%) reported sometimes using English on WhatsApp, while 15% usually used English on WhatsApp.

The largest percentage of the participants (30%) reported that they always used English on Instagram, while 23% said they usually did so. Only 13% reported that they had never used English on that app.

Of all participants, 28% always used English on Snapchat. A smaller number (23%) reported that they usually communicated in English on Snapchat. However, 21% never used Snapchat to communicate in English.

TikTok was always used by 26% of the participants to communicate in English. However, 20% reported that they sometimes communicated in English on TikTok, and 21% stated that they never communicated in English.

Participants were asked to rate which app was the easiest to use. This question was intended to measure learners' familiarity with using the app to help teachers determine which app could best be used in the early stages of using social media apps in language classes. The results are shown in Table 3.

TABLE 3
SOCIAL MEDIA EASE OF USE

Ease of Use	Twitter	WhatsApp	Snapchat	Instagram	TikTok
	84%	82%	75%	82%	78%

Table 3 shows that most of the participants were familiar with using the apps. This meant that, if these apps were incorporated into learning, most learners would adapt easily to using them. Twitter was rated highest for ease of use, followed by WhatsApp. The introduction of these two apps preceded that of the others in the social media world, which enabled people to become familiar with them because there only ones available.

As previously mentioned, a primary reason for integrating social media apps into learning processes is that they provide reduced-stress milieux. Unlike classroom settings, which usually require prompt responses from learners, social media apps allow more time for students to read, re-read, and edit their answers. Participants in this research were asked about their attitudes towards social media apps as providing user-friendly learning environments. The results are shown in Table 4.

TABLE 4
SOCIAL MEDIA APPS AS FRIENDLY LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS

Which apps provide the friendliest learning environments?	Twitter	WhatsApp	Snapchat	Instagram	TikTok
	65%	43%	40%	71%	59%

Most of the participants agreed that Instagram provides a friendly learning environment. Similarly, over half regarded Twitter and TikTok as friendly learning platforms. WhatsApp and Snapchat were rated relatively low, although they were

not viewed entirely negatively. The nature of Instagram, Twitter, and TikTok as public accounts may allow them to be used in a friendly question-and-answer way.

In an open-ended question at the end of the questionnaire, the participants added YouTube and Telegram as apps they felt were useful for improving their English. When asked whether they would like their teachers to integrate social media apps into their teaching, most learners answered positively. However, a few learners rejected the idea, justifying their rejection by claiming that social media would be distracting if they were officially incorporated into the learning process.

V. DISCUSSION

In the current study, the author investigated learners' attitudes towards the influence of social media apps on their overall EFL development. The results showed that, in general, learners viewed these apps positively and believed that they could contribute to their overall EFL performance. Regarding specific apps, Instagram appeared to be the top app for assisting the participants in their learning, perhaps due to the nature of the app. Instagram enables images and video clips to be posted with no limitation on the space provided for the account creator's or viewers' comments. Indeed, Instagram was probably favoured because of these features; users can present a topic with visual content and add many pictures and videos under which they can write long informative comments. Content on Instagram does not automatically disappear after 24 hours, and it will remain on the platform until deleted by the account holder.

TikTok has not yet gained the same popularity as Instagram as an EFL learning facilitator, despite the emergence of many accounts that offer English teaching content. TikTok was considered more valuable for EFL learning than the other apps, although it was only recently launched. Twitter has a strict limitation of 120 letters for comments (at the time of conducting this research)—a limitation that may discourage users from elaborating on their responses or comments. It is worth mentioning that the topic presentation on Twitter is visually straightforward and, consequently, may appeal to some types of learners e.g., reading/writing learners who value reading and responding to short texts and feel distracted by pictures or videos. Similarly, Snapchat is mostly a visual resource that requires learners to be accepted by account holders if they wish to see the content, which disappears after 24 hours. Therefore, to use Snapchat as a learning channel, learners must record the content within 24 hours. WhatsApp was not seen as a valuable learning resource compared to Instagram and TikTok. Since WhatsApp requires users to select other users to communicate with, it is only valid for acquaintances. Thus, unless learners subscribe to an online channel for which that app is the only tool used, they may not find the app useful for supporting their EFL learning.

Compatible with the rating for Instagram as the top app for EFL development, most of the participants who reported using English on social media used Instagram. This compatibility shows the participants' awareness of the importance of Instagram for improving their English and suggests that instructors could employ Instagram in their teaching without fear of it being rejected by students. Tips for its use may include requesting learners' comments on or descriptions of visual material posted by the instructor. Other practices involving Instagram may include digital storytelling, practicing grammar by developing photo captions, participating in hashtags, and role playing (Bell, 2013; Hudson, 2013; Spencer 2012). These interventions could be a good way to control for any disadvantages may appear because of the employment of social media in classrooms.

Similarly, TikTok was perceived as useful for improving learners' English. Many of the participants who used social media to communicate in English reported using TikTok. However, when asked about the app they never used to communicate in English, most participants said that they never used TikTok. In other words, although TikTok was ranked second after Instagram for its usefulness for EFL learning, it was never used by those who used all the other social media apps. Since the question asked about using English in general, it is possible that the participants considered receptive skills more than productive skills when answering this question. Instagram has an exploratory feature that allows users to provide recommendations and explore thousands of different international accounts without needing to follow them. Although this feature is also available in other apps (e.g., the explore icon in TikTok), it was first introduced on Instagram. (It is worth noting that TikTok was not as popular at the time of conducting this research as it is now.) However, comments on Instagram are displayed below posted pictures or videos, which helps users follow up if something in the comments catches their attention. Comments on TikTok are hidden, and users have to tap the comment icon to see them. In terms of regularity of use, Twitter and WhatsApp were rated higher than the other apps. Notably, although Twitter informs users of trending issues and topics without the need to actively participate, it acts as a search engine with regard to language learning. The formality of the app means that language learners must define what they are searching for before they can obtain valuable results. Similarly, with WhatsApp, users need to specify the channels/people they are interested in communicating with in English. In the context of the current study, it is possible that the participants considered brief conversations with their classmates and instructors when asked about using English on WhatsApp.

Learners were given the opportunity to name any additional app they felt was useful for improving their English. Those who responded added YouTube and Telegram. YouTube, which was launched in 2005, offers a number of free, well-known English teaching channels, such as BBC Learning English, Oxford Online English, Talk English, Let's Talk, and many others. YouTube is accessible worldwide, and learners can access these channels free of charge at their convenience. Telegram could also be a great source of improving English, but, like Instagram and Snapchat, it requires learners to have prior registration with the account holders. The size of shared files may also be limited.

VI. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, by exploring and mapping learners' perceptions of social media apps as learning tools, the author provides insight into the available learning facilitation options presented by the apps. The study results indicate that social media apps can be introduced into EFL teaching/learning processes to update the older approaches still applied in many of today's classrooms. EFL teachers should use all the equipment they are offered to engage learners more actively in learning processes. Young people these days spend many hours on their smartphones and are therefore highly familiar with using social media and other online apps. Technology is an important learning facilitator that teachers should incorporate into their classes to obtain the best possible engagement from their students. However, using social media apps for teaching does not mean relying on them to the exclusion of traditional classroom practices and activities; they should be employed as supplements to traditional teaching approaches.

This study reported students' preferences for certain apps, however, it has some limitations; although it asked about students' preferences for certain apps, their answers were entirely subjective and the study thus gave no insight into how students used the apps, the levels/styles of English they used, who they communicated with, or whether using the apps did, in fact, improve their English. Further research is thus needed to address these issues and contribute to the literature about social media and language learning.

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Fictionalizing the Self: Autofictional Fragments in Meena Kandasamy's *When I Hit You*

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Abstract—By fictionalizing the self, autobiographical elements play a crucial role in analyzing the narrative instability, memory, and language in Meena Kandasamy's 2017 novel *When I Hit You: Or, A Portrait of the Writer as a Young Wife*. The novel depicts domestic violence through fragmented, non-linear lenses of display and creates an autobiography that becomes an intense reflection of the protagonist's pain. This research article employs a qualitative research approach along with the theoretical concepts of autofiction and feminist narrative criticism to explore how Kandasamy creates a semi-fictionalized self to express the phenomena of gendered violence, postcolonial identity, and resistance. The novel's fragmented structure, metafictional devices, and autobiographical elements create an intervention into a conventional means of discourse (both fiction and memoir), acting as an intervention into the conflicting ways in which women are silenced, whether patriarchally or literarily, creating a strong counter-narrative. Through a close reading of select passages and with the layering of critical secondary texts, this paper illustrates how *When I Hit You* (Kandasamy, 2017) functions as a site of feminist self-fashioning and subversive storytelling.

Index Terms—autofiction, autobiography, Meena Kandasamy, Indian literature, trauma

I. INTRODUCTION

Havenil Meena Kandasamy is an Indian poet, writer, translator, and activist widely known for her collections of poetry, *Touch* (2006) and *Ms. Militancy* (2010). Her writings mainly focus on caste annihilation, feminism, and linguistic identity. She states, "Poetry is not caught up within larger structures that pressure you to adopt a certain set of practices while you present your ideas in the way that academic language is" (Taneja, 2017). The 2017 book *When I Hit You: Or, A Portrait of the Writer as a Young Wife* by Meena Kandasamy takes place in contemporary India. The unnamed narrator of the book falls in love with a university professor and consents to marry him. The narrative centers on the author's experience as a recently married woman who is socially isolated and subjected to severe violence at the hands of her husband. She finds refuge in writing and uses it as a potent weapon of resistance to combat her severely abusive married life, even though she is only trying to survive. In a review of the novel *When I Hit You* in *The Guardian*, Preti Taneja says, "The raw material of domestic abuse leads to a meditation on writing and a searing examination of a woman's place in contemporary Indian society" (Taneja, 2017).

The literary form of autofiction, blending autobiography with fiction, is positioned as an increasingly powerful way to tell the story of personal trauma that intentionally resists strict genre boundaries. First used by Serge Doubrovsky in 1977, autofiction refers to a special brand of writing that combines lived experience with the author's fictional response, allowing the author to enact several narrative positions at the same time. This writing form has been especially welcomed by feminist authors who are trying to address the structures of domination to reclaim ownership over their own stories (Lee, 2021).

A clear example of current autofiction is in Meena Kandasamy's 2017 novel *When I Hit You*. Even though the story is typically read as fiction, it is impossible to overlook the author's personal experiences, which she has talked about in interviews and publications, of being repeatedly abused physically and psychologically by her husband while she was a young scholar. Indeed, it is her life story that also finishes the smudged circle of genre when moving between autobiography and fiction. The text occupies a fertile and ambiguous space of confession and creation, testimony and transformation (James, 2022). While Kandasamy's writing resembles specific trajectories of the memoir genre, she chooses not to present a straightforward, linear, factual memoir; instead, she presents a fragmented, plausibly metafictional narrative that obscures the boundaries between author and protagonist.

Autofiction is significant in *When I Hit You* (Kandasamy, 2017) not only because it draws on autobiographical moments but also because it includes both significant formal experimentation and a political agenda. Kandasamy also challenges voyeurism—the impulse of confessional writing—as well as the silencing of women's voices that has characterized literary tradition. To examine how autofictional fragments in *When I Hit You* (Kandasamy, 2017) enable

the narrator to respond to systemic patriarchy, make sense of trauma, and assign narrative agency, this study aims to examine the function and consequences of these fragments.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

For this paper on Meena Kandasamy's 2017 novel *When I Hit You*, the literature review focused on the scholarly works and books that examine the evolution of autofiction, trauma studies, and feminist narratives. The writings based on autofiction showcase the perceived difference in how fact or fiction divides and leaves a gap between theory and practice. In a letter to Philippe Lejeune, Doubrovsky declares that he wanted to fill this "empty square" (Lejeune, 1989, p. 63). Lejeune propounded that, as a primary need, the identities of the narrator, character, and author should be contained in an autobiography. The identity may or may not be accumulated by a specific "autobiographical pact" that alleges it within the text (Lejeune, 1989, p. 26).

In her book *Autotheory as Feminist Practice in Art, Writing, and Criticism*, Lauren Fournier (2021) discusses the growth of autofiction as a space where theory and lived experiences meet. Fournier asserts that auto-fictional narratives are often sites of feminist intervention, allowing marginalized writers to intervene as they disrupt dominant discourses (Fournier, 2021). Because Kandasamy's narrative integrates sociopolitical critique with a personal story, Fournier's concept of "autotheory" is valuable to think about. The book *Reading Autobiography: A Guide for Interpreting Life Narratives* (2010) presents a thorough analytic framework for life writing, especially for women-influenced writings. Smith and Watson suggest feminist autobiographical texts often employ fragmentation, irony, and multivocality as resistance. These features are overt in Kandasamy's novel, where non-chronological scenes are combined with metafictional commentary that resists the linear format of trauma narratives (Smith & Watson, 2010).

Leigh Gilmore's *The Limits of Autobiography: Trauma and Testimony* (2001) also provides wisdom concerning the difficulties of trauma narration. Gilmore argues that trauma dislocates narrative coherence, and the autobiographical subject emerges more from fragmentation than continuity (Gilmore, 2001). This fragmentation is not a failing of memory; it is a conscious and ethical aesthetic. Kandasamy's non-linear layout supports Gilmore's claim that trauma narratives need non-conventional modes of representation. Moreover, Cathy Caruth's pioneering work in trauma theory, especially *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History* (1996), offers a lens to think about narratives as memorials of an experience that remains impossible to tell altogether. Caruth (1996) states, "To be traumatized is precisely to be possessed by an image or event," a quality found in Kandasamy's novel, highlighted by repeated motifs and fractured temporalities (Caruth, 1996, p. 4).

Concerning the particular topic of *When I Hit You* (Kandasamy, 2017), the existing articles have commented on how the novel challenges the domestic abuse narrative and the narrator's bildungsroman narrative. It argues that "Kandasamy does not allow the narrative to fall into facile empathy; she demands that her narrator's agency as a writer is at the forefront." Moreover, it is also interpreted that the novel is "a document of literary resistance rather than merely an account of personal suffering." Finally, Kandasamy has expressed her resistance to victimhood in interviews and essays. She said in an interview with *The Guardian* (2017), "I wanted to write a story that was not about a victim, but about a survivor, about someone who writes back." The research gap for this article on *When I Hit You* (Kandasamy, 2017) lies in the limited scholarly analysis of Kandasamy's self-narrations that help her to overcome the trauma she faced in her married life.

The narrator slowly begins to raise her voice against her husband's physical abuse because it is emotionally haunting. As Urvashi Bahuguna describes in her blog, "The novel shows us how domestic violence isolates a person. It does not embolden most victims. It shows how leaving takes time, cunning, and opportunity. It shows how staying takes obedience, fear, and self-preservation" (Bahuguna, 2017). To sever the arm of torture, she becomes a writer who self-documents every second of her abusive marriage as a comfort claim in her life. In all honesty, many people think, "How can educated, independent, and clever girls put up with such indignity?" It is difficult to answer this question in full; the short answer is that we are all simply creatures of love. Respectively, to preserve love in their lives, we help to re-shackle it by being married to those people. A woman typically gathers love from her surroundings—nature, parents, and husband. However, in her case, the narrator could not fully harvest because her husband was oppressive.

III. METHODOLOGY

This research paper employs a qualitative literary theory-based approach and textual analysis that focuses on trauma studies, feminist narrative theory, and autofiction. Meena Kandasamy's 2017 novel *When I Hit You: Or, A Portrait of the Writer as a Young Wife* serves as the primary text for analysis. The article places the novel's important auto-fictional components, like self-referentiality, narrative fragmentation, and hazy author-protagonist boundaries, into theoretical and sociopolitical frameworks by using close reading techniques.

The analysis draws on secondary sources such as academic books, journal articles, and critical essays dedicated to examining autofiction as a mode of writing, as well as feminist and postcolonial readings of the narrative of trauma. The methodological goal of the study is to investigate not only the ways that Kandasamy uses autofiction but also the purposes of her use of autofiction: to understand how this genre affords opportunity for feminist reclaiming of voice and identity when faced with both intimate and structural violence. The paper also incorporates interviews with Meena

Kandasamy and published online posts to triangulate textual evidence with authorial purpose, considering carefully the problem of the author indicating the narrator in autofiction. In all cases, the paper stays aware of the complicating ethical and artistic implications of fictionalizing personal trauma.

IV. DISCUSSION

Meena Kandasamy uses domestic abuse as the raw material in her novel *When I Hit You* (Kandasamy, 2017), which leads to a reflection on writing and a critical analysis of a woman's position in modern Indian culture. In her 2012 article on her marriage for the Indian magazine Outlook, Kandasamy uses an unidentified narrator who speaks furiously in the first person (Kandasamy, 2012). *When I Hit You* (Kandasamy, 2017) is an autobiographical fiction describing two anonymous figures from different backgrounds. The narrator of the novel is a writer married to a man, a professor from a slightly higher caste and class. He is in his second marriage after a failed first marriage with a higher-caste woman. He gradually and systematically pressures and dominates his wife, asking for access to her social media accounts, for example. He thinks this total access might create more intimacy in their relationship. As their marriage builds, he also begins to make corrections to her writings.

A. Fragmentation and Disruption of Narrative Coherence

The novel begins without providing any background exposition or chronological development. This absence of chronology indicates the fragmentations of the narrator's mental state that befit the psychological impact of abuse. As a trauma theorist, Cathy Caruth argues that the traumatic experience is easily represented frequently by the return of the victim in jumbled scenes. Kandasamy represents this through her fragmented writing, some not even a paragraph long, that recollects the ruptures and violence from her memory. In one of the novel's fragments, the narrator reflects, "This is not a story with a beginning, middle, and end. This is a series of wounds" (Kandasamy, 2017, p. 123).

The marginalization of women, the power struggle between men and women, and the societal perception of women are issues explored in literature. This is shown in the auto-section of the book, which is where these incidents most likely occurred. It is known that these problems still exist in society, even if they may not have been brought up there (Carmody, 2021). To draw attention to the differences between how women are treated by their spouses and how they expect to be treated, the book employs literary techniques, narrative method, style, structure, and plot, or the absence in the present situation. How actual concerns are explored and connected to the audience, rather than just focusing on the narrator, makes it more than just a collection of writings to tell a story.

According to Smith and Watson, women's autobiographical writing often resists narrative coherence in the interest of resisting the masculine literary canon (Smith & Watson, 2010). Meena Kandasamy resists the reader's desire for narrative closure and refuses to package her pain into a fully resolved plot. By reading *When I Hit You* (Kandasamy, 2017), the reader gets a narrator who often blurs the boundaries of author and character.

B. Metafiction and Writerly Self-Awareness

The narrator is a writer attempting to use language to process her abuse. Her reflections about the process of writing serve as metafictional commentary and further support the text's autofictional identity. The narrator says, "I want to be the one who names. I want to be the one who writes. I want to be the one who tells my story and gives it shape, not him, not anyone else" (Kandasamy, 2017, p. 89). It is both personal and political, and the narrator rejects the idea of creating herself as a patriarchal instinct. This relates to Lauren Fournier's idea of "autotheory," where the personal becomes a mechanism for feminist theorizing (Fournier, 2021).

When analyzing the fictionalization of the self, Meena Kandasamy states, "I fictionalize because the truth is too painful. I fictionalize because it allows me to scream without being silenced" (Kandasamy, 2017, p. 102). These lines show the auto-fictional character of the novel directly while simultaneously highlighting the therapeutic aspect of it, a means of survival and reframing trauma without allowing it to consume an individual. The interplay between the fiction of truth and the active reality signifies the ethical dimension of the autofiction text, which is theorized by Leigh Gilmore (2001), who sees fragmented truths as ethical responses to trauma.

C. Intersections of Gender, Language, and Violence

The autofictional voice of the writer is not formed by gender but by her dual identity as a Tamil woman and poet. It shows that a language can be both a weapon and a site of struggle. The abusive husband in the novel tries to silence her by crippling her writing, restricting her speech, and undermining her self-worth. Meena Kandasamy narrates, "He tells me that women who write are whores. That I should be ashamed of every word I have ever written. That literature is filth if it comes from a woman's mouth" (Kandasamy, 2017, p. 37). These incidents expose the systemic misogyny that is inherently entangled in cultural notions about women's authorship. For the narrator, writing is not just expressive; it is defiance. This notion is consistent with postcolonial feminist criticism, which situates writing as a site of resistance for women marginalized by subordinate identity (Spivak, 1988).

The narrator's refusal to be silenced shows her reconceptualization of narrative authority, while disempowerment arises. Her voice is unwavering, ironic, and often mordantly humorous, as in "If I die, let it be known that I died trying to finish a sentence" (Kandasamy, 2017, p. 58). As the narrator recognizes writing as a weapon for her survival, she fictionalizes herself through her writing. Meena Kandasamy employs her satirical and ironic writing style to raise

awareness of the societal concerns covered in the novel. The harmony of humor and pain is evident and valuable in that it helps readers understand the content. She provides the humor so that the reader may make their judgments on the text. In the end, it enables readers to apply this knowledge to their own lives. She writes:

In the greedy quest for more and more dowry, or because women did not give birth to sons, or because they refused to sleep with their husbands every night, our culture started burning brides. Tradition never goes out of fashion. (Kandasamy, 2017, p. 187)

In the 2017 novel *When I Hit You*, Meena Kandasamy makes use of her writing as a weapon to escape from her past life. She writes the novel to fictionalize her “self” as an awareness among women, and it empowers the society that sits back after experiencing the abuse or violence in their lives (Dwivedy, 2024).

D. Voice, Irony, and Subversion

The novel *When I Hit You* (Kandasamy, 2017) has an ironic and literary narrative voice. It is not about a passive victim relaying her abuse but a writer who reconstructs her sharp intelligence of trauma on her terms. Meena Kandasamy’s protagonist wears wit like armor—an ironic distance that highlights the surreal absurdity of her situation while also taking back control of language. She writes, “I must learn that a Communist woman is treated equally and respectfully by comrades in public but can be slapped and called a whore behind closed doors. This is dialectics” (Kandasamy, 2017, p. 34).

Here, it is seen that the narrator is satirizing not only her abuser but also the dissonance between political ideals and tyrannical politics at home. The same irony and irony of irony reveal the ineffectiveness of political structures to uphold women’s dignity, particularly in private. The husband’s socialism is a facade for the narrator’s romantic idealism, which she is in the process of dismantling (Alapati, 2022).

Irony in autofiction is doing important work, as it enables the author-narrator to critique not only her abuser but also wider cultural constructs. By not resorting to sentimental or victimhood narratives, the narrator positions herself as a thinker. She exists in the space between the rigid binaries of theory and practice, love and violence, and writing and silence.

E. Intertextuality and Cultural Commentary

The literary references in Kandasamy’s work are multilayered, providing a perspective that is bigger than a personal story. The narrator points to literature, politics, and history, using her own experience as a touchstone in larger cultural and intellectual engagements. In one striking instance, she compares her situation to that of Tamil women raped during war: “In the end, all of this reminded me of what women in Sri Lanka, in Eelam, must have gone through at the hands of the army: the shutting down of their voice, their resistance, their rebellion, their sense of self” (Kandasamy, 2017, p. 94).

The fragment links the domestic sphere to the geopolitical and works as an echo of the feminist expression, “the personal is political.” In addition, it demonstrates Meena Kandasamy’s commitment to writing as a collective testimony, not simply an autobiography. Her autofiction becomes a witnessing of human testimony, of articulating her pain and the pain of others that has gone unrecorded.

By connecting herself with other women across borders and histories, she ingeniously creates feminist solidarity based on struggle. The text’s transnational aspect also expresses its post-colonial consciousness, where trauma is conceptualized within state violence, gender oppression, and imperial histories.

F. Language as Resistance

In *When I Hit You* (Kandasamy, 2017), language is both a weapon and a safe space. The protagonist is always thinking about her attempts to write, what she can write, what she cannot write, and what she has to keep unspoken. The husband’s consistent attempts to destroy her writing, delete her emails, and dictate her internet usage symbolize greater attempts to silence women who dare to speak out. She writes:

He deletes the 25,600-odd emails from my Gmail inbox. All at one go. Then, to prevent me from writing to the Gmail help team and having my emails restored, he changed the password to something I do not know and cannot guess. He erases everything on my hard disk. Everything about my life as a writer is gone. There are no contacts. There is no email conversation that I can return to at a later date. There is no past. (Kandasamy, 2017, p. 139)

The rhetorical violence is a part of an ongoing pattern of erasure. However, it is through writing, although interrupted and disjointed writing, that the narrator tries to reclaim herself. By including these very instances of silencing and censorship in the narrative itself, Kandasamy reveals all the processes of suppression that are usually implicit. The writing itself is a revolution (Sharma, 2022).

The fractured form of the novel is a commentary on this kind of resistance, too. Short, fragmented “paragraphs,” disparate entries, and text breaks are techniques of inoculation against erasure. Each fragment contests the totalizing, contesting the narratorial agency that reflects the husband’s psychological agency. Thus, writing in fragments is both a symptom of trauma and a mode of survival.

V. CONCLUSION

Meena Kandasamy's *When I Hit You: Or, A Portrait of the Writer as a Young Wife* exemplifies how autofiction can be both a literary and political act. Through fragmentation, metafiction, and writerly self-reflection, she assembles a narrative form that resists sequential storytelling to address the interplay of trauma, gendered violence, and self-representation. By putting herself into fragments of fiction, Meena Kandasamy produces a narrative space where survival, resistance, and reclamation intertwine. Her narrative technique does not allow for the erasure that so often takes place with women who persist in abusive domestic settings. Instead, it allows for the assertion of authorship, control, and visibility. By juxtaposing fiction with autobiography, Meena Kandasamy's narrative strategy also allows her to explore emotional truth around trauma without being held to the requirements of factual truth.

In addition, her works interrogate hegemonic literary and social structures that prop up patriarchal ideologies, condoning violence against women. The novel makes the personal political and the political personal, with Meena Kandasamy making visible an identity that is marginalized through caste, gender, and national politics, positioning herself as an activist. In the present moment, the novel shows that autofiction is not only an aesthetic arrangement in contemporary literature but also a radical act, especially for feminist or postcolonial writers who sought to dismantle dominant narratives. *When I Hit You* serves as a forceful demonstration of how auto-fictional fragments can be used to reorganize and recover a self, to defy erasure, and to repurpose trauma into literature. Kandasamy's work represents the spirit of feminist autofiction—fearless, unapologetic, and highly autonomous.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I thank my supervisor, Dr. K. Thomas Alwa Edison, for his invaluable guidance. There was no external funding for this research. All efforts have been made to ensure the ethical use of literary sources and respectful handling of cultural themes.

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Requirements for Employing Artificial Intelligence Applications in English Language Education at Universities: Perspectives of Faculty Members

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Abstract—This study investigates the essential conditions for the successful integration of artificial intelligence (AI) applications into English language education at the university level, as perceived by academic staff. Employing a descriptive survey design, a structured questionnaire comprising 24 items was developed and categorized into three core dimensions: organizational, human, and technical requirements. The instrument was distributed to a purposively selected cohort of 255 faculty members from Al-Zaytoonah University of Jordan. Results indicated that faculty members consistently rated all three categories of AI integration requirements as highly important. Moreover, statistical analysis revealed no significant differences in perceptions based on gender or academic discipline (humanities versus sciences). In light of these findings, the study advocates for proactive engagement by senior officials within the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research to advance the institutionalization of AI-based innovations across university settings.

Index Terms—AI integration requirements, educational technology, English language instruction, higher education, faculty perspectives

I. INTRODUCTION

In simple terms, AI systems can be defined as those which enhance and further advanced means of computation with self and autonomous learning, organization, and adaptability. Systems like these, therefore, correspond to a certain model which, in the broadest sense, has transformed technology into the key driver of change in this century (Al-Atoum, 2023).

The integration of various machine learning algorithms alongside different neural network models has significantly improved systems in pattern recognition, prediction, and in performing advanced operations on massive datasets.

Such abilities are now being employed to disrupt the foundations of society, with education being the primary sector to serve as a representative of such disruptions.

The education sector is considered liable to implement AI technologies to maintain its pedagogical relevance and institutional legitimacy in a knowledge-based economy amidst the present information revolution.

Ammar and Matoussi (2022) argue that AI innovation transforms higher education by providing tailored, data-based recommendations to align with institutional objectives and accelerate pedagogical transformation.

Similarly, Al-Mahdi (2021) emphasizes that meaningful curricular reform particularly in adapting academic programs to meet evolving labor market requirements requires integrating advanced technologies such as AI.

This necessitates a critical examination of AI's conceptual dimensions, functional applications, and implementation pathways to ensure coherence with educational development agendas.

Recent empirical work delineates five major domains of AI utility in education: institutional management, teacher support and enhancement, dynamic and adaptive assessment, skill cultivation for professional readiness, and facilitation of lifelong learning (Darwish & Al-Laithi, 2022). In parallel, global policy organizations such as UNESCO advocate for

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the ethical incorporation of AI into education as a means of promoting human rights and sustainable development (Al-Yagzi, 2019). Expanding this discourse, Al-Atal (2021) argues that AI systems offer cognitive capabilities that exceed conventional instruction, particularly in diagnosing learner difficulties and refining educational interventions.

However, despite its promise, AI's integration in educational systems remains limited.

Structural and cultural resistance to shifting from face-to-face instruction and standardized assessments continues to inhibit widespread adoption (Mukhtar, 2022). Compounding this is the scarcity of professionals equipped with the technical expertise necessary to design, maintain, and scale intelligent educational systems. Nonetheless, universities increasingly explore AI-supported instruction and assessment models (Al-Atoum, 2023). Yet, as Holmes (2023) cautions, redefining instructional roles where teachers assume administrative functions and students engage in AI-guided autonomous learning requires strategic planning and institutional support. Definitional clarity remains central to AI's educational implementation. In this study, AI is defined as an autonomous computational system capable of mimicking and, in some cases, surpassing human cognitive functions, including reasoning, learning, and decision-making (Al-Atoum, 2023; Abu Zaqa, 2018; Al-Dahshan, 2019).

The core functional properties of artificial intelligence (AI) encompass three main dimensions. First, inference refers to logic-based decision-making that integrates multimodal inputs with structured knowledge repositories. Second, machine learning captures the data-driven processes through which AI systems perform classification, pattern recognition, and predictive modeling. Third, knowledge representation involves structuring meaning by linking contexts with outcomes and generating outputs that are both interpretable and actionable (Wang, 2020; Fryer, 2020).

For an AI-based solution to be effective in higher education institutions, multiple requirements would have to be fulfilled. To begin with, an AI solution operating in an educational institution would have to meet specific privileged protocols and ethical standards, thus requiring an adequate organizational and legal framework. Secondly, the teaching staff and other stakeholders would have to be sufficiently trained in the use of AI tools. Thirdly, appropriate technical infrastructure along with supporting staff would be required for integration and ongoing support, and lastly, dependable funding would be required for the development, implementation, and continuous improvement of AI solutions (Chan, 2023).

In other words, AI's pedagogical implications within higher education are manifold. Learners can actively participate in their study, since AIs personalize learning by controlling content delivery according to individual learner profiles, and introduce other interactive readings of information.

Key instructional applications of artificial intelligence (AI) in education can be identified across several domains. Intelligent Tutoring Systems (ITS) generate adaptive learning pathways by leveraging diagnostic feedback and learner analytics. Adaptive Learning Environments dynamically adjust instructional content in real time through algorithmic analysis of learner responses. Educational Robots enhance engagement by simulating natural language interactions and supporting conversational learning experiences. Finally, Expert Systems emulate human expertise by drawing on structured knowledge bases and decision rules, thereby facilitating problem-solving and decision-making within educational contexts.

AI-enabled tools can be applied in multiple contexts, such as tutoring services, conducting client interactions in Filipino or English, or employing hybrid approaches like one-to-one sessions. AI-enabled tools, like conversational robots, allow students to practice dialogues in real time with simulated human partners (Al-Atoum, 2023).

Platforms of this nature remove some of the traditional barriers to education, including an instructor's availability, expenditure, and learner's anxiety. At the same time, they offer flexible, pressure-free, and highly engaging learning environments. With the spread of mobile technologies, such programs are changing the language learning framework, as they provide constant access to excellent language models.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

The use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in English language courses at tertiary education levels has changed the scope of learning. Students now have new modalities of associating with the course material, instructors, and other students. A notable advancement within this scope is the AI-powered, real-time, speech-based systems, which enable the learner to converse, also replicating the nuances of human conversation (cf. Al-Atoum, 2023). The systems gain additional importance with the now widespread mobile technologies, which facilitate anywhere and anytime access to AI-powered conversation and language practice systems.

They allow message sending based on the subject, feeding real time feedback in immersion language environments that adapt to the user's proficiency level. Such technologies go beyond the norms of learning geography which involve personally fixed-time classes or expensive one-on-one tutoring, some of which may pose as a hurdle to a large number or intimidating to users with very little self-confidence or language experience.

Alarming for the purposes of foreign language instruction, these technologies separate to a great extent from the existing models of language learning, such as predefined schedule one-on-one or group shoddy classroom coaching. Such models might be not reachable to many or frightening to users with little self-esteem or interaction with the language.

The technologies mentioned previously have been further developed to enable learners to practice the language with contextual feedback and immerse themselves in language environments fine-tuned to their proficiency levels. Yin (2021)

and Holmes (2023) further note that AI-driven English language learning solutions for tertiary institutions have been advanced to address a wider range of learner and teaching needs. These also comprise mobile apps, smart learning platforms, and chatbots that make use of natural language processing and speech recognition, and more.

To understand the benefits of new AI-driven language learning, it is best to look at a few examples. They all cast a slightly different light on the use of adaptive technologies in education. Chat Bot not only tests the English proficiency of the users but also modifies the flow of the conversation to provide gradual and sustained learning. Duolingo has modules for vocabulary, grammar, and even pronunciation, and like other self-taught systems, it has its unique gamified approach. Moreover, it has an advanced algorithm that analyses performance for targeted lesson planning and skill reinforcement on a daily basis. In the same vein, Andy serves as a conversational tutor, offering systematic grammar instruction, tests, and even immediate corrections to improve grammar learning during interactive speaking sessions.

With its reliance on AI, the Mondly app stands out, as it offers AI-driven pronunciation modeling and error correction, enabling learners to engage in spoken English practice with digital chat partners. The Improve English app, on the other hand, is designed for second language users who are preparing for international exams such as TOEFL or GRE. With its use of AI analytics, the app is able to determine strengths and weaknesses and generate custom practice tasks. Lastly, English Sentence Master uses a puzzle-based system that requires users to put mixed-up words into proper sentences within a set time limit, thus deepening their grasp of grammar and syntax. Taken together, these apps demonstrate the new direction in education which is personalized learning; here AI customizes teaching materials, monitors the student's activity and continually updates suggestions. The increasing use of such tools highlights the evolving perception of AI in education from a gimmick to an essential feature of modern teaching.

A. Thematic Insights From Prior Research

The global momentum around AI in education has led to a wide array of research on its use, benefits, and challenges. Because the research is done in many different countries and types of institutions, it provides a broad evidence base that is useful to the inquiry at hand.

In the case of Jordanian universities, Abu Muqaddam (2024) analyzed the relationship between AI tools and self-directed study in a graduate student cohort of 452. Utilizing a descriptive correlational methodology, the research displayed a statistically significant positive correlation, supporting the idea that AI fosters autonomy and learner engagement.

Abdulghani et al. (2024) conducted research at Umm Al-Qura University to gather faculty perceptions on requirements for the integration of AI. Regardless of the college type or the participants' academic ranks, their data analysis surfaced unanimous agreement on the effective organizational, technical, and human resource requirements for the implementation of AI. Similarly, Al-Atoum (2023) conducted a study using surveys and document analysis to investigate the necessary process and infrastructural frameworks for the implementation of AI in tertiary education. The study highlighted the hardware readiness, secure data networks, and institutional support to nurture the AI-innovation culture as the often-addressed requirements.

In the wide frame, Al-Maliki (2023) synthesized 20 articles on the strategic dimensions of AI. In these articles, the benefits included improved instructional delivery, enhanced tracking of student's performance, and research innovation. The challenges seen were institutional inertia and digital illiteracy. Complementing these findings, Ofosu-Ampong (2024) studies the acceptability and perceptions faculty have on AI and university teaching. Compared to his other findings, this study shows the opposite, whereby the lecturers understand the use of AI, but institutional support, professional development, and governance policies are crucial for the successful integration of AI.

As for the U.S., Kim et al. (2025) offered the latest insight with their survey of 76 faculty members and 982 students at a large public university, focusing on perceptions of generative AI. Their findings indicated no notable attitudinal differences between students and faculty, highlighting the universal academic consensus on the need for technical infrastructure and professional development.

A number of studies conducted in Arab and Southeast Asian settings shed light on the specific policies related to the use of AI in institutions of higher learning. For instance, Al-Masri and Al-Tarawneh (2021) investigated the impact of AI on the Jordanian institutions' productivity, measured in terms of teaching, research, community service, and administration. Their study revealed moderate levels of adoption and, where progress existed, it was not balanced across the different sectors. Likewise, Al-Muqayti (2022) used a correlational survey design to examine the impact of AI use on the perception of university performance. Although human and technical resources were somewhat adequate, marked imbalances were observed among the different faculties, with the hard sciences showing greater preparedness than the soft sciences.

In Saudi Arabia, Al-Bashir (2021) developed a two-dimensional framework by employing an expert-based method that included structured interviews and questionnaires. The first dimension captured enabling factors, which were organizational, technical, and human, while the second dimension captured expected barriers such as change resistance and policy constraints. The study found that there was strong agreement about the foundational requirements that were necessary for successful AI integration. Broadening the focus within the region, Asirit and Hua (2023) conducted an empirical survey of tertiary students in the Philippines. Their study confirmed that there is a strong recognition of the importance of AI integration, with institutional support, infrastructure development, and capacity-building initiatives being key factors shaping readiness and utilization.

B. Methodological Convergence and Gaps in Literature

When looking at these studies, the first thing that stands out is the focus on descriptive and correlational survey designs, which further highlights the exploratory stage of this field (e.g., Abu Muqaddam, 2024; Al-Atoum, 2023). Although this enriches our understanding of the topic for a specific point in time, it also points to the absence of experimental or longitudinal studies, which are vital for establishing cause-and-effect relationships and determining whether findings can be applied on a larger scale.

In addition, whereas a number of studies investigate institutional preparedness or the general implementation of AI in higher education, there's a striking lack of research focusing on the use of AI in specific subjects, and more so in the area of English language teaching. This limited scope is even more glaring when there's little to no focus on the detailed dynamics of how AI influences different aspects of language learning, learner anxiety, or even socio-cultural challenges in the context of EFL/ESL environments.

The present study responds to this gap by focusing on faculty perceptions of the structural, technical, and human requirements for integrating AI into university-level English instruction. It distinguishes itself by blending theoretical insights with empirical data to create a discipline-specific framework that has both local relevance and global implications.

C. Theoretical Underpinnings and Conceptual Direction

While the majority of studies analyzed rely upon empirical methodologies, there is growing recognition that AI education research needs an equally strong theoretical base to be given credence. The greater ones among the theoretical frameworks would be the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), which relates to user engagement with perceived usefulness and ease of use, and the TPACK framework, which addresses the interplay between technological, pedagogical, and content knowledge. Integrating such theories would help future research transcend descriptive accounts and contribute to predictive modeling and intervention design.

D. Synthesis and Scholarly Contribution

In summary, the reviewed literature confirms that while the higher education sector acknowledges the value of AI, full-scale adoption remains constrained by infrastructural, pedagogical, and administrative challenges. Notably, the specific context of English language instruction has not received adequate scholarly attention, especially from the perspective of university faculty who are tasked with implementation.

By concentrating on this intersection AI applications and English language teaching this study contributes an original, context-sensitive perspective to the discourse on AI in education. Its findings are expected to inform institutional policies, professional development programs, and AI tool design tailored to the linguistic and cognitive demands of English language learners.

E. Research Problem

Rapid advances in digital technologies have redefined how knowledge is produced, delivered, and consumed, compelling educational institutions particularly those in developing regions to reconsider their instructional and evaluative practices. In Jordan, this digital transformation has catalyzed increasing investment in artificial intelligence (AI) as a mechanism for enhancing educational delivery and institutional responsiveness (Abu Muqaddam, 2024).

Multiple empirical investigations have emphasized the pivotal role of AI in reshaping higher education. For Yin (2021), AI had the long-term potential of augmenting teaching practices through the automation and enhancement of teaching tools. Fryer (2020) also pointed out that assessment with AI-assisted systems not only fosters differentiated learning, but also enhances academic performance through real-time feedback and personalized scaffolding.

Given these developments, Shabaan (2021) advocated for the universities to reassess and realign their curricular programs as part of a wider strategy of digital transformation. Abd Al-Salam (2021) argues that successful integration of AI needs to align with the preparedness of institutions with respect to three main dimensions: infrastructure, policy, and human capital. Despite increasing scholarly consensus on AI's relevance to education, significant knowledge gaps persist particularly in subject-specific domains such as English language instruction. Drawing on the researcher's own professional experience in language education, and observations of both students' linguistic struggles and faculty members' challenges in delivering effective instruction, this study emerges as a timely response.

Its primary aim is to determine what organizational, technical, and human requirements must be met to facilitate meaningful AI integration into English language education at the university level.

F. Research Questions

This study seeks to address the following research questions:

1. What are the perceived requirements for integrating artificial intelligence applications into English language instruction at universities, according to faculty members?
2. Are there statistically significant differences in these perceptions based on gender and college type (i.e., humanities vs. sciences)?

G. Significance of the Study

(a). Theoretical Significance

This study theoretically contributes to an extended discussion on AI adoption in educational contexts through the provision of evidence, framed in the context of a developing nation. It fits with national strategies, e.g. Jordan's Vision 2025, which states that the integration of advanced technologies in the different sectors of society shall include education.

This research contributes theoretically to a broader debate on the adoption of artificial intelligence in educational contexts by generating evidence in the context of a developing country. It fits with the national strategies like that of Jordan's Vision 2025, which mandates the inclusion of high-tech innovations across sectors of society, particularly education.

Moreover, it may serve as a foundational reference for future research on the pedagogical, infrastructural, and policy implications of AI in higher education.

(b). Practical Significance

From a practical perspective, the study responds to pressing institutional needs for empirical evidence to guide the formulation of AI implementation strategies. The findings are expected to assist university administrators in making informed decisions regarding resource allocation, infrastructure development, and professional training initiatives. They also provide valuable insights for curriculum designers and instructional technologists, enabling them to embed AI components more effectively into educational programs. In addition, the results support faculty developers in creating AI literacy programs specifically tailored to the needs of language educators, thereby fostering more sustainable and context-relevant integration of AI into higher education.

H. Definition of Terms

To ensure conceptual clarity, several key terms are defined both in light of existing literature and in relation to their operational application within this study.

Employment is conceptually defined as “an individual’s awareness and interaction with their environment, encompassing both tangible experiences and psychological constructs such as thoughts and emotions” (Mishal & Al-Eid, 2023, p. 16). Operationally, it refers to the degree to which faculty members at Al-Zaytoonah University of Jordan utilize AI-related resources and strategies in their instructional practices, as measured by their responses to the study’s validated questionnaire.

Artificial Intelligence (AI) is conceptually described as “the emulation of human cognitive processes including reasoning, decision-making, and learning by machines and systems operating in dynamic contexts” (Al-Ahmadi & Al-Qahtani, 2023, p. 18). For the purposes of this study, AI refers specifically to educational technologies and software designed to simulate human cognition in language instruction, particularly in tasks such as feedback delivery, adaptive testing, and conversational modeling.

AI Requirements are conceptually defined as “the set of human, technical, financial, and organizational preconditions necessary for deploying AI systems in educational environments” (Al-Bashir, 2021, p. 36). Operationally, this term denotes the organizational, technical, and human competencies that faculty perceive as necessary for successful AI adoption in English language teaching at Al-Zaytoonah University.

I. Delimitations of the Study

To establish a focused scope, this study is subject to several delimitations. With respect to subject delimitation, the investigation concentrates exclusively on the perceived requirements for AI integration in university-level English language instruction, thereby excluding other subject areas. Geographically, the study is confined to Al-Zaytoonah University of Jordan, and its findings may not be directly generalizable to other institutions without further comparative research. In terms of temporal scope, data were collected during the second semester of the 2023–2024 academic year, and any subsequent technological or institutional developments are not reflected in the analysis. Regarding human delimitations, the study includes only current faculty members at Al-Zaytoonah University, excluding the perspectives of students, administrators, or technical staff. Finally, instrument-based limitations apply, as the data collection relied on a questionnaire that, while validated for reliability and content accuracy, remains subject to the inherent constraints of self-reported data and Likert-scale-based measures.

III. METHODOLOGY

A. Research Design

This study employed a descriptive survey design, selected for its suitability in gathering and analyzing quantitative data reflecting the views of a defined population (Creswell, 2014). Given the study’s aim to explore the requirements for implementing artificial intelligence (AI) in English language education from the perspective of university faculty this design was appropriate for capturing prevailing perceptions across multiple institutional dimensions.

B. Population and Sampling

The studious population consists of all faculty members who were hired by Al-Zaytoonah University of Jordan, that is entirely within the academic year of 2023-2024, which according to official records from the university, adds up to a total of 741 individuals.

Statistical calculation methods in accordance with the guidelines of the American Educational Research Association were therefore used to determine a proper sample size.

For a population of 741, the recommended minimum sample size is approximately 253 respondents to achieve a confidence level of 95% with a $\pm 5\%$ margin of error for sample surveys. According to strong sample representation, thus, 269 questionnaires were sent out, of which 259 were collected, 4 of them were incomplete, leaving a total number of 255 responses for analysis.

TABLE 1
THE DEMOGRAPHIC DISTRIBUTION OF PARTICIPANTS BY GENDER AND ACADEMIC DISCIPLINE

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	169	66%
	Female	86	34%
College Type	Humanities	124	49%
	Sciences	131	51%

C. Instrumentation

A structured questionnaire was developed to collect data on faculty perceptions of the requirements for AI implementation in English language instruction. The instrument was informed by a comprehensive review of relevant literature and adapted from previously validated tools in studies such as those by Abu Muqaddam (2024) and Al-Bashir (2021). To ensure contextual relevance and content validity, the draft version was refined through consultation with experts in educational technology and measurement. The initial version contained 36 items; however, following expert review and pilot testing, the questionnaire was streamlined to 24 items. These were organized into three domains: Human Requirements (8 items), Organizational Requirements (8 items), and Technical Requirements (8 items).

D. Scale and Scoring

Each item was rated using a five-point Likert scale designed to measure the degree of agreement among participants, where 5 indicated "Strongly Agree," 4 represented "Agree," 3 denoted "Neutral," 2 corresponded to "Disagree," and 1 reflected "Strongly Disagree." For interpretive purposes, the overall scale range ($5-1 = 4$) was divided into three levels of perception using class intervals of approximately 1.33. Responses were thus categorized as Low Level (1.00–2.33), Moderate Level (2.34–3.67), and High Level (3.68–5.00). These interpretive categories were applied consistently across all three domains of the questionnaire to assess faculty perceptions regarding the human, organizational, and technical requirements for AI integration in English language teaching.

E. Validity Procedures

To ensure content and face validity, the questionnaire was subjected to expert review by a panel of specialists in educational measurement, evaluation, and instructional technology from Jordanian universities.

Experts assessed the relevance, clarity, linguistic accuracy, and alignment of each item with the intended constructs. Based on their feedback, several items were reworded for clarity, and redundant or ambiguous items were removed, yielding the final 24-item version.

F. Reliability Testing

To ensure the reliability and internal consistency of the questionnaire, both test-retest and Cronbach's alpha methods were employed. For test-retest reliability, the instrument was administered twice to a pilot group of 20 faculty members, with a two-week interval between administrations. The Pearson correlation coefficient between the two sets of responses was 0.90, indicating high stability over time. Internal consistency was assessed using Cronbach's alpha, which yielded a value of 0.89 for the full instrument, confirming a high degree of internal reliability across all items.

G. Study Variables

The study included both independent and dependent variables. The independent variables were gender (male, female) and college type (humanities, sciences). The dependent variable was faculty perceptions of the organizational, technical, and human requirements for the integration of artificial intelligence in English language instruction.

H. Data Collection Procedures

Data collection was conducted during the second semester of the 2023–2024 academic year, following a systematic sequence of steps. First, a review of existing literature and validated instruments was undertaken to guide the construction of the questionnaire. Second, the draft instrument was submitted to expert reviewers to ensure content validity. Third, a pilot test was conducted with a small group of faculty members outside the study population. Fourth, the final version of the questionnaire was distributed to faculty at Al-Zaytoonah University through both printed copies and electronic forms hosted on Google Drive. Fifth, the returned responses were collected, coded, and cleaned to ensure

completeness and accuracy. Finally, the data were analyzed using appropriate statistical methods to address the study objectives.

I. Statistical Analysis

The data were analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS), version 26. To address the first research question, which aimed to identify perceived requirements for AI integration, descriptive statistics were employed. Means and standard deviations were calculated to determine both the overall level and the domain-specific levels of perceived requirements. To address the second research question, which examined differences in perceptions based on gender and college type, independent-samples *t*-tests were conducted. Statistical significance was established at the $p < 0.05$ level.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents and interprets the study's findings based on the order of the research questions.

A. Results and Discussion of the First Research Question

What are the perceived requirements for employing artificial intelligence (AI) applications in English language education at universities, as viewed by faculty members?

To address this question, means, standard deviations, and estimation levels were computed for the overall set of AI integration requirements as well as for each specific domain. The data are summarized in Table 2.

TABLE 2
MEANS, STANDARD DEVIATIONS, AND RANKING OF AI EMPLOYMENT REQUIREMENTS FROM FACULTY PERSPECTIVES

No.	Domains	Mean	Standard Deviation	Rank	Estimation Level
3	Human Requirements	4.31	1.01	1	High
1	Organizational Requirements	4.30	1.08	2	High
2	Technical Requirements	4.25	1.02	3	High
	Overall Average	4.28	1.03		High

The data set suggests that the score on average across all domains is 4.28. This means that faculty members strongly agree with the need to include AI in their daily activities. The faculty members agree most on the human requirements with an average score of 4.31, followed by organizational requirements with 4.30 and lastly the technical requirements with 4.25. The faculty members strongly agree with the need for pedagogical tasks to be more differentiated and that AI enables advanced engagement for learners because that is the student model that is sought to be adopted. The faculty members assume that the balance of the requirements, especially the technical one that is ranked last, has to do with the fact that they are strongly and materially backed by the institutions assuming that the faculty members are trained and have appropriate experience to incorporate AI for pedagogical reasons.

This complements the findings of Abdulghani et al. (2024), who said that faculty members perceived AI-related instructional needs as high. Results also concur with Kim et al. (2025), who surveyed faculty and students in the United States and reported strong consensus on the importance of technical infrastructure and professional development as prerequisites for AI integration. The results also tally with Ofosu-Ampompong (2024), who found that university lecturers largely accepted the use of AI in teaching and identified institutional support, professional development, and organizational policies as significant predictors of AI integration readiness.

However, the results contradict Al-Muqayti (2022) who reported that the faculty members of universities in Jordan rated the needs for AI at a medium level. This could be attributed to the differences in the level of preparation of the institutions concerned, traditions of the discipline, or exposure to AI teaching approaches.

This next section thus disaggregates the data for the Organizational Requirements domain for greater clarity.

(a). Organizational Requirements

TABLE 3
MEANS, STANDARD DEVIATIONS, AND RANK ORDER OF ORGANIZATIONAL AI REQUIREMENTS

No.	Item	Mean	Std. Dev.	Rank	Estimation Level
7	Establishing regulations and guidelines for data protection	4.36	1.01	1	High
8	Promoting AI culture among faculty and students	4.35	1.08	2	High
4	Mandating AI use in English instruction	4.33	1.02	3	High
5	Developing a new institutional vision for AI	4.32	1.10	4	High
1	Introducing AI as an academic major	4.31	0.87	5	High
2	Establishing postgraduate AI programs	4.30	1.05	6	High
3	Embedding AI in higher education strategic plans	4.29	1.02	7	High
6	Implementing cybersecurity policies for AI use	4.27	1.05	8	High
	Overall Domain Mean	4.30	1.08		High

All items in the Organizational Requirements domain were rated at a high level, with mean scores ranging from 4.27 to 4.36. The highest-rated item was the establishment of data protection regulations ($M = 4.36$), while the lowest was the implementation of cybersecurity policies ($M = 4.27$).

The ratings capture an issue faculty face; academic institutions tend to face difficulties shaping regulatory frameworks and cultural readiness for AI adoption. They also indicate some dissatisfaction with data security and institutionalization, which in turn highlights concerns regarding ethical standards and governance in AI. These results align with those of Abdulghani et al. (2024), which centered on organizational readiness as the pivot of AI integration. At the same time, Chan (2023) focused on the requirement of governance structures as well as operational supports not only AI integration, but safe, ethical, and sustainable AI integration. Modeling a different from the rest, Al-Muqayti (2022) noted only a lukewarm approach towards organizational preparedness in Jordanian institutions, which could point to a difference in institutions or a difference in AI literacy of the survey takers.

(b). *Technical Requirements*

TABLE 4
MEANS, STANDARD DEVIATIONS, AND RANKINGS OF TECHNICAL REQUIREMENTS FOR AI INTEGRATION

No.	Statement	Mean	SD	Rank	Estimation Level
5	Providing necessary infrastructure (labs, facilities) for AI in English teaching	4.45	0.99	1	High
6	Developing emergency protocols for data loss or technical failure	4.40	0.88	2	High
7	Creating a comprehensive database for English content, students, and faculty	4.38	1.01	3	High
8	Designing AI software and applications specific to university needs	4.35	1.10	4	High
4	Updating databases and information systems regularly	4.33	0.87	5	High
3	Establishing effective digital communication systems between faculty and students	4.20	1.06	6	High
1	Implementing robust data protection systems	4.15	0.94	7	High
2	Promoting online AI training programs in higher education	4.14	1.07	8	High
	Overall Average	4.25	1.02		High

According to the data provided in Table 4, academic staff rated all the technical prerequisites for AI adoption in English language teaching on a high scale, ranging from 4.14 to 4.45. The highest-rated factor was, therefore, provision of infrastructure such as laboratories and technical facilities ($M = 4.45$), while the least was promotion of online training sessions on AI integration in higher education ($M = 4.14$). This pattern suggests that faculty place significant emphasis on tangible infrastructural elements both digital and physical as prerequisites for effective AI deployment in pedagogy. Their lesser emphasis on training programs may reflect an assumption of existing faculty competence or a perceived gap in institutional support for professional development.

(c). *Human Requirements*

TABLE 5
MEANS, STANDARD DEVIATIONS, AND RANKINGS OF HUMAN RESOURCE REQUIREMENTS

No.	Statement	Mean	SD	Rank	Estimation Level
7	Providing professional trainers for faculty and student capacity building	4.41	0.88	1	High
8	Hiring experts to install and maintain AI systems	4.40	0.93	2	High
5	Employing technical experts to design AI applications for university use	4.36	1.00	3	High
2	Training faculty and students on AI integration into instruction	4.34	1.05	4	High
4	Conducting training specific to AI-supported English instruction	4.33	1.03	5	High
3	Raising awareness of AI's value in English language learning	4.32	1.06	6	High
1	Promoting public understanding of AI's educational significance	4.31	0.95	7	High
6	Recruiting AI-specialized English language educators	4.30	0.87	8	High
	Overall Average	4.31	1.01		High

Faculty members rated all items within the human domain as highly important, with mean values between 4.30 and 4.41. The top-ranked item was "Providing professional trainers for faculty and student instruction in AI use" ($M = 4.41$), emphasizing the central role of targeted training. The lowest-ranked item was "Recruiting AI specialists in English" ($M = 4.30$), possibly due to the limited availability of such roles or perceived institutional priorities.

These results highlight faculty recognition of human capital as a critical driver of AI integration success. The emphasis on trainers and technical experts suggests that knowledge dissemination and system usability are pivotal concerns. This finding resonates with Ofosu-Ampong (2024), who emphasized the centrality of faculty preparedness,

institutional support, and technical training in fostering AI adoption. However, it contrasts with Al-Muqayti (2022), who reported only moderate concern for human resource readiness.

B. Results and Discussion of the Second Research Question

Are there statistically significant differences in faculty members' perceptions of the requirements for employing AI applications in English language instruction at universities, based on gender or college type?

(a). Gender Variable

To address the gender-based aspect of this question, means, standard deviations, and independent samples t-tests were computed for each domain and for the overall AI requirement score. Table 6 summarizes the findings.

TABLE 6
INDEPENDENT SAMPLES T-TEST RESULTS FOR AI REQUIREMENT PERCEPTIONS BY GENDER

Domain	Gender	N	Mean	SD	t-value	df	Sig. (p)
Organizational	Male	169	4.40	0.182	0.131	410	0.896
	Female	86	4.40	0.155			
Human	Male	169	4.02	0.199	0.858	410	0.391
	Female	86	4.01	0.160			
Technical	Male	169	4.24	0.248	-1.376	410	0.170
	Female	86	4.27	0.182			

As shown in Table 6, the p-values for all three domains exceed 0.05, indicating no statistically significant differences between male and female faculty members in their perceptions of AI employment requirements.

This suggests that faculty, irrespective of gender, share similar levels of awareness and concern regarding the organizational, technical, and human prerequisites for integrating AI into English instruction. Such consensus may stem from institutional policies or shared professional development experiences that emphasize the cross-cutting nature of AI in education. Faculty members across genders may also perceive the adoption of AI tools as a vital response to global educational innovation trends.

These findings are consistent with prior research on AI integration in higher education. Kalniņa (2024) reported no significant gender-based differences in AI readiness, a result that aligns closely with the present study. Al-Bashir (2021) noted a lack of gender gaps in faculty views within Saudi university settings, aligning with such tendencies elsewhere. In the same vein, Al-Muqayti (2022) established that there were no marked differences by gender in the views of faculty regarding AI integration in Jordanian institutions. This is yet again an indication of the fact that opinions regarding AI adoption do not vary by demographic factors.

(b). College Type Variable

To explore whether faculty perceptions varied by college type (Humanities vs. Sciences), means, standard deviations, and independent samples t-tests were again employed. The results are presented in Table 7.

TABLE 7
INDEPENDENT SAMPLES T-TEST RESULTS FOR AI REQUIREMENT PERCEPTIONS BY COLLEGE TYPE

Domain	College Type	N	Mean	SD	t-value	df	Sig. (p)
Organizational	Humanities	124	4.39	0.191	-2.210	410	0.214
	Sciences	131	4.43	0.108			
Human	Humanities	124	4.01	0.198	-1.266	410	0.206
	Sciences	131	4.03	0.141			
Technical	Humanities	124	4.24	0.235	-1.726	410	0.185
	Sciences	131	4.29	0.188			

No statistically significant differences were detected between faculty from Humanities and Sciences in any of the three domains, as indicated by p-values greater than 0.05.

Faculty from all disciplines agree on the importance of AI in improving English language teaching, and the lack of differences indicates an emerging alignment among disciplines in the appreciation of AI's educational value, which might be the result of organizational programs or interdisciplinary interaction with digital tools. This study's findings are consistent with prior research that shows faculty share the same view on adopting AI, as Abdulghani et al. (2024) reported no differences in views by college type, and Al-Bashir (2021) similarly noted consistent views regarding the use of AI across different disciplines.

Whereas, Al-Muqayti (2022) has emphasized the role of science faculties, our research for example noted no such differences. The said study, Al-Muqayti (2022), accentuated the probable science faculty readiness attributed to measurable behavioral change among such faculties as a consequence to technology-driven content. The present study reflects an absence of such behaviors which is likely indicative of Al-Zaytoonah University's balanced integration encompassing all faculties for AI professional development programs and the equilibrium of technology innovation across various departments.

V. CONCLUSION

This research is focused on examining the use of AI in English language instruction in universities in the Jordanian context, especially the use at Al-Zaytoonah University, and the challenges faced by human, technical, and organizational resources. The study, which adopted a descriptive survey methodology and utilized a rigorously validated survey instrument, confirms that there is a strong need in all three dimensions. The findings specify that the actual integration of AI tools relies, to a lesser extent, on the institution's infrastructure, and, to a greater extent, on strategic institutional policies and proper human and specialist skills development.

Analyzing the data, it's clear that human-centered changes had the greatest impact, such as integrating expert-led instruction, recruiting AI professionals, and creating tailored English language teaching modules. Incorporating these changes reflects the faculty's insight that the implementation of edtech is a matter of having the appropriate expertise and readiness rather than merely possessing access. The other technical requirements, particularly those related to infrastructure and system security, were given simultaneous attention, implying that the faculty consider robust digital infrastructures as a foundation for teaching propelled by AI. An increased focus was given to other institutional functions such as policy formulation, strategic planning, and the development of AI programs, reflecting that the institutions consider readiness an enabler for digital transformation.

Significantly, no evident variations were detected based on the type of college or gender. The consistency in views across different demographics and fields points to a shared institutional culture and agreement on the issue of AI integration. In addition, the implementation of AI appears to be an issue affecting every discipline in higher education and not just the STEM disciplines.

The study has practical implications as well as strategic ones. Institutions that desire to implement AI in language instruction must allocate funds and collaborate across disciplines. The national education authorities, especially the Higher Education and Scientific Research Ministry, should enact clear policies and continue supporting the integration of AI tools, particularly in humanities such as English language education, where such tools are rarely used.

Subsequent studies might benefit from examining student perceptions, engaging in cross-institutional comparisons, and tracking the long-term effects of AI on pedagogy. The continued development of AI technologies calls for a thoughtful approach from higher education institutions. Such institutions should ensure that AI serves to enrich, rather than diminish, the human aspect of teaching and learning.

Reflecting on the steady concern of the 13 faculty members regarding the implementation of artificial intelligence (AI) in English language teaching, particularly with regard to the organizational, technical, and human resources required, the following recommendations are proposed to address policy formulation and organizational implementation.

Policy-Level Initiatives. The senior management of the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research must take initiative and lead the development and implementation of a set of policies that will enable the swift adoption of AI across all higher education institutions. Such policies must be strategic in intent, provide for targeted financing along with securing the necessary funding, as well as contain thoughtful ethical guidelines for the use of AI in education.

Developing Institutional Infrastructure for Digital AI Education. The digital infrastructure for advanced multilingual teaching, particularly AI institutions, must be adequately financed. The financing must also extend to providing AI-compatible teaching spaces, fully provisioned labs, and English teaching-focused secure and reliable communication systems. The institution and student data must also be protected using appropriately established advanced cybersecurity measures.

Capacity Building and Professional Training. Universities might need to organize sessions for educators that train them in the use of AI tools in their teaching. Training might, for instance, include the use of adaptive learning software, intelligent tutoring systems, and the basic principles of AI integration in both physical and remote teaching.

Research Expansion and Comparative Studies. Empirical research needs to be carried out in order to understand the Jordanian universities and the academic fields of AI implementation requirements. That kind of research is necessary to give a comparative view and emphasize the AI integration master aids and challenges in various educational settings.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The authors would like to thank their respective universities for providing academic support and resources that facilitated the completion of this work.

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Blended Learning in EFL Contexts: Lecturers' Perceptions and Its Effect on Students' Performance in Indonesian Higher Education

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Abstract—The main objective of this study was to explore English lecturers' perceptions of blended learning (BL) and its impact on learner performance in three universities on Madura Island, Indonesia. Using a qualitative approach with a case study design, eight EFL lecturers from three universities participated in the study. Data were obtained using semi-structured interviews and questionnaires to understand the effectiveness, implementation experiences, and challenges of the model. The results of this study indicated that lecturers had a positive perception of BL, especially regarding its ability to increase student engagement and learning flexibility. However, some challenges remain, such as limited technological infrastructure, difficulties in preparing online materials, and low motivation among students to actively engage in online learning. The effect of BL on students' writing and listening skills was positive, but their speaking and reading skills still required further improvement. This study recommends increasing technology training for lecturers, strengthening the digital infrastructure, and designing a curriculum that synchronises online and face-to-face learning proportionally.

Index Terms—English Language Teaching, online learning, offline learning, digital pedagogy, speaking

I. INTRODUCTION

Blended Learning (BL) has become an important strategy in current educational schemes, especially with the advancement of technology that supports the establishment of flexible and dynamic learning methods (Kumar et al., 2021; Müller & Mildenerger, 2021). BL combines face-to-face learning with the use of digital platforms and resources to create an interactive and personalised learning environment (Alamri et al., 2021; Albatti, 2023). This strategy allows students to access materials anywhere and at any time and affords them the freedom to learn at their own pace, thus consolidating the quality of their learning experience. Thus, BL provides the much-needed adaptability to accommodate students' various learning styles, enhance their engagement in learning, and support freedom in learning models.

In teaching English as a foreign language (EFL), the adaptation of BL is increasing in line with the development of technology and the need for more modern education (Rahman, 2021). The use of the BL in EFL teaching offers students the opportunity to develop their language skills more thoroughly than traditional teaching. By incorporating online learning, students are able to reach in-depth and relevant material, while in face-to-face learning, it is still used for speaking practice as well as live discussion (Tran et al., 2024). With the use of BL, language learning becomes more interactive as it provides opportunities for students to engage in more collaborative and varied learning activities, which support the improvement of their overall language proficiency. However, although the adaptation of BL in EFL teaching offers various benefits, there is a gap in the research regarding how EFL teachers perceive and apply it in their teaching practices. Most studies on BL tend to focus on the technical aspects of technology implementation or the effectiveness of specific learning platforms; however, very few have examined EFL lecturers' perceptions of how BL directly affects their teaching processes and student performance (Attard & Holmes, 2022; Barfi et al., 2023). This suggests that there is still much room for more in-depth research on how lecturers integrate BL into their teaching practices and its impact on student learning outcomes, especially in EFL schemes.

The challenges faced by EFL lecturers in implementing BL have not been widely discussed in the literature. EFL lecturers often face various technical and pedagogical obstacles, such as limited access to technology, difficulties in

designing curricula that integrate online and face-to-face elements, and challenges in ensuring that students can adapt to this more flexible learning method. This difference suggests the need for further research to identify the barriers that EFL lecturers may face when applying BL and find solutions that can help them maximise its use in language teaching.

The main objective of this study was meant to investigate English lecturers' perceptions of blended learning (BL) implementation in their teaching and its impact on learner performance in EFL classes. By identifying lecturers' views and experiences, this research aims to offer greater clarity regarding the advantages and challenges of implementing BL and its impact on student learning outcomes. Through a more profound understanding of BL implementation, this study hopes to provide recommendations for more effective English language teaching practices.

The research questions posed in this study are as follows: 1) How do English language teaching lecturers perceive the application of blended learning (BL) in their teaching? 2) What is the impact of the BL model on students' performance in English language learning? 3) What challenges do teachers face when integrating BL into their teaching practice? These questions aimed to explore the effectiveness of BL in strengthening students' language skills and to further understand how teachers can overcome barriers to implementing this method.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

A. Definition and Framework of Blended Learning

Blended Learning (BL) is a learning approach that combines face-to-face and online learning. This model leverages the strengths of both methods to create a more flexible and personalised learning experience (Thai et al., 2020). In BL, students participate in face-to-face activities that take place in the classroom, but they are also exposed to tasks, resources, and interactions that take place online. Online learning allows students to access materials anytime and anywhere, while face-to-face interaction provides opportunities for hands-on and more intensive learning experiences. A key component of BL is the effective integration of digital technologies and traditional teaching techniques to support students' skill development.

BL is relevant to higher education schemes and has been widely adopted at different educational levels (Zhao, 2022). Along with the increasing use of the Internet and mobile devices, this learning model has become an effective alternative to overcome the challenges of educational access limited by time and location. With this approach, students have the opportunity to engage in more thorough learning, both independently and collaboratively. Technological developments are increasingly enabling more engaging and varied multimedia-based teaching, which is expected to strengthen students' overall learning outcomes. Therefore, BL is important for supporting education that is flexible, relevant, and accessible to all.

B. Integrated Learning in Language Teaching

BL plays an important role in language acquisition because it allows for more dynamic and immersive language teaching (DeMolder et al., 2023). In language teaching, BL provides students with opportunities to learn languages through various platforms, ranging from online learning videos and interactive exercises to online collaboration with other learners (Wang, 2021). The use of technology for language learning allows students to access different types of media that can enrich their learning experiences, such as podcasts, articles, and videos in the target language. In this way, students can develop their language skills more thoroughly in terms of oral language comprehension (listening) and speaking, reading, and writing.

The main benefit of BL in language teaching is its ability to provide students with opportunities for independent learning, which is particularly important in communication-based language learning (CBLL) (Holovatska, 2023). With BL, students can access learning materials anytime and anywhere, allowing them to learn at their pace and convenience. In addition, they can use various online learning tools to strengthen their skills, such as vocabulary practice apps, discussion forums, and speaking with native speakers.

C. Impact of Blended Learning on Learner Performance

The application of BL in language teaching has positively impacted students' academic and cognitive outcomes (Tong et al., 2022). Research has shown that students who engage in integrated learning tend to have a better understanding and can master language skills more effectively than those who use traditional methods of learning. The use of various digital resources in BL allows students to access a wider range of information, practise independently, and receive faster feedback, which strengthens the quality of their learning (Li & Wang, 2022). In addition, BL allows for a more personalised approach where students learn according to their individual needs and rhythms, ultimately strengthening their performances in examinations and other tasks.

However, while there is plenty of evidence supporting the effectiveness of the BL model in strengthening student performance, there are also some challenges to consider. One of these is accessibility, where students from lower economic backgrounds may struggle to afford the technology required for online learning. In addition, while BL can strengthen overall academic performance, its successful implementation depends heavily on technological readiness, curriculum design, and proper teacher training to manage the integrated learning environment. Therefore, although BL has enormous potential, its implementation requires serious attention to the various factors affecting its effectiveness.

III. METHOD

A. Research Design

This research uses a qualitative approach with a case study design to understand English as a Foreign Language (EFL) lecturers' perceptions of the implementation of Blended Learning (BL) in their teaching (Yin, 1981). A qualitative approach was chosen as it provides space to explore a more profound understanding of the experiences, views, and challenges lecturers face in implementing BL. Using a case study design, this research examines the BL phenomenon in detail in a specific setting, namely, a higher education setting on Madura Island in East Java, Indonesia. This design allowed for a more comprehensive analysis of EFL classroom dynamics using the BL approach.

The strategies used in this study were descriptive and interpretive in nature. The descriptive approach aimed to describe clearly and in detail the lecturers' perceptions regarding the use of BL in English language teaching, while the interpretive approach was used to interpret the meaning of these experiences and perceptions. With both strategies, this study aims to provide a more in-depth picture of how BL can be implemented in EFL lessons and how it affects the learning process and student performance at three Indonesian universities.

B. Research Location and Participants

This study was conducted at three universities on Madura Island in East Java, Indonesia. The universities involved were Universitas Madura, Universitas Islam Madura, and Institute Agama Islam Negeri Pamekasan (IAIN) Pamekasan. The selection of these locations was based on the diversity of educational institutions that teach English as a foreign language and their willingness to participate in this study.

The participants in this study consisted of eight (8) EFL lecturers who were purposively selected to ensure that they had relevant experience in teaching English using BL. Three EFL lecturers were from Madura University, two from Madura Islamic University, and three from the Pamekasan State Islamic Institute in East Java, Indonesia. The participants were lecturers with varying levels of experience, ranging from those with more than five years of teaching experience to those who were new to teaching, so that the selection could provide diverse views on the implementation of BL. The participants were selected based on their involvement in English language teaching, technology, and online learning. The participants of the semi-structured interviews are listed in Table 1.

TABLE 1
SOURCE OF RESPONDENT DATA

No	Name	Institution of Origin	Length of Teaching Experience
1	AR	Madura University	5 years
2	BC	Madura University	7 years
3	RKT	Madura University	10 years
4	AFO	Madura Islamic University	4 years
5	MI	Madura Islamic University	6 years
6	GDI	Institute Agama Islam Pamekasan	8 years
7	SH	Institute Agama Islam Pamekasan	3 years
8	RFN	Institute Agama Islam Pamekasan	9 years

C. Data Collection

Data were collected using two main instruments: semi-structured interviews and questionnaires (Ambert et al., 1995). Semi-structured interviews offered the researcher the opportunity to explore the lecturers' views, experiences, and challenges in implementing BL in their teaching practice in more depth. This approach allowed the researcher to tailor questions to the responses of the EFL participants, allowing for a more intense and open discussion of the study results. In addition to the interviews, a survey was also used to collect quantitative data to complement the interviews, which provided an overview of lecturers' views on the utilisation of BL and the extent to which they were able to integrate technology into their EFL teaching.

The data collection process involved interviewing each of the lecturers. The interviews were conducted face-to-face and recorded to ensure that all information obtained from the participants was accurately understood. In addition, a survey consisting of closed- and open-ended questions was administered to the lecturers to obtain broader information on the use of BL in their classrooms. The data obtained from both instruments was analysed to identify the main themes related to BL's application and its impact on EFL teaching and learning.

D. Data Analysis

Data collected through interviews and surveys was analysed using thematic analysis techniques (Mills & Birks, 2014). The process involved coding the data to identify common themes that emerged in relation to the experiences, perceptions, and challenges faced by EFL lecturers in implementing BL. These themes were then analysed to identify relevant patterns and draw conclusions about the effects of BL on EFL students' performances. Through thematic analysis, this study intends to offer a more complete understanding of the effectiveness of implementing BL in EFL teaching, as well as the challenges that lecturers may face in integrating technology into the learning process.

IV. RESULTS

This section discusses the research results in terms of EFL lecturers' perceptions of blended learning (BL) and its impact on EFL students' performance. They offer extensive knowledge about traditional learning methods. First, lecturers' views on BL reveal how they understand and implement it in English language learning, including the challenges they face in integrating online and face-to-face learning in the classroom. Next, the effects of BL on students' performance reveal how this approach influences students' motivation, engagement, and achievement and provides perspectives on its effectiveness in strengthening their language skills. Finally, comparative insights are utilised to compare the application of the BL model with traditional teaching methods and identify the strengths and weaknesses of each learning model in supporting the quality of English language learning. The results of this study provide a comprehensive picture of the influence of BL on EFL teaching and how this approach is more effective than conventional methods of teaching.

A. Lecturers' Conceptions of Integrated Learning

TABLE 2
LECTURERS' CONCEPTION OF BLENDED LEARNING

No	Statement	Average Score	Category	Interpretation
1	Intuitively, I understood what blended learning meant.	4.3	Agree	Most lecturers clearly understand the general meaning of blended learning.
2	Blended learning combines the best aspects of online and offline learning.	4.6	Strongly Agree	Professors are aware of the benefits of using the blended approach for teaching.
3	I am not worried about using blended learning models for teaching.	4	Agree	Mixed learning is easy to use.
4	With blended learning, time and resources can be utilised more efficiently	4.4	Agree	One of the benefits that lecturers see in this plan is its efficiency.
5	I need more training to ensure that blended learning works well.	3.7	Neutrals tend to agree.	People still need to be trained, even though some of them think they are ready.

Teachers generally have a positive opinion of blended learning, especially regarding its effectiveness and classroom application. The necessity for training signifies that blended learning has not been completely assimilated into pedagogical practices.

Based on the results of interviews and questionnaires, English as a Foreign Language (EFL) lecturers generally have a positive view of the impact and application of Blended Learning (BL) in English language teaching. Most lecturers reported that BL allowed them to combine the strengths of face-to-face learning and flexible online learning, giving students the opportunity to learn at their pace. One lecturer said, "BL is quite effective in helping students who are faster or perhaps slower than the rest of the group to follow the lesson. They are able to reach the material first and can return to it if needed." This opinion is in line with the results of the study by Müller and Mildenerger (2021), who found that BL provides the benefits of flexibility needed in current education, allowing for more effective and personalised learning.

However, some lecturers expressed concerns about students' ability to maximise their skills in online learning, despite the general consensus that online learning is effective. Some respondents felt that not all students could optimise online learning without adequate guidance from their teachers. For instance, a lecturer expressed that students who are not yet comfortable with technology often struggle to engage in online learning. Although students are able to reach the material, they often have difficulty in adapting to self-learning." This shows that the effectiveness of BL is also quite dependent on the students' readiness and ability to utilise IT technology.

Lecturers' practice of BL in the classroom varied according to their level of experience utilising technology and applying this method to EFL teaching. In general, lecturers who are used to using technology in teaching feel more comfortable integrating BL and utilising various online media to support materials and evaluations. One lecturer said, "I have been using this LMS (Learning Management System) for quite some time in managing assignments and materials; this helps students to access learning materials at any time. This way, students can relatively more easily practise and learn outside of class hours." This statement is in accordance with the research results of McKnight et al., which imply that IT-supported teaching can enhance students' learning experiences, especially in supporting more independent and flexible learning outcomes.

However, lecturers who are less familiar and experienced with IT technology feel more burdened by the need to design customised learning media and materials that can be accessed online. One respondent stated, "I am burdened by the additional task of developing online media and materials, which I am not used to. I am still not well trained in the use of technology." This implies that although BL is capable of providing a lot of potential, the technical challenges in terms of technological skills are still often a significant barrier for some novice lecturers.

Pedagogical challenges, in addition to technical challenges, also arise in the implementation of BL, especially in terms of assembling appropriate materials for online learning. However, most lecturers reported that they needed to adjust their materials and teaching strategies to ensure that students learnt effectively in the blended learning model. A senior lecturer said that "adjusting teaching methods using online media is not an effortless thing. Additionally, it is

crucial to ensure that the provided material is easily comprehensible and appealing to students, particularly those studying independently. These findings show that BL requires a more flexible and creative approach to make the material effective and engaging, especially for students' learning. The results also reinforce the belief that the success of BL learning depends on an effective instructional model that comprehensively integrates online and face-to-face learning.

Several EFL lecturers also shared that in addressing this issue, it is important for instructors to design maximum tasks and activities that can maintain students' interest and participation. One lecturer emphasised, "It is quite important, personally, for me to plan and prepare challenging and interesting tasks so that EFL students do not feel bored when participating in online learning." This implies that, in addition to independent learning support, BL also requires various elements that can maintain student engagement through relevant and innovative learning activities. De Bruijn-Smolders et al. (2024) argued that the success of BL is dependent on the various task designs given by teachers, which not only provide freedom in learning but are also more challenging for students to keep actively participating.

In general, EFL lecturers reported that blended learning (BL) is an effective model for strengthening student engagement and performance, but various pedagogical, technical, and motivational challenges remain the main obstacles to successfully implementing it. Therefore, educational institutions such as universities need to intensify effective training for lecturers in their respective educational institutions to support technological skills, as well as design more effective materials so that BL can be integrated in learning for better learning outcomes.

B. The Impact of Integrated Learning on Learner Performance

TABLE 3
PERCEIVED IMPACT OF BLENDED LEARNING ON EFL STUDENT PERFORMANCE

No	Statement	Average Score	Category	Interpretation
1	Blended learning motivates EFL students to learn.	4.1	Agree	Lecturers assessed blended learning as having a positive impact on student motivation.
2	Blended learning helps EFL students learn independently.	4.3	Agree	Blended learning is seen as improving learning independence
3	The mixed learning method helped EFL students learn English better.	3.9	Agree	recognition of the positive contribution to students' language skills
4	A blended learning system makes it easier for students and teachers to communicate with each other.	3.7	Neutrals tend to agree.	Interaction still tends to focus on the quality of blended learning designs.
5	Blended learning helps EFL students who are not as good at some things to catch up.	3.6	Neutrals tend to agree.	This perception is hopeful but not yet evenly distributed.

Blended learning is thought to help EFL students become more motivated and independent in their learning. However, inconsistent learning designs may have affected diverse perceptions of enhanced engagement and skill equalisation.

The interviews and questionnaires showed that the EFL lecturers showed significant improvement in students' participation, engagement, and learning outcomes in blended learning (BL) classes. Generally, lecturers observed that students exhibited increased levels of engagement when granted the liberty to access EFL learning materials online. One lecturer said, "Students seem more active in their participation during online discussions. Students tend to be more comfortable in expressing their personal opinions online than face-to-face." This implies that BL can create a new space for students who previously seemed less involved in face-to-face learning to contribute more. In addition, the lecturer also mentioned that learning materials that can be accessed at any time can provide many opportunities for students to understand them before a face-to-face meeting in class, which has a positive impact on participation and engagement. Despite the increase in student participation and engagement in EFL, some lecturers have also asserted that not all students are able to utilise this opportunity to the fullest due to various reasons. One respondent said, "Some students are still found to lack discipline in participating in online EFL learning, which causes their participation to not be as optimal as expected by the teacher." This implies that, although BL provides room for flexibility, maintaining student discipline and self-motivation is often a challenge for lecturers as well. Lecturers still need to pay attention and overcome this problem by designing EFL learning activities that are more captivating and effective in maintaining students' participation in both learning models. This is supported by a study conducted by Mulingtapang (2025), who explained that although BL has the potential to strengthen participation and engagement, students still need guidance and support to ensure that they remain motivated to participate in integrated learning (BL).

This study also focused on the impact of BL on EFL students' language skills, particularly speaking, listening, writing, and reading. In general, the lecturers reported that BL positively impacted their students' listening and writing skills. The lecturers revealed that online learning materials involving videos and podcasts provide more opportunities for students to practice their listening skills. One lecturer stated, "My students seem more confident in communicating after the video listening practice, because they can repeat it at any time." This shows that audio-visual media in BL provides students the opportunity to repeat the material, which is crucial for developing listening skills. Montero Perez's (2022) research also supports this finding, stating that the use of audio-visual materials in BL can enrich

students' learning experience and strengthen their language skills, especially in the linguistic aspects of the listening scope.

However, based on the results of progress in the listening and writing aspects of language skills, some lecturers felt that students' speaking and reading skills were still inadequate. Despite numerous online discussions, one respondent asserted that students' speaking skills remain inadequately developed. Students still often feel awkward when speaking English. This suggests that although BL has been shown to support more passive skills such as writing and listening, speaking skills, which still require interaction, remain a challenge in teaching English. Similarly, although students were provided with more reading materials, their reading skills did not seem to be as developed as the other skills because of the lack of direct supervision from the lecturers. This is supported by Geng et al. (2019), who stated that reading and speaking skills in BL still require a more intensive one-to-one approach to achieve maximum mastery.

Lecturers' perceptions of students' ability to adapt to the BL method yielded mixed results. In general, lecturers observed that students, especially those who are familiar with IT technology, can adapt faster and feel more comfortable using online learning platforms. One lecturer said, "Younger students seem to adjust faster to IT technology. Students do not feel inhibited by the online learning platform and can use it optimally." This indicates that the age and technological capabilities of individual students can influence the speed at which they master BL methods. Heilporn et al. (2021) also revealed that age and technology experience are important factors influencing the success of BL adaptation by students, with younger students appearing to adapt faster. However, some lecturers noted that some students still had difficulty adopting online learning methods. One lecturer stated, "Several students who come from more traditional conditions or are less able to get used to IT technology still find it difficult to follow online learning, especially in achieving individualised materials." This suggests that while blended learning (BL) offers more advantages, the disparity in students' technology skills remains a significant issue, particularly for those lacking reliable Internet access or who are less proficient in using the necessary IT tools for online learning.

C. Comparative Insights

TABLE 4
COMPARATIVE INSIGHTS

No	Aspects Assessed	Conventional Average	Blended Average	Critical Interpretation
1	Concept understanding	4.5	4.1	Most teachers are more comfortable with traditional approaches, although they know a lot about blended learning methods.
2	Effectiveness of material delivery	4.2	4	Both approaches are thought to work, although the traditional approach is still thought to be more direct.
3	Interaction with students	4.3	3.7	People believe that face-to-face conversations are warmer and more responsive than online conversations.
4	Student learning independence	3.6	4.4	Blended learning allows students to learn independently.
5	Time & workload management	3.2	4.1	Blended learning is flexible, although it requires some initial adjustment.
6	Technology adaptation	2.5	4.5	Blended learning requires more technology, whereas traditional learning is more stable.
7	Quality of learning	4	4	The quality is graded as balanced based on the design and its implementation.
8	Teaching satisfaction	4.1	4.2	Lecturers are pleased with how blended learning is both challenging and creative in nature.
9	Institutional support	3.9	3.6	Institutions have superior digital support compared to regular places.
10	Future development potential	3.5	4.6	Lecturers think that blended learning will be better in the long run.

A comparison between blended learning (BL) and traditional/conventional teaching methods revealed significant differences in student performance and participation. The results of the questionnaires and interviews revealed that most lecturers stated that the BL model provided a significantly higher level of student engagement than traditional teaching. One EFL lecturer said, "In a class using traditional methods, although there is discussion, students tend to be passive and listen more. However, with BL, students are more active because they have the opportunity to participate in online learning discussions and master the material before the class meeting." This suggests that traditional teaching methods, which tend to centre on face-to-face interaction in class, often limit student engagement, whereas BL provides broader opportunities for students to interact with the material and receive more in-depth EFL instruction.

In addition, a comparison of student performance showed that while the traditional method had its strengths compared to the collaboration between direct teaching and face-to-face discussion, the BL model provided more positive results in terms of flexibility and access to additional materials. For example, one respondent stated, "BL offers students the opportunity to learn at their own pace, which is very helpful for students who need more time to understand the material. Meanwhile, in the traditional method, all students need to follow a uniform class rhythm." This supports the results of Albiladi and Alshareef, who showed that BL enables students to learn independently by giving them more

control over their individual learning experiences, which in turn strengthens their EFL comprehension and learning outcomes.

Despite the benefits of BL, some lecturers recognised that traditional teaching methods have the advantage of direct supervision and fuller interpersonal participation. One lecturer stated, "Although BL is effective in strengthening students' engagement in learning, I still feel the need to have face-to-face sessions in class so that I can offer immediate feedback and address students' barriers more individually." Therefore, some lecturers thought that combining the best parts of both models would be more effective—utilizing BL for flexibility and face-to-face teaching for more individualised interaction and direct supervision of students' learning improvement.

To improve BL for better EFL learning outcomes, lecturers generally suggested the need for training and professional development (PD). "We need to give lecturers more in-depth training on the use of IT technology and online learning platforms," one lecturer stated. Without a solid understanding of technology, BL cannot be effective." This implies that although BL can provide more opportunities to strengthen learning, the technical and pedagogical challenges faced by lecturers in using IT require serious attention and supervision from universities to be overcome. Tong and his colleagues (Tong et al., 2022) corroborate this, supporting this, stating that the development of technology skills among lecturers is a key factor for success in implementing BL in the classroom.

In addition to training for lecturers, respondents generally suggested that institutional support should be improved, such as the provision of more and better infrastructure, including stable access to devices and more adequate internet access. One respondent stated, "Adequate facilities and technical support are essential for the smooth implementation of BL learning. Without adequate internet connection and qualified devices, online learning cannot be effective." This support is consistent with the study by Jiang (2024). The study suggests that the success of BL depends on having the necessary technology and resources to support it. Without a well-established infrastructure, the use of BL in the classroom can be hampered, which can reduce its effectiveness in improving the quality of learning EFL.

Regarding curriculum design, respondents suggested that BL could be designed in a more structured way, integrating a balance of online and face-to-face learning in the classroom. One respondent said, "It is important to design activities in a complementary way between online and face-to-face; however, if these two cannot be integrated well enough, students may feel lost in the objectives of each session." This highlights how the success of BL depends not only on the use of IT technology but also on the way activities and materials are organised and measured to harmoniously integrate online and face-to-face learning in the classroom.

V. DISCUSSION

The findings of this study showed that lecturers teaching English generally have a favourable opinion of integrating blended learning (BL) into their teaching practices and are receptive to innovation. Most lecturers have a broad understanding of blended learning and know that it may be a powerful way to combine the best parts of online and offline learning in a way that works effectively. The high average scores on the metrics of ease of using BL and conceptual understanding demonstrate this view. Most lecturers also agree that blended learning is useful because it allows students to learn at their pace and make better use of their resources. This is especially important when academic workloads are constantly changing. However, people know that to get the most out of BL, they still need training and techno-pedagogical capacity building. Some lecturers said that it was difficult to create digital products that suit the needs of their students and that they needed to learn how to use ever-changing digital platforms. This implies that even if individuals perceive BL as beneficial, they still require time to adjust to it.

The effect of blended learning on EFL students' performance is also important, especially in terms of making them more independent and motivated to learn. Students who are part of blended learning tend to be more active participants, especially when they can use flexible online materials and interactive multimedia. According to the lecturers' perception scores, BL makes students more responsible for their learning, especially in terms of writing and listening skills. Students can cover the content at their pace using videos, podcasts, and online discussion forums. This helps them feel more confident and understand the subject more effectively than before. However, the performance improvement was not uniform across all areas. The lecturers said that the BL scheme did little to help the children's speaking and reading skills. Some students may not be good at online learning or speaking directly. Therefore, when designing lessons for BL, lecturers should consider how to ensure that interactivity and feedback are balanced and useful.

Although blended learning has significant pedagogical potential, educators face many hurdles in incorporating it into their routine instructional practices. These problems are not one-dimensional; they encompass technological, educational, and student-specific issues. From a technological standpoint, the biggest problems include infrastructure issues such as unreliable Internet connectivity, different levels of digital capability, and not using the Learning Management System (LMS) in the best way possible. From a teaching perspective, lecturers struggle to create engaging online material and mix it well with in-person learning methods. Students often become lost or confused when trying to follow the learning flow when the design is not properly integrated into the learning process. Another issue is students' motivation to learn. Some lecturers said that children are often unruly, do not respond well to online learning, and still need hands-on leadership. This suggests that students need to improve their digital literacy and self-management skills. Thus, the BL strategy can be more than just a temporary solution; it can also make learning more successful over the long term.

In general, blended learning is regarded as a good way to teach English as a second language, and a favourable attitude among lecturers is an important part of creating teaching methods that are flexible and sensitive to societal changes. However, the effectiveness of blended learning in improving students' language proficiency significantly depends on institutions' willingness to embrace digital change and lecturers' ability to create humanistic, adaptable, and student-focused learning experiences.

VI. CONCLUSION

The study's results indicated that lecturers have positive perceptions of blended learning (BL), particularly regarding its effectiveness in enhancing student engagement and offering flexibility in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learning. Generally, lecturers observed that BL enriches students' learning experience by enabling them to achieve personalised EFL in materials and actively participate in EFL learning. However, challenges such as pedagogical, technical, and motivational challenges are still often obstacles that need to be resolved, such as limited IT technology tools or infrastructure, obstacles in designing effective online materials, and the lack of motivation of some students in using online learning to its full potential. The impact of BL on students' language skills, especially writing and listening, shows positive results, but reading and speaking skills still need more supervision in the integration of the BL model.

The implications of this study for EFL learning practices show that although BL offers various benefits, its implementation needs to be closely matched with training for lecturers and increased IT infrastructure support. The main recommendation for strengthening the integration of BL in language education is to provide intensive training for lecturers in the utilisation of technology and to increase the facilities and accessibility of media and the Internet for students.

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The Use of CONTAINER and PATH Image Schema in the Chinese Government White Paper “Fighting COVID-19: China in Action”

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Abstract—The paper explores the ideological representations of the CONTAINER and PATH image schemas within the Chinese government’s white paper, “Fighting COVID-19: China in Action”. This important political document provides a detailed account of the strategies and actions undertaken by the Chinese government. By integrating Johnson’s theory of image schemas with van Dijk’s theory of ideology, the study establishes a theoretical framework for analyzing the significance of these image schematic patterns concerning cognitive processes and ideological frameworks. The findings suggest that integrating the CONTAINER and PATH schemas effectively conveys ideologies in the white paper, thereby enhancing understanding of China’s actions and policies during the pandemic.

Index Terms—image schema, ideology, political discourse, Chinese government white paper

I. INTRODUCTION

Image schemas are essential abstract structures that profoundly influence our perception of the world. They are vital in various cognitive processes, serving as foundational elements for understanding and interpreting our experiences. Our biological makeup significantly shapes how we perceive the space around us. The domain of image schemas, often evident in the conceptual frameworks of human languages, highlights the fundamental and pervasive structures that underpin cognitive organization (Clausner & Croft, 1999).

Chinese government white papers serve as authoritative political documents, presenting policies and actions on specific issues to a global audience. Typically distinguished by their white covers, these documents outline government policies and express China’s perspectives on significant matters affecting the nation and the world. A prominent example is the comprehensive white paper titled “Fighting COVID-19: China in Action,” officially released during a press conference by the State Council Information Office in Beijing on June 7, 2020. This document outlines the strategies and measures China has adopted to combat the COVID-19 pandemic, detailing the challenges encountered and the successes achieved in managing this public health crisis. It addresses key aspects such as testing protocols, responses from the healthcare system, and community engagement efforts, providing an in-depth overview of the country’s actions during this unprecedented period. It offers valuable insights to other nations and articulates China’s stance in the worldwide response to the crisis.

Image schemas play a crucial role in political discourse due to their ideological implications. Hart (2019b, p. 90) highlights that “schematization is ideological” because image schemas “constrain and limit meaning, as well as patterns of inference in our reasoning” (Johnson, 1987, p. 42). Furthermore, Núñez Perucha (2011, p. 101) observes that “[i]mage schemas have been shown to organize key concepts in political discourse and significantly influence the conceptualization of power relations.” These schemas shape political discourse by clarifying specific roles within various initiatives. They effectively convey ideological implications and influence public perceptions of critical issues. This function aligns closely with the objectives of Chinese government white papers, which are designed to communicate the government’s attitudes, values, and ideologies to the public, ultimately fostering a deeper understanding of its policies. This paper aims to analyze the connotations of the CONTAINER and PATH schemas within the white paper, exploring their ideological functions in enhancing our comprehension of China’s strategies and actions. The research questions are designed to achieve this research objective: (1) What are the schematic structures of the CONTAINER and PATH schema in the white paper? (2) What are the ideological functions of these image schemas

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in the white paper?

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

A. *Studies on Schema Images in Political Discourse*

Research on image schemas in political discourse has garnered considerable interest from scholars examining their political functions (Hart, 2017, 2019a). In his work, Hart (2017) explores image schema analysis, with a particular focus on its application to political protests. He investigates how linguistic structures and metaphors can evoke specific conceptualizations that shape public understanding and perception. Furthermore, Hart analyzes the ideological implications of these conceptualizations, highlighting how they can legitimize specific political actions or movements. Some researchers focus on the CONTAINER, PATH, and FORCE schemas to illuminate their roles in political discourse. For example, Victoria (2023) highlights the persuasive impact of the CONTAINMENT and FORCE schemas in Brexit discussions, where these schemas were employed to invoke fear and prompt readers to take a defensive stance against the EU. Hampl (2021) conducts a detailed analysis of the metaphors rooted in the CONTAINER and FORCE image schemas that U.S. President Barack Obama utilized in his strategic communications during the campaign against ISIL. Furthermore, Salih et al. (2024) focus on the PATH, CONTAINER, and FORCE image schemas, examining their roles in metaphor formation and how they influence the relationship between source and target domains. Nonetheless, previous studies have overlooked significant Chinese political discourses, leaving a gap in understanding China's political strategies.

B. *Studies on the Chinese Government White Paper*

The primary objective of research on white papers is to analyze their characteristics, functions, and translation strategies (e.g., Zhang, 2021; Xin & Yan, 2022; Xiong & Zhou, 2023). While most scholars focus on these areas, only a tiny fraction investigates the connection between white papers and national image (Chen & Wang, 2020; Deng & Pang, 2020; Ma & Zhan, 2021; Zhang & Jamal, 2025). For instance, Deng and Pang (2020) explore the textual features of white papers and propose translation strategies to improve China's national image. Ma and Zhan (2021) create a corpus titled "Energy in China's New Era" to examine the meanings conveyed in the text and the underlying ideologies, thereby demonstrating how these factors lead to the construction of China's national image.

The white paper "Fighting COVID-19: China in Action" has drawn considerable interest from researchers, particularly in metaphorical translation, ecological translation, and conceptual metaphors. Li and Zhang (2020) examine the metaphors utilized in this document to enhance the understanding of China's actions in addressing the COVID-19 epidemic. Wang (2021) argues that the translation of this white paper could be more effectively adapted for an international audience, which would facilitate the construction of a positive national image and provide a linguistic foundation for information exchange during a global public health crisis. Feng and Liu (2022) explore the characteristics of war metaphors in the Chinese version while analyzing the translation strategies implemented in the English version. Meanwhile, Xin and Yan (2022) analyze the metaphors found in the Chinese version of the white paper, subsequently discussing translation methods suited to each distinct category of metaphor. Notably, Liu and Liu (2021) take a distinctive approach by examining China's national image through the lens of Systemic Functional Linguistics, explicitly analyzing the white paper "Fighting COVID-19: China in Action." Zhang and Jamal (2025) conduct an ideological exploration of the white paper "Fighting COVID-19: China in Action," employing a theoretical framework of conceptual blending theory and van Dijk's theory of ideology to explore the ideological functions of blended space in metaphorical structure.

Research on Chinese government white papers encompasses a diverse range of topics and themes. Chinese scholars often underscore the functions of these documents, particularly their significance in shaping national narratives and supporting government policies. Additionally, they emphasize effective translation strategies, leading to a multitude of publications that analyze specific white papers and their implications. Conversely, researchers from other countries frequently regard these white papers as essential for gaining insights into the Chinese government's policies and strategic priorities, particularly in critical areas such as military defense, human rights, and climate change. Nevertheless, there is a need for more in-depth studies that analyze China's ideologies in political discourse related to health crises. Addressing this gap could yield valuable insights into China's actions and policies during health emergencies and their potential implications for global cooperation and communication.

III. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

A. *Johnson's Theory of Image Schemas*

The term "image schema" first appeared in *The Body in the Mind* (Johnson, 1987) and *Women, Fire, and Dangerous Things* (Lakoff, 1987). Johnson (1987, pp. xiv, xvi) states, "an image schema is a recurring dynamic pattern of our perceptual interactions and motor programs that gives coherence and structure to our experience." Johnson (1987, p. 29) stressed that "image schemas are dynamic patterns rather than fixed and static images." Image schemas are "structures of an activity by which we organize our experience in ways that we can comprehend, and they are flexible in that they can take on any number of specific instantiations in varying contexts" (Johnson, 1987, pp. 29-30). That is, image

schemas represent the recurrent patterns derived from our sensory-motor experiences. They serve as a valuable tool for comprehending and deliberating upon such experiences, as well as assisting in organizing abstract concepts and drawing inferences within the realm of abstract thinking.

The concept of CONTAINER is widely referenced in literature as a fundamental image schema. It is a crucial element in metaphorical structuring, allowing authors to convey complex ideas and emotions effectively. This schema also plays a vital role in inferential reasoning, drawing upon our everyday experiences of physical and abstract boundaries. According to Johnson (1987), specific experiences are characterized by a common structural element referred to as “spatial boundedness,” which is primarily related to “being limited or held within some three-dimensional enclosure, such as a womb, a crib, or a room” (pp. 21-22) (see Figure 1). The CONTAINER schema holds significant importance within political discourse as a conceptual framework, where the fundamental structure of the schema, delineating an inside versus outside, “operates as a principle of division” (Chilton, 1996, p. 147). It represents an image schema that embodies a fundamental aspect of ideologies: the polarization between “Us” and “Them” (van Dijk, 1998).

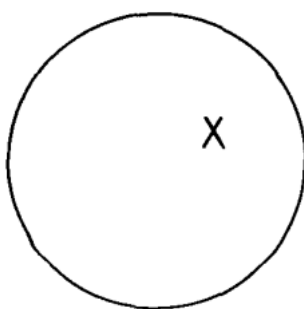


Figure 1. CONTAINER Schema (Johnson, 1987, p. 23)

The PATH schema is a fundamental framework in our understanding of motion (Lakoff & Johnson, 1999). Johnson (1987, p. 113) indicates that a PATH possesses a “definite internal structure.” This structure includes three essential components: “(1) a source or starting point, (2) a goal or endpoint, and (3) a sequence of contiguous locations that connect the source to the goal” (see Figure 2). Essentially, paths function as routes for navigating from one point to another (Johnson, 1987, p. 113). Political discourse is vital for clarifying the various elements involved in shaping a political agenda, and politicians “frequently speak and write of looking toward the future, taking rapid steps, moving on, coming to a crossroads, going in the right direction” (Chilton, 2006, p. 623). In the realm of political discourse, there is often a clarification of elements related to the political agenda. As a result, the path schema can foster a positive perception of the “Us” (the entity) while presenting a negative view of “Them” (the obstacles along the path), as discussed by van Dijk (2000).



Figure 2. SOURCE-PATH-GOAL Schema (Johnson, 1987, p. 114)

B. van Dijk's Theory of Ideology

Ideologies are socially shared representations that define a group's identity and shape social cognition. They are not just systems of ideas but also frameworks with internal structures and cognitive functions (van Dijk, 2017). van Dijk (2017) summarizes the functions of ideologies in the social and cognitive dimensions: 1) ideologies help shape the shared beliefs of a group; 2) ideologies form the basis for the discussions and social activities of group members; 3) ideologies guide group members to coordinate their actions based on the group's goals and interests; 4) ideologies play a significant role in the way different groups engage in social structures, discourses, and other social practices.

Ideological discourse is “generally organized by a general strategy of positive self-presentation (boasting) and negative other-presentation(derogation)” (van Dijk, 2013, p. 126). This strategy entails emphasizing our positive attributes and downplaying our negative ones, while doing the opposite for others, thereby enhancing their negative traits and minimizing, concealing, or overlooking their positive ones (van Dijk, 2013). Ideologies serve a social function by either sustaining or challenging the existing status quo. They promote cohesion and cooperation within in-groups while influencing interactions with out-groups. Additionally, their cognitive function facilitates the classification of concepts, the organization of individuals, the characterization of personalities, the elucidation of emotions, and the demonstration of actions. In summary, ideologies can be expressed and reinforced through linguistic representations that portray members of the in-group in a positive light and their actions favorably, while simultaneously portraying out-group members and their actions in a negative light.

IV. DATA AND METHODOLOGY

This study selects the white paper “Fighting COVID-19: China in Action,” published by the Chinese government, as the target for analysis. The Chinese white paper, an official document released by the government on significant issues related to the economy, politics, and military affairs, represents China's stance and image, and disseminates China's voice to the world. The white paper “Fighting COVID-19: China in Action” contains 24311 words, with detailed descriptions of China's attitude, strategies, and actions towards the epidemic.

The selection of the white paper “Fighting COVID-19: China in Action” for CDA follows a typical case sampling strategy, since it depends on the characteristics of the white paper: 1) being authoritative and rich in ideology; 2) being relevant to China's self-portrayal and global communication; 3) being embedded in context related with global health emergency. This white paper offers a valuable platform for researchers to examine how the Chinese government employs language to project a positive national image in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The qualitative approach is suitable for analyzing the white paper's language expressions, identifying its ideologies, and exploring the relationship between discourse and ideology. Given language's constructive power and close relationship with context, this study employs a qualitative research design—a case study, specifically the critical discourse analytic approach—to examine how language is ideologically used in the image schemas presented in the white paper released by the Chinese government.

V. DISCUSSION

A. CONTAINER Schema in the White Paper

The CONTAINER schema conceptualizes enclosed spaces, defining a container as a “bounded space” (Charteris-Black, 2006, p. 575) that protects the objects within. This schema also reflects “physical in-out orientations” and encompasses separation, differentiation, and enclosure, indicating restriction and limitation (Johnson, 1987, p. 22). Semino (2008, p. 95) observes that “groups, institutions, and particularly nation-states are conventionally constructed as containers.” When a state, group, or organization is perceived as a container, it can serve multiple functions and “have implications for the concepts of international relations discourse” (Chilton, 1996, p. 51). The following examples illustrate how the CONTAINER schema articulates China's strategies for addressing the health crisis in conjunction with its values and ideologies. The following examples in Table 1 illustrate the application of the CONTAINER schema.

TABLE 1
EXAMPLES OF CONTAINER SCHEMA (1)

Examples	
CONTAINER Schema (1)	(1) The situation became most pressing with the rapid increase in newly confirmed cases in China. (2) He emphasized that this epidemic, given the speed and scope of its spread, represented the most challenging public health emergency in China since the founding of the People's Republic, and that it was both a serious crisis and a major test. (3) With the epidemic putting people's lives and safety in danger, CPC members have acted as the vanguard. (4) The baseless accusation that China concealed epidemic information and death figures is a calculated slur on the 1.4 billion Chinese people, including those killed by the virus, and on millions of Chinese medical workers. (5) This includes sending the most urgent medical supplies, conducting cooperation on medical technologies, and dispatching more medical expert teams and task forces. (6) This shows how much we Chinese at home and abroad are committed to each other and demonstrates the unity and cohesion of the Chinese nation in times of difficulty. (7) In the face of this serious crisis humanity once again stands at a crossroads. Which route shall we take?

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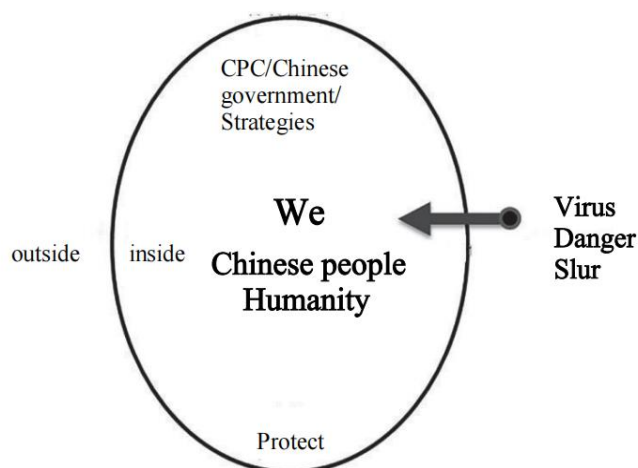


Figure 3. CONTAINER Schema (1)

The CONTAINER schema is most effectively illustrated through the spatial prepositions “in” and “include,” which are commonly employed to describe the spatial connection between the Trajector (TR) and the Landmark (LM). In this framework (see Figure 3), China and its people are metaphorically depicted as a container, with the Chinese government, the Communist Party of China (CPC), and their related strategies serving as the defining boundaries of that container. Within this context, the virus and the subsequent public health emergency are characterized as threats or risks to the integrity of this container.

Examples 1 and 2 underscore the significant crisis triggered by the swift rise in newly confirmed COVID-19 cases, which poses a considerable public health emergency for the Chinese population. These examples highlight the urgency and challenges faced by healthcare systems in managing the outbreak. In Example 3, the Communist Party of China (CPC) is portrayed as a vital entity in ensuring the health and well-being of the people during this epidemic. The CPC is characterized as a foundational source of support and leadership, taking proactive measures to enforce public health policies and ensure community safety in the face of this ongoing threat.

In Example 4, an unfounded accusation suggests that the term “TR” has developed into a derogatory slur directed at Chinese individuals. This claim is particularly sensitive, as it affects not only those who tragically lost their lives to the virus but also the dedicated medical professionals who fought tirelessly on the front lines of the pandemic. Such a characterization of “TR” risks perpetuating stigma and fostering misunderstandings related to the crisis.

Example 5 examines the strategies implemented by the Chinese government, referred to as “LM”. These strategies are depicted favorably, implying that they intend to support and protect Chinese citizens as they navigate the challenges posed by the disease. Figure 3 illustrates the relationship between “TR” and “LM”, emphasizing how these terms are used in public discourse and their broader implications. This visual representation enhances our understanding of how these concepts interrelate and influence societal perceptions during the pandemic.

The term “we” delineates a clear distinction between “Us” and “Them.” In Example 6, “we” refers explicitly to Chinese individuals, encompassing both those living in China and those residing abroad. This usage conveys an internal perspective that emphasizes the collective identity and shared experiences of the Chinese community. Conversely, Example 7 expands the definition of “we” to include not only Chinese individuals but also all of humanity. This broader interpretation underscores the importance of viewing everyone as part of a global community, emphasizing that collaboration and mutual development are essential for progress. It encourages acknowledgment of our shared responsibilities and interconnection across diverse backgrounds.

In conclusion, the white paper frequently depicts China as the “Us,” symbolizing a united and positive force committed to combating the virus through various initiatives and efforts. This portrayal bolsters China’s image as a proactive and responsible player on the global stage. In contrast, COVID-19 is characterized as “Them,” representing a menacing entity that poses a significant threat to public health and safety. This clear distinction between “Us” and “Them” effectively enables China to cultivate public empathy, positioning itself as a protector against the adversary that the virus embodies while garnering support for its actions.

The following examples in Table 2 illustrate the application of the CONTAINER schema (2) as described in the white paper.

TABLE 2
EXAMPLES OF CONTAINER SCHEMA (2)

CONTAINER Schema (2)	Examples
	(8) He pointed out that the solemn pledge to lift all rural people living below current poverty line out of poverty by 2020 had been made by the CPC Central Committee to the whole nation, and it must be fulfilled on schedule.
	(9) Immediate, science-based and targeted measures must be taken to stamp out the virus.

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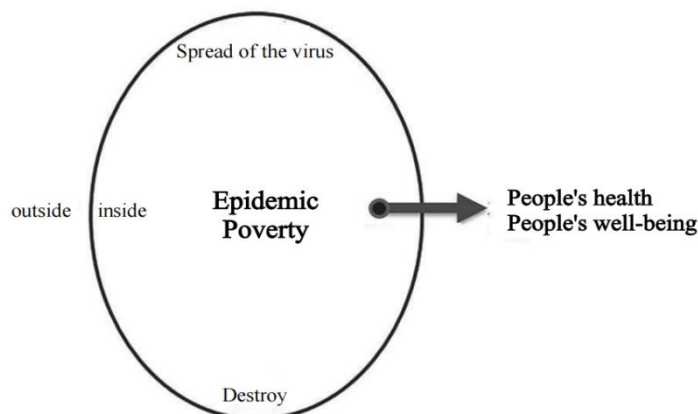


Figure 4. CONTAINER Schema (2)

It is essential to recognize that, due to the speaker's varying perspectives, the term "container" may carry negative connotations, particularly when examining non-spatial interpretations of the word "out" (see Figure 4). For instance, in the context of poverty in China, as illustrated in Example 8, this situation is characterized as a container that confines individuals, suggesting that those living in rural areas and below the poverty line are trapped in their circumstances. This characterization suggests that these individuals have endured prolonged hardship, which has significantly hindered their potential for personal and economic development. The characterization of poverty as a container suggests that rural residents cannot improve their circumstances without external assistance. In this narrative, the Chinese government, represented by the Communist Party of China (CPC), is portrayed as a pivotal force committed to providing the support and resources necessary for individuals to overcome the constraints of poverty. The CPC's efforts are crucial in empowering people to overcome their challenging conditions and realize their full potential, to foster a more equitable society.

In Example 9, the virus circulating in China is metaphorically represented as a container, symbolizing the various challenges and threats it poses. In response, China has adopted comprehensive, evidence-based strategies to control and manage the spread of the virus, effectively preventing it from leaving the country. This proactive approach not only addresses immediate public health concerns but also aims to enhance the overall well-being of its citizens. These two examples distinctly contrast "Us" and "Them." "Us" underscores the significance of health and well-being, emphasizing collective safety and social responsibility. Conversely, "Them" pertains to broader issues, such as poverty and the virus, which are often perceived as external threats that demand attention. Together, these concepts frame the discourse on public health, highlighting the various challenges faced by different groups.

In conclusion, perceptions of China and the virus as either the "container" or the "contained" vary based on the speaker's viewpoints. In Figure 3, China and humanity are depicted as positive entities strategically positioned at the periphery of the discourse space. This placement conveys a sense of inclusion and hope associated with these subjects. Conversely, COVID-19 is portrayed as an intruder, emphasizing its substantial threat to public health and safety. This visual representation highlights the disruptive nature of the virus and its detrimental effects on society.

Figure 4 examines the complex relationship between the epidemic and poverty, highlighting how both have a profoundly negative impact on individual health and overall well-being. This depiction highlights their interconnection, suggesting that poverty intensifies the epidemic's impact, further endangering people's health. By employing the CONTAINER schema in these visuals, the public can gain a deeper understanding of the underlying power dynamics and ideologies that the imagery conveys. This contextualization encourages the public to reflect on how social, economic, and health-related factors are interconnected, ultimately shaping public perception and influencing policy responses.

B. PATH Schema in the White Paper

This analysis will examine the PATH schema outlined in the government white paper, highlighting the key elements that reveal the motivations behind China's actions, the obstacles it encounters, and the strategies employed to overcome these challenges. This exploration will serve as a foundation for understanding China's values and ideologies. By doing so, the goal is to enhance the reader's understanding of how these factors influence China's international conduct and

interactions. The following examples in Table 3 illustrate the application of the PATH schema (1) as described in the white paper.

TABLE 3
EXAMPLES OF PATH SCHEMA (1)

PATH Schema (1)	Examples
	(1) The strong <i>leadership</i> of the CPC has been fundamental to China's rapid containment of the virus. (2) General Secretary Xi Jinping has taken personal command, planned the response, overseen the general situation and acted decisively, <i>pointing</i> the way <i>forward</i> in the fight against the epidemic. (3) In doing so we will see that the spirit of solidarity, cooperation, responsibility and dedication <i>leads</i> people around the world <i>towards</i> victory in our fight against the pandemic. (4) TCM has played its part in the entire <i>process</i> of Covid-19 response, <i>from</i> early intervention <i>to</i> administering case-specific treatment.

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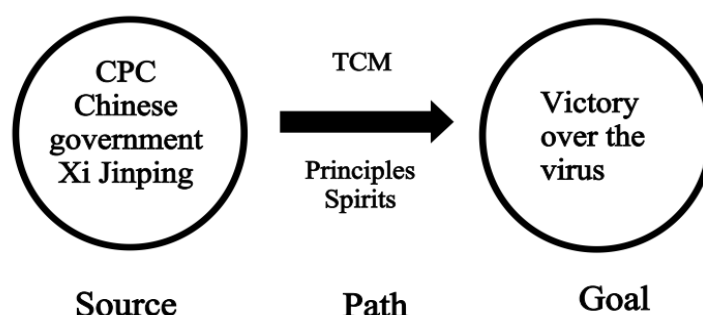


Figure 5. PATH Schema (1)

According to Figure 5, the phrase “leadership of the CPC” highlights the crucial role that the Communist Party of China (CPC) plays in shaping the nation’s response to the epidemic. This leadership encompasses strategic planning, resource mobilization, and cross-sector coordination to tackle the outbreak effectively. By launching initiatives and setting objectives, the CPC aims to enhance public health responses, foster community involvement, and ensure the effective allocation of vital resources to achieve optimal outcomes in crisis management.

Goatly (1997) asserts that the phrase “moving forward” encapsulates a sense of “purposeful activity” (p. 44). This sense implies that such intentionality can yield positive outcomes across various contexts (Cameron, 2010; Gibbs, 2017). This concept is especially significant in discussions about progress and advancement, as it establishes a motivational framework for both individuals and communities. In this regard, the phrase “pointing...forward” in Example 2 is pivotal in emphasizing the positive direction ahead. By employing this imagery, the expression aims to foster an atmosphere of optimism and hope, suggesting that concerted efforts to combat the epidemic are likely to yield successful and beneficial results. Forward-pointing imagery reinforces a sense of trajectory, encouraging individuals to envision a future where challenges are addressed and overcome. Ultimately, this fosters a collective spirit of resilience and determination in the face of adversity.

Example 3 underscores that the primary objective of the journey is to achieve victory by embracing essential principles such as solidarity, cooperation, responsibility, and dedication. By prioritizing these values, we can enhance public confidence and underscore the importance of nurturing a collective spirit in the pursuit of success. Similarly, Example 4 employs the structure “from...to...” to effectively illustrate the multifaceted role of Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) throughout various stages of health and wellness. This phrasing effectively conveys how TCM can influence different phases, from preventive care to treatment, emphasizing its significance within holistic healthcare practices.

The following examples in Table 4 illustrate the application of the PATH schema (2) as described in the white paper.

TABLE 4
EXAMPLES OF PATH SCHEMA (2)

PATH Schema (2)	Examples
	(5) <i>Following</i> the principles of safety, effectiveness and availability, China has <i>accelerated</i> the R&D and application of medicines, vaccines, and new test kits. (6) Even while under the tremendous pressure of coronavirus control, China has <i>moved quickly to</i> provide as much assistance to the international community as it can. (7) He said that this work must be taken as a major and pressing task and <i>proceed</i> as <i>speedily</i> as possible, while abiding by the rules of science and ensuring safety, so as to provide strong scientific and technological support for overcoming the epidemic.

Adopted from http://english.scio.gov.cn/node_8018767.html

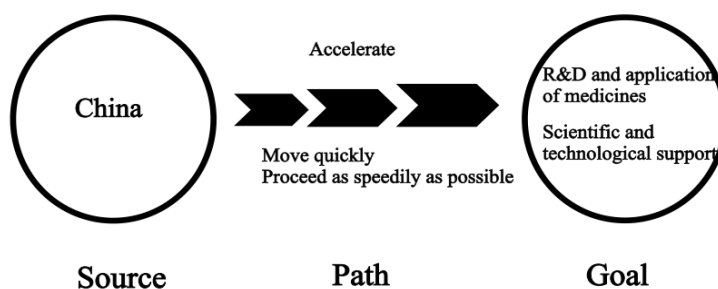


Figure 6. PATH Schema (2)

According to Figure 6, the terms “move” and “proceed” signify intentional actions taken along a strategic path, underscoring China’s strong commitment to advancing its various initiatives and developmental processes. Expressions such as “accelerate,” “move quickly,” and “proceed speedily” not only convey different speeds of action but also imply a progressive increase in momentum. This distinction highlights the dynamic nature of China’s efforts as it navigates the various stages toward its overarching objectives. Additionally, these phrases play a vital role in clarifying China’s intentions and enhancing the overall impact of its communication, effectively conveying its aspirations and strategic plans. By articulating its objectives in such compelling language, China communicates a sense of urgency and purpose, reflecting its determination to achieve its goals promptly.

Vehicles on the path serve as essential tools for individuals and organizations to achieve their specific goals and objectives. Metaphorically speaking, these operational vehicles represent key principles such as safety, effectiveness, availability, and adherence to scientific guidelines, similar to navigating a “vehicle on a path” toward success. For instance, discussions about increasing a vehicle’s speed can symbolize China’s concerted efforts to enhance its scientific and technological capabilities in response to public health challenges. By making substantial investments in research and development, expanding healthcare resources, and adopting innovative technologies, China is addressing immediate health concerns while also strengthening its global reputation. These proactive initiatives reflect a commitment to leadership in science and technology, solidifying China’s position as a significant player in international efforts to manage health crises.

Example 6 underscores China’s vital role in supporting the international community during global challenges, reaffirming its commitment to providing ongoing assistance in the future. This support encompasses the delivery of medical supplies, financial aid, and sharing critical information regarding public health strategies. Furthermore, Example 7 emphasizes China’s proactive efforts in addressing the virus. The country has implemented comprehensive measures, including extensive testing, contact tracing, and vaccination campaigns, all of which contribute to a growing sense of optimism that these initiatives could ultimately lead to the global eradication of the virus.

The following examples in Table 5 illustrate the application of the PATH schema (3) as described in the white paper.

TABLE 5
EXAMPLES OF PATH SCHEMA (3)

PATH Schema (3)	Examples
	(8) He pointed out that while significant progress had been made in containing the epidemic, the <i>turning point</i> had not yet <i>arrived</i> at the national level. Adopted from http://english.scio.gov.cn/node_8018767.html

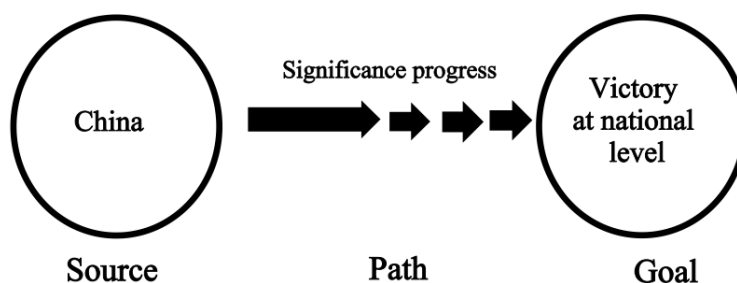


Figure 7. PATH Schema (3)

As illustrated in Figure 7, a “turning point” signifies a pivotal moment when significant change takes place, particularly when that change leads to improved conditions. In the realm of virus control, this concept signifies that China is taking substantial and strategic measures to confront the ongoing epidemic. This shift reflects a serious commitment from authorities to address the public health crisis effectively.

The expression implies that the situation in China remains complex and poses numerous challenges. The ongoing epidemic underscores that, despite various efforts, the virus continues to represent a significant threat to public health and safety. This reality validates China's decision to uphold strict public health measures necessary for controlling the virus and protecting its population. Moreover, this context highlights the importance of understanding and support from the international community. Collaborative efforts and shared knowledge are crucial for effectively managing the complexities of virus control. Acknowledging the ongoing challenges faced by China can foster a more supportive global response to public health crises.

In conclusion, the PATH schema presented in the white paper provides a comprehensive overview of China's approach to addressing the epidemic. The assessment of the current process highlights both the progress achieved and the ongoing challenges that remain. The leading role of the Communist Party of China (CPC) is underscored, illustrating its essential function in coordinating nationwide efforts and efficiently mobilizing resources. Additionally, the discourse addresses the various difficulties encountered during this process, including logistical challenges, public compliance issues, and international relations. Collectively, these insights contribute to a unified narrative of a resolute and cohesive "Us" dedicated to overcoming this public health emergency.

C. Ideologies Embedded in the White Paper

(a). Collectivism

Through the analysis of the cognitive process of schematization, it is found that this ideology of collectivism is a foundational principle underpinning the policies articulated in the white paper concerning China's response to the COVID-19 pandemic. The CONTAINER schema posits that the Chinese population, in conjunction with humanity, constitutes an in-group unified by shared interests and destinies. The document underscores that individual and communal fates are intricately interconnected, particularly during health crises, which are typically perceived as threats emanating from "out-groups." This interconnectedness underscores the imperative of mutual support and collaboration in overcoming health challenges and fostering community resilience.

(b). Self-Reliance

Maoism advocates that individuals are encouraged to confront and challenge oppressive systems through engagement in revolutionary struggle, fostering a sense of agency and solidarity among the masses, even in the most challenging circumstances (Lu, 2017). In the PATH schema, China's metaphorical "route" symbolizes its strategic methods for addressing the epidemic, specifically tailored to align with its unique social, cultural, and political context. Notably, the integration of Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) alongside modern medical practices throughout the healing process underscores China's commitment to a holistic approach to healthcare. This combination reflects a deep respect for its rich cultural heritage and aims to leverage the strengths of both conventional and alternative medical strategies to provide effective treatment options. These elements showcase China's perspective on health and wellness, highlighting its unique approach to effectively combat the crisis and support its population during these unprecedented times.

(c). Centered Leadership of CPC

Marxism posits that the party-state actively guides all sectors of society—including healthcare, the economy, and public policy—toward achieving a unified goal that serves the collective interest (Jiang, 2014). The Communist Party of China (CPC)'s leadership structure and the top-down command system are fully implemented in the white paper. In the cognitive process of schematization, the PATH schema illustrates that the "strong leadership" of the Communist Party of China (CPC) is vital to the nation's strategic actions and policies. President Xi Jinping's directives outline clear pathways for addressing a wide array of domestic and international challenges, underscoring his pivotal role in shaping the country's decision-making processes. Phrases such as "move quickly to" and "proceed as speedily as possible" highlight the government's emphasis on efficiency and responsiveness in executing critical initiatives, particularly during times of crisis.

VI. CONCLUSION

The CONTAINER and PATH image schemas offer a valuable framework for analyzing and interpreting ideologies in the white paper, providing deeper insights into the fundamental concepts of governance and policy-making. When effectively utilized, these frameworks provide a nuanced understanding of China's strategies for managing the COVID-19 pandemic, while acknowledging the severe repercussions of the outbreak. The crisis, characterized by its aggressive and unpredictable nature, is often metaphorically described as a powerful and threatening force. Additionally, this focus has significantly enhanced the conceptual development and legitimacy of China's policies and actions in its ongoing fight against the virus, reinforcing the narrative of a proactive and responsive government during times of crisis.

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The Language of Colors: Symbolism of Hues in Kazakh Proverbs and Cross-Cultural Comparison

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Abstract—This paper explores the symbolic and cultural meanings of color terms in Kazakh proverbs. It examines how colors such as white (*ак*), black (*қара*), red (*қызыл*), yellow (*сары*), and blue (*көк*) function as cultural codes that convey moral values, aesthetic ideals, and philosophical concepts within Kazakh traditional thought. Proverbs that include color references reflect complex ideas about truth and justice, beauty, patience, and respect for the natural and spiritual world. The study is based on a qualitative linguo-cultural approach, using Kazakh paremiological dictionaries as primary sources and employing comparative analysis with Turkic and global proverb traditions. The paper also addresses the contemporary relevance of color-based proverbs in Kazakh media, public messaging, and educational discourse, showing how they retain pedagogical and communicative power. Ultimately, the paper emphasizes the role of color symbolism as a medium for transmitting cultural memory and shaping national identity across generations.

Index Terms—language, culture, Kazakh proverbs, cultural metaphors, cross-cultural comparison

I. INTRODUCTION

The exploration of proverbs, particularly those incorporating color symbolism, reveals their multifaceted role in cultural and linguistic contexts. Proverbs serve not only as conduits of wisdom and cultural heritage but also as tools for linguistic and social analysis. Understanding the nuances of color in proverbs enriches our grasp of how societies use these expressions to convey deeper meanings, reflect values, and shape perceptions.

Proverbs can significantly enhance lexical competence and language acquisition because they contain condensed cultural knowledge that transcends mere vocabulary. Rajapova highlights that proverbs contribute to language learning, serving as a bridge between vocabulary enhancement and cultural contextual understanding, which is essential for effective communication (Rajapova, 2024). Through the examination of various proverbs, learners can gain insights into the cultural and moral frameworks of a language community, thus elucidating the intricate links between language, thought, and cultural identity.

Therefore, this study aims to explore the symbolic and cultural meanings of color terms in Kazakh proverbs and to interpret their relevance in a broader cultural context. Kazakhstan is a culturally diverse and strategically located country in Central Asia, serving as a bridge between East and West. As the world's ninth largest country by territory, it

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plays a growing geopolitical and cultural role both in the region and globally. Kazakhstan promotes a trilingual policy – Kazakh as the state language, Russian as the language of interethnic communication, and English as a language of international integration. In this multilingual and multicultural context, Kazakh proverbs offer unique insight into the nation's worldview, value system, and linguistic creativity. Studying these proverbs allows us to reveal the symbolic meanings of language, particularly in how color terms reflect cultural identity, moral concepts, and social norms.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Different cultures possess distinct associations with colors, which play a crucial role in the symbolism embedded in proverbs. In the comparative analysis of the significance of the red color across Russian, French, and Chinese linguistic cultures, Zheng demonstrates that the interpretation of color symbols differs based on historical and cultural factors (Zheng, 2024). This highlights a critical aspect of proverbs that utilize color: they serve as reflections of the collective consciousness and unique ideologies of different societies. Embedding colors in proverbs introduces layers of meaning that resonate within specific cultural contexts.

Color symbolism also features prominently in ethnolinguistic studies, as evidenced by the Madurese proverbs analyzed by Fadhilah et al. (2019). In their exploration of proverbs containing color elements, they uncover how these colors symbolize various life principles intrinsic to the Madurese way of life (Fadhilah et al., 2019). This ethnolinguistic perspective allows for a more profound understanding of how specific color associations in proverbs can shape cultural practices and thought processes. Similarly, Mukabenova et al. (2024) track the symbolic meanings of colors such as red and blue in Korean proverbs, illustrating how these colors resonate with national identity and collective consciousness.

Furthermore, the role of color in proverbs extends to ecological knowledge, as highlighted by Kim et al. (2017), who discuss how proverbs encapsulate traditional ecological wisdom that can foster ecoliteracy. This connection underscores the practicality of proverbs, which serve not only as artistic expressions but also as tools for conveying vital knowledge about the environment and sustainable practices. In many cultures, proverbs function as mnemonic devices for preserving essential information regarding ecological balance and resource management, effectively merging cultural expression with ecological awareness.

In a comparative inquiry into the proverbs of various languages, such as the English and Karakalpak languages analyzed by Baxitovna (2024), we find that proverbs significantly reflect labor culture and societal values. This linguistic and cultural interaction is essential for understanding how color symbolism can be employed differently across cultures to embody specific values or societal norms. Moreover, the pragmatic functions of proverbs, like those articulated in Yoruba culture, serve to promote communal harmony and social values, which are often intertwined with color imagery (Yede et al., 2025). These examples illustrate that proverbs are not merely decorative linguistic constructs; they carry significant implications for social cohesion and cultural preservation.

Analyzing proverbs through different lenses, such as metaphorical conceptualization, reveals additional insights into the roles colors play in conveying implicit meanings. The study of proverbs involving animal lexicons in different languages, by Bachrun and Suhandano (2023), points out how metaphorical associations enhance the richness and depth of proverb meanings, often linked to color imagery. Such metaphorical dimensions enable proverbs to function dynamically within communicative contexts, facilitating nuanced expression and understanding.

As proverbs continue to be significant cultural artifacts, their role in educational environments cannot be overlooked. Both traditional and contemporary methodologies, as explored by Ibrayeva et al. (2022), illustrate how proverbs are effective in developing language proficiency and cultural competence among learners. The unique characteristics of proverbs in pedagogy enhance the learning experience by providing culturally relevant and contextually rich material that resonates with students, thereby fostering both language acquisition and cultural appreciation.

Further reinforcing the symbolic power of proverbs, studies by Nkomazana and Tabalaka (2024) analyze how proverbs are not merely decorative phrases but integral to governance and community dynamics, encapsulating wisdom that guides both social conduct and leadership. The ability of proverbs to convey profound insights through simple assertions is remarkable, and the inclusion of color symbolism serves to augment this effectiveness, layering additional context onto their meanings.

Thus, the role of color in proverbs is a compelling area of study that sheds light on broader cultural meanings and the functional use of language in society. From Rajapova's insights into lexical development through proverbs to Fadhilah's ethnolinguistic interpretative frameworks, the research consistently underscores how proverbs emerge as rich sites of cultural negotiation, expression, and cognition. Proverbs endowed with color not only articulate cultural narratives but also foster intergenerational dialogue and continuity of wisdom, making them central to understanding both language and identity.

The synthesis of findings across different studies emphasizes the indispensable role of proverbs in cultural expression, identity formation, and social guidance. The integration of color symbolism into proverbs serves to deepen their meanings, allowing these idiomatic expressions to function as repositories of wisdom, reflecting social values and cultural narratives. As such, exploring the interplay between proverbs and color not only enriches our understanding of these traditional expressions but also highlights the profound connections between language, culture, and societal values.

III. MATERIAL AND METHODS

This study adopts a qualitative and interpretative approach rooted in cultural linguistics and ethnosemantics. The primary material consists of selected Kazakh proverbs that explicitly contain references to main color terms such as *ақ* (white), *қара* (black), *қызыл* (red), *сары* (yellow), and *көк* (blue). These proverbs were sourced from published collections of Kazakh paremiology, including classical anthologies, contemporary compilations, and online databases maintained by cultural and educational institutions. Mainly, “*The Golden Book of Kazakh Proverbs and Sayings*” (Keikin, 2015) which contains 8675 items and Explanatory Dictionary of Kazakh Proverbs and Sayings by Aubakirov (2007).

The analytical method combines semantic, symbolic, and contextual interpretation. Each proverb was analyzed in its literal and figurative dimensions to identify the color’s function as a cultural symbol. Special attention was given to the socio-historical context in which these proverbs emerged, their persistence in modern Kazakh discourse, and their roles in shaping behavioral norms and aesthetic values.

Comparative examples from Turkic and global paremiological traditions were occasionally referenced to highlight unique or shared symbolic functions of color. The study also considered the proverbs’ use in contemporary media and popular culture to assess the continuity and transformation of color symbolism in Kazakh society.

In most languages of the world, basic colors are those that are most frequently mentioned and have stable, distinct names. According to the theory of Berlin and Kay (1969), basic color terms tend to emerge in a universal sequence: black / white (*қара* / *ақ*); red (*қызыл*); yellow / blue (*сары* / *көк*); green (*жасыл*); brown, gray, purple (*қоңыр*, *сұр*, *күлгін*) – less common.

After selection and analyzing of use of colors in Kazakh proverbs, we revealed the same tendency in Kazakh language, the main colors are mostly used in them, especially white and black. In the current study we will analyze the most actively used and still relevant proverbs that are illustrated in the Table 1:

TABLE 1
SYMBOLIC MEANINGS OF COLORS IN KAZAKH PROVERBS AND CULTURE

Color (Kazakh)	Color (English)	Symbolic Meaning in Kazakh Culture	Examples in Proverbs
Ақ	White	Purity, truth, honor, holiness	"Аққа Құдай жақ" - God is on the side of the pure (white). "Ақ жол - айғақ" - The white path is the evidence (witness). "Ақты ақ, қараны қара де" - Call white white, and black black.
Қара	Black	Evil, depth, justice, seriousness, strength	"Қара қылды қақ жарған" - Split a black hair exactly in half. "Қара жер – қазына" - The black soil is a treasure. "Қара жол – тайғақ" - The black path is slippery.
Қызыл	Red	Beauty, festivity, desire, emotional vividness	"Қыздың көзі қызылда" - A girl's eyes are on the red. "Әсіреқызыл тез оңар" - Excessive red fades quickly. "Өнер алды – қызыл тіл" - The foremost art is the red tongue.
Сары	Yellow	Patience, wisdom, seasonal change (autumn), spiritual richness	"Сабыр түбі – сары алтын" - The root (end result) of patience is yellow (pure) gold. "Сары майдай сақтады" - Preserved like yellow butter.
Көк	Blue	Sky, freedom, hope, cosmic awareness	"Көкке қарап түкірме – бөтіңе түседі" - Do not spit at the sky – it will fall on your face.
Жасыл	Green	Nature, renewal, fertility, growth	(Used in metaphorical descriptions; less frequent in proverbs)

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The analysis of color symbolism in Kazakh proverbs reveals the intricate interplay between language, culture, and collective psychology. Far from being arbitrary descriptors, color terms in proverbs serve as semiotic markers that reflect the community’s values, aesthetic sensibilities, and ethical frameworks.

A. White and Black in Kazakh Proverbs

One of the profound examples is “*Ақ жол – айғақ, қара жол – тайғақ*,” (“The white path is evident, the black path is slippery”) which conveys a deep moral and philosophical message about life choices, honesty, and responsibility. At first glance, “white path” and “black path” may seem to describe the color or condition of roads. However, in this context, the “white path” symbolizes honesty, righteousness, and justice, while the “black path” represents deceit, immorality, and corruption.

The first part, “*Ақ жол – айғақ*,” implies that a person who walks the righteous path is always supported by clear evidence, truth, and dignity. In other words, the white path is solid, transparent, and trustworthy. On the other hand, “*Қара жол – тайғақ*” warns that taking the dishonest path is slippery – meaning it is unstable, dangerous, and ultimately leads to failure or shame.

Kazakh worldview traditionally divides human moral choice into two roads: the right (white) path and the wrong (black) path. This proverb speaks to one's inner moral compass. In life, every individual face choice: to pursue success honestly, or to take shortcuts through lies or injustice. Yet, as the proverb reminds us, the black path may seem easier, but it will cause one to slip and fall sooner or later.

This proverb has strong social implications, emphasizing the importance of honesty in institutions, relationships, and governance. Justice, law, education, and trust—all are built on the “white path.” Any success achieved through dishonest means is fragile and unsustainable. From a spiritual perspective, the proverb teaches us to preserve inner purity and external integrity. Honest labor, sincere intention, and truthful speech are a person's true evidence and support. Deceit, falsehood, and unjust actions, by contrast, weaken the soul and ultimately lead to downfall. This metaphor reflects a broader pattern found in many cultures where light is equated with truth and goodness, and darkness with doubt or wrongdoing. Similar dichotomies appear in other languages: for example, in English, the expressions “a clear conscience” or “a white lie” contrast with “blackmail” or “black-hearted.” In Islamic-influenced cultures, “*sirat al-mustaqim*” (the straight path) also echoes the ideal of a righteous, visible way – conceptually close to *ақ жол* (Al-Sheikh, 1999; Wikipedia, 2025).

The following frequently used proverb is “*Аққа Құдай жақ*,” which literally translates as “God is on the side of the pure (white).” Though brief, this proverb conveys a deep moral philosophy rooted in justice, honesty, and spiritual resilience. In Kazakh, the word “ақ” (aq) signifies more than just the color white. It symbolizes purity, truthfulness, righteousness, and moral cleanliness. The phrase “*Құдай жақ*” (Qūday jaq) means “God is near” or “God is supportive.” Put together, the proverb states: “One who is pure and truthful is always under the protection of God.” This proverb reflects a worldview in which justice and truth ultimately prevail. Even if a person faces hardship or injustice in the short term, if they are honest and act with integrity, they will ultimately be supported by divine justice or fate. “*Аққа Құдай жақ*” serves not only as a belief in spiritual protection, but also as a moral compass and source of hope for those who choose the path of truth in a world where dishonesty may sometimes seem rewarding. It expresses the conviction that truth is not defenseless—there is always a higher force that defends it.

This proverb has a strong educational function in Kazakh society. It teaches individuals—especially the younger generation—to value honesty, live ethically, and trust that moral conduct will not go unnoticed. In a social environment, where people are often tempted by shortcuts or corruption, the proverb reminds us that only truth and righteousness lead to lasting success and inner peace. Parents, teachers, and elders use this saying to instill resilience, faith, and ethical courage, emphasizing that being honest might be difficult, but it is always worth it. It is more than a traditional saying—it is a spiritual and ethical guideline. It expresses a timeless truth: those who stand for what is right and live with honesty will never truly be alone, for they walk with the support of truth—and of God. The Kazakh proverb “*Аққа Құдай жақ*” (God is on the side of the pure) shares conceptual similarity with Turkish expressions like “*Doğruya Allah yardım eder*” (God helps the honest), where white and purity are linked with divine favor (Temir, 2013; Yıldırım, 2007).

The proverb “*Ақты ақ, қараны қара де*” (“Call white white, and black black”), delivers a powerful message about honesty, fairness, and moral clarity. It is a call to recognize and express the truth without distortion or bias. The literal meaning is simple: call the color white what it is – white, and black – black. It encourages people to acknowledge things as they truly are, without embellishment, excuses, or deception. In Kazakh cultural symbolism, white represents purity, truth, and honesty, while black often signifies weight, depth, or difficulty. Both must be recognized and respected in their rightful place.

Beyond its surface meaning, this proverb emphasizes the importance of truthfulness and moral responsibility. People may sometimes twist facts or present lies in order to serve personal interests, protect someone close, or avoid conflict. This proverb, however, teaches that integrity means naming things truthfully, regardless of context or relationship. Whether the subject is good or bad, right or wrong, honesty demands calling it what it truly is.

This proverb carries strong educational value. In raising the younger generation, it teaches the importance of fairness, objectivity, and courage to speak the truth. In modern society—where misinformation, social manipulation, and personal bias often dominate—this principle remains crucial for healthy communication, trust, and justice.

It aligns with another Kazakh saying: “Truth may be bitter, but it is just.” Honesty may not always be comfortable, but it is necessary.

Kazakh proverbs are vivid reflections of the nation's life philosophy and worldview, particularly in relation to nature. One such expression of ancestral wisdom is “*Қара жер – қазына*” (“The black soil is a treasure”). This proverb underscores the importance of the land as a source of sustenance, labor, and the deep connection between humans and nature. The surface meaning of the proverb is simple: black soil is wealth. For Kazakhs, “*қара жер*” refers to cultivated land, pastures, and places of settlement. It is the source of bread, livestock, and life itself. The land provides everything essential for human survival. Therefore, it is truly a treasure – the greatest form of wealth. In this context, “*қара жер*” is not just physical soil, but a symbol of life itself, the foundation of labor and abundance. The proverb reflects the Kazakh people's respect for the land, their dependence on it, and a lifestyle rooted in harmony with nature.

It also emphasizes the value of hard work: when a person works the land, they receive harvest and sustenance. But laziness or detachment from the land leads to poverty. Thus, the proverb teaches the importance of diligence and staying close to the land.

In the Kazakh language, the word “*қара*” (black) is not only used to describe color, but also carries rich figurative and symbolic meanings. It frequently appears in proverbs and idioms, often conveying deep philosophical and cultural connotations. The phrase “*қара жер*” (black earth) in the proverb is one such example, holding a strong symbolic significance:

1. As a color – a symbol of fertility, in agriculture, black soil is considered the most fertile and productive. It is ideal for growing grains and vegetables. That is why “*қара жер*” is seen as a source of abundance and sustenance.

Across the vast Kazakh steppes, much of the soil is brown, gray, or yellowish. Truly black soil is rare – and therefore especially precious. Thus, calling it a “treasure” (*қазына*) reflects its unique value.

2. As a metaphor – depth and stability. In Kazakh worldview, the word “*қара*” often means ancient, enduring, sacred, modest, yet essential. For example:

қара халық (common people),
қара шаңырақ (ancestral home),
қара жол (main road),
қара домбыра (traditional dombra).

Similarly, “*қара жер*” symbolizes something humble but foundational. It is the basis of life for all living beings – animals, plants, and humans alike.

3. Land – a sacred concept in Kazakh Culture

For Kazakhs, land is not just a natural resource, but a spiritual space, a homeland inherited from ancestors, and a part of collective memory and identity. Even the phrase “to be laid to rest in the black earth” (*қара жерге тапсырдық*) – used when referring to burial – reflects the sacredness of land. Such a positive connotation of black is also found in other cultures with agricultural traditions. For example, in Turkish, the phrase “*kara toprak*” (black soil) is also used poetically to refer to the fertile ground that nourishes life. In Slavic languages, rich soil is often described as “*chernozem*” (literally “black earth”) and is seen as the most valuable farmland (Britannica Editors, n.d.; Etymology Online, n.d.).

Today, this proverb carries even greater significance. Issues such as ecology, land preservation, agricultural development, and food security are all tied to the concept of “*қара жер*.” Respecting and caring for the land is a bridge to the wellbeing of future generations. For Kazakhs, land is not merely a possession – it is the legacy of ancestors and a core element of national identity. That is why this proverb also embodies values of national consciousness, patriotism, and a deep love for the land.

Another such deeply meaningful proverb is “*Қара қылды қақ жарған*” – literally, “Split a black hair exactly in half.” This phrase is used to describe a person of exceptional fairness, integrity, and honesty. It embodies the idea of absolute justice and total devotion to truth.

The expression “*қара қыл*” (black hair) refers to an extremely thin, barely visible strand – like a hair or a fine thread. To “split it in half” implies dividing it perfectly down the middle, an act almost physically impossible. Yet that is precisely the point: a truly just person can detect and resolve even the most invisible injustice. This metaphor represents an extraordinary level of precision and fairness.

Figuratively, this proverb refers to a person who lives by justice, never infringes upon others’ rights, and always makes decisions based purely on truth and law – not influenced by others’ opinions or power.

In traditional Kazakh society, such virtues were especially expected of judges (*biys*), elders, and wise leaders. Expressions like “*Töle bi*, who split the black hair exactly in half” or “*Aiteke bi*, known for his fairness” (Nysanbayev, 2008; Suleimenov, 2013) highlight legendary historical figures known for such righteous qualities.

This proverb promotes the importance of justice in society and the need for people to stay on the path of righteousness. Justice is the foundation of social harmony and trust. Without it, chaos and conflict take hold.

Even today, the relevance of this proverb is profound. In judicial systems, governance, and daily disputes, the demand remains for “splitting the black hair” fairness. Educating younger generations in this spirit of justice is essential for a brighter future.

Why does the proverb say “black hair”, and not white or red? If it were “*white hair*”, the metaphor might lose its weight and feel too soft. “*Red hair*” might distract with emotional or other symbolic associations. But “black hair” evokes clarity, seriousness, and groundedness.

Similarly, “*Қара қылды қақ жарған*” (Split a black hair exactly in half) echoes broader Turkic values of extreme justice and fairness, found in phrases like “*Kıl kadar haksızlık etmemek*” (Not to commit injustice even the size of a hair) in Turkish.

In Kazakh culture, “black” (*қапа*) is associated not just with color, but with depth, stability, sacredness, and essence. Therefore, “black hair” in this proverb is a precise and meaningful metaphor for the thinnest, yet most vital line between right and wrong.

Among the rich tapestry of Kazakh proverbs, many are deeply connected to nature, human character, and the logic of life. One such proverb is “*Қарға баласын аппағым деп*” (“A crow calls its chick snow-white.”) Though it may sound simple on the surface, this expression carries profound meaning, reflecting the boundless love and unconditional affection of parents for their children.

The crow is not typically regarded as a beautiful bird in Kazakh culture. Its appearance and voice are often considered unpleasant. Yet despite this, the crow sees its own chick as the most beautiful, the whitest, the purest. This is a natural reflection of maternal instinct and innate parental bias.

The central idea of this proverb is that to every parent, their own child is the most precious and beautiful. Others may find the child unattractive, weak, or naughty, but to the parent, the child is flawless. It speaks to a subjective view shaped by love and emotional closeness. The proverb is also used more broadly when people overly praise or defend someone close to them, ignoring their flaws or faults.

This proverb illustrates the depth and limitlessness of parental love, one of humanity's highest spiritual values. It also subtly touches on the idea that this love can sometimes cloud objective judgment. Therefore, the proverb can have a slightly ironic or critical tone when someone refuses to acknowledge a loved one's shortcomings.

Another Kazakh saying that complements this one is: "Even a bad child is mourned when gone." It similarly reflects the unbreakable bond between a parent and child. This reflects a universal cultural motif found in other traditions as well. For instance, the Turkish expression "*Karga yavrusunu şahin görür*" ("A crow sees its chick as a hawk") conveys the same idea of parental partiality. In English, expressions like "*Every mother thinks her own gosling is a swan*" and "*A face only a mother could love*" highlight the same theme of love distorting perception.

B. The Symbolism of Red in Kazakh Proverbs

Kazakh proverbs are vessels of collective wisdom, passed down through generations and rooted in deep life experience. Each proverb encapsulates an entire philosophy in just a few words. One such saying is "*Қыздың көзі қызылда*," which literally means "A girl's eyes are on the red." Despite its brevity, this expression holds rich cultural and ethical significance.

Literally, the phrase suggests that a girl is drawn to the color red. However, in Kazakh culture, "red" symbolizes much more than just a color—it stands for beauty, elegance, festivity, and visual appeal. Expressions such as "*қызыл көйлек*" (red dress), "*қызыл отау*" (decorated bridal yurt), or "*қызыл шырай*" (rosy complexion) reflect this connotation of splendor and charm.

Therefore, the deeper meaning of the proverb is that young women are naturally drawn to beautiful, eye-catching things. This may manifest in a desire to dress fashionably, wear jewelry, or be surrounded by attractive objects. Such behavior is typical and even expected at a youthful age, reflecting a natural inclination toward beauty and self-expression. The proverb "*Қыздың көзі қызылда*" (A girl's eyes are on the red) reflects cultural associations between red and beauty, a pattern also seen in Russian ("*красна девица*") or Chinese traditions, where red symbolizes celebration and attraction (Portal of Tyumen Culture, 2021; Wikipedia, 2024).

Yet this proverb is not merely an observation—it also carries an implicit lesson. Elders often use it to offer gentle guidance or even caution. While external beauty and elegance are appreciated, true value also lies in a young woman's inner qualities: dignity, wisdom, and modesty. The saying encourages balance, reminding young women not to be overly consumed by superficial appearances.

In today's world, the relevance of this proverb remains intact. In an age dominated by social media, advertising, and consumer culture, young girls are frequently influenced by glittering ideals. Remembering proverbs like this one can serve as a moral compass, reminding them to nurture both outer beauty and inner grace. On the other hand, this proverb is actively used in social media and YouTube in advertising content for women.

Another well-known proverb is "*Өнер алды – қызыл тіл*," which literally means "The foremost art is the red tongue." This proverb highlights the value of language and eloquence, placing the art of speech above all other forms of artistic expression. The main message of the proverb is that among all the arts, the art of language—eloquent and expressive speech is the most esteemed. In Kazakh tradition, people valued words so highly that they would yield even in a dispute if the other party spoke wisely and justly. Disagreements were often resolved not by force, but by speech. Kazakh biys (judges), poets, and orators played a vital role in shaping society, resolving conflicts, and transmitting values through skillful language. Thus, this proverb elevates language not just as a tool of communication, but as the foundation of culture and the highest form of art.

One of the most striking features of the proverb is the phrase "*қызыл тіл*"—"red tongue." Why, we might ask, is the tongue described as "red"? In Kazakh culture, the color red (*қызыл*) carries symbolic meaning far beyond its literal sense. It is associated with beauty, elegance, festivity, brightness, and allure. So, when the proverb refers to the "red tongue," it doesn't just mean any tongue—it refers to a beautiful, expressive, captivating, and articulate form of speech. In other words, it is a metaphor for eloquence, for speech that inspires, persuades, moves, and uplifts. The red tongue is the tongue of a poet, an orator, a thinker—it is the speech that becomes art. Even today, the proverb remains highly relevant. In a world driven by communication, those who speak well—politicians, teachers, writers, lawyers, journalists—often lead and influence society.

Comparatively, similar notions are found across the Turkic world. For instance, in Turkish, expressions like "*Tatlı dil yılanı deliğinden çıkarır*" (A sweet tongue can lure a snake from its hole) highlight the power of speech. Globally, proverbs such as the English "*The pen is mightier than the sword*" or the Arabic "*Al-kalima tayyiba sadaqa*" (A good word is charity) echo the idea that eloquent and kind speech carries authority and moral weight.

Another insightful expression is: "*Әсіреқызыл тез оңар*," which literally means "Excessive red fades quickly." Though simple in form, this proverb conveys a powerful message about artificiality, exaggeration, and the fleeting

nature of superficial beauty. The term “*әсіреқызыл*” refers to an overly bright or unnaturally intense red color, while “*тез оңар*” means that it fades quickly. So, the literal meaning is: colors that are too bold or exaggerated lose their vibrancy faster. But behind this physical observation lies a broader moral and philosophical lesson.

At its core, this proverb warns that what is overly artificial or exaggerated will not last. It applies not only to appearances, but also to fake behavior, empty praise, or superficial status. When a person attempts to impress others through unnatural charm, flashy displays, or pretentiousness, it might catch attention briefly—but it will not endure. In time, such “bright red” fades, revealing the lack of authenticity beneath.

This proverb remains deeply relevant in today’s world, especially amid social media culture, advertising, and the pursuit of image over substance. In a time when people often present a glamorous, filtered version of their lives, this proverb reminds us that surface-level beauty is temporary, while genuine character and depth are timeless. It also applies to leadership, public reputation, or even fame—when built on exaggeration or deceit, it cannot withstand the test of time. True value lies in natural simplicity, sincerity, and inner strength. “*Әсіреқызыл тез оңар*” is a timeless proverb urging us to avoid artificiality and exaggeration in our actions, speech, and appearance. It encourages us to value authenticity over showiness, and to seek beauty in what is real, modest, and lasting. The proverb teaches that truth and simplicity endure, while false brilliance fades. “*Әсіреқызыл тез оңар*” (Excessively red fades quickly) carries a cautionary meaning, warning against superficial brilliance. This mirrors idioms in English like “*All that glitters is not gold*”, or “*Too much of a good thing can be bad*,” suggesting that excessive outward beauty or showiness may not last.

C. Yellow in Kazakh Proverbs

Kazakh proverbs, born from centuries of life experience, represent a spiritual and cultural treasure trove. One of the most profound is: “*Сабыр түбі – сары алтын*,” which literally translates as “The root (end result) of patience is yellow (pure) gold.” This proverb praises one of the most noble human qualities – patience – and elevates it to the level of great wisdom. In Kazakh philosophy, patience is not just a moral virtue but a powerful force that leads to success.

Looking at the structure of the proverb, the word “*түбі*” means “the result” or “the end.” The phrase “*сары алтын*” refers to pure, high-quality gold. Therefore, the meaning becomes clear: true patience leads to priceless reward. This is not about passive inaction but about inner discipline, self-control, and the ability to remain calm and think rationally in difficult moments. Kazakh culture has long viewed impulsiveness as dangerous, expressed in another proverb: “*A rush is the devil’s work*.” Impatience often leads to regret, while patience brings resolution and reward. This saying offers hope and resilience during hardship. Patience reflects not only personal strength but also emotional intelligence and spiritual maturity.

The choice of the phrase “*sary altyn*” (“yellow gold”) is symbolic. In Kazakh thought, “yellow” is associated with richness, value, brightness, and warmth. Gold is universally recognized as a symbol of enduring value and reliability. So, in this proverb, patience is not just rewarded with material gain—it is likened to spiritual wealth, purity of character, and moral superiority. The use of gold as a metaphor implies that patience is rare, precious, and timeless—something to be valued and protected. A patient person, in this sense, becomes as valuable and respected as gold itself. In today’s fast-paced world, where information overload and constant competition often breed impatience, the ability to remain calm, composed, and steady becomes even more crucial. Those who exhibit patience are often better at navigating personal relationships, managing stress, and making thoughtful decisions. Modern psychology and coaching also emphasize the importance of emotional regulation and long-term thinking—principles deeply embedded in this ancient Kazakh proverb. In that sense, the wisdom of the past aligns perfectly with contemporary science. “*Сабыр түбі – сары алтын*” (Patience ends in yellow gold) finds parallels in universal proverbs that connect yellow/gold with reward and patience, such as the English “All things come to those who wait”.

Another proverb is “*Сары майдай сақтады*” (“Preserved like yellow butter”), capturing the idea of cherishing and protecting something valuable with utmost care. In traditional Kazakh life, *сары май* (clarified yellow butter) was one of the most valued and delicious foods. Among pastoral communities, yellow butter symbolized abundance, hospitality, and prosperity. It was carefully stored and served only on special occasions or to important guests. Thus, to “preserve something like yellow butter” means to guard it attentively, protect it from harm, and treat it as something deeply treasured.

While the proverb originates in reference to food, its figurative use extends much further. It can refer to cherishing a person, memory, object, or even a feeling with deep care and respect.

Examples include: A mother cherished her child like yellow butter. He protected the entrusted item like yellow butter. She kept their friendship like yellow butter. In all these cases, the proverb implies trust, responsibility, loyalty, and heartfelt appreciation. The saying promotes values such as mindfulness, responsibility, and the importance of safeguarding what truly matters. It reminds us that both material and intangible things—like relationships, promises, and memories—require dedicated care and respect.

To fully understand the proverb “Preserved like yellow butter,” we must explore the cultural, historical, and symbolic importance of *сары май* (clarified yellow butter) in Kazakh life. Its mention is far from accidental – it carries deep meaning in traditional Kazakh culture.

In the Kazakh nomadic lifestyle, *сары май* was considered a precious and rare food item. It was made from the best cream or fermented milk, carefully churned and stored for long periods, often preserved with salt and kept in special containers. Because of this it was a symbol of abundance and prosperity, served only to honored guests or on special

occasions, and thus treated with great care and respect. In Kazakh culture, yellow (sary) is associated with ripeness and maturity (like autumn), wisdom and patience (e.g., “Patience ends in yellow gold”), and even preciousness, as it is linked metaphorically to gold. Meanwhile, butter (май) itself symbolizes richness and comfort – a “buttery life” (*майлы өмір*) is an idiom for a smooth, prosperous existence. This association of yellow with rarity and protection finds resonance in other cultures. For example, in English, the word “golden” often conveys not just color, but value: “golden days,” “a golden opportunity,” etc. Similarly, in Turkish expressions, “*altın gibi saklamak*” (to protect like gold) implies the same careful reverence for what is valuable.

D. The Symbolism of Blue in Kazakh Proverbs

Kazakh proverbs, rooted in centuries of lived experience and harmony with nature, are not mere phrases but profound reflections of cultural philosophy. One such proverb is: “*Көкке қарап түкірме – бетіңе түседі*,” which literally means, “Don’t spit at the sky – it will fall on your face.” While this may seem like a simple observation of physical cause and effect, it actually conveys a deep moral lesson about responsibility, humility, and consequences.

On a literal level, the proverb refers to a basic truth: if you spit into the air, gravity will bring it right back to you. However, Kazakh wisdom transforms this into a metaphor about human behavior. Whatever negative words or actions one directs toward others—or toward life itself—will inevitably come back in some form. The proverb serves as a moral reminder that our deeds and words have consequences. It aligns with the universal concept of “what goes around comes around,” or the ethical law of reciprocity: do good, and good returns; do harm, and harm follows.

In Kazakh culture, “*көк*” (sky) doesn’t only refer to the physical sky—it also carries a symbolic meaning as a representation of heaven, fate, the divine, or higher powers. So, to “spit at the sky” may also be interpreted as a metaphor for defying nature, disrespecting the sacred, or mocking what is greater than oneself. This reverence for the sky is deeply rooted in the Tengrian worldview, where the sky (*Көк Тәңірі*) was seen as the supreme deity. The proverb thus blends color symbolism with cosmological ethics, turning the color blue into a metaphor for fate, justice, and spiritual balance. Comparable concepts exist in other cultures. For example, in English, the phrase “What goes around comes around” carries a similar message, though without the color-based imagery. In Chinese tradition, Heaven (天) also symbolizes moral authority, and disrespect toward it is thought to bring misfortune (New World Encyclopedia, 2025; Wiki.Agenda, 2025; EWA Direct, 2024).

The phrase “it will fall on your face” emphasizes that the consequences of one’s own arrogance or disrespect will be personally felt. It teaches us that nothing done in negativity remains without a result. This proverb underscores the principle of moral justice: every action has its price. In modern society, this proverb remains as relevant as ever. Whether in ecological terms—polluting nature and facing climate disasters—or in personal relationships, where negative energy, gossip, or cruelty can destroy one’s own peace, the lesson is the same: every action has a reaction.

It is especially pertinent in an age of social media, where thoughtless words or harmful behavior can quickly turn against the person who initiates them. The proverb is a powerful reminder to think before we speak or act, and to cultivate humility and respect.

V. CONCLUSION

The analysis of color symbolism in Kazakh proverbs reveals the intricate interplay between language, culture, and collective psychology. Far from being arbitrary descriptors, color terms in proverbs serve as semiotic markers that reflect the community’s values, aesthetic sensibilities, and ethical frameworks.

Proverbs such as “*Қыздың көзі қызылда*” or “*Әсіреқызыл тез оңар*” exemplify how *қызыл* (red) conveys both allure and impermanence. While red symbolizes beauty, passion, and festivity, it also warns against superficiality and excess. Similarly, *ақ* (white) is associated with purity, truth, and moral clarity, as seen in sayings like “*Аққа Құдай жақ*” or “*Ақты ақ, қараны қара де*”. The contrast with *қара* (black) underscores the Kazakh worldview’s dualistic moral logic: black often implies hardship, seriousness, or hidden depth, yet also justice and strength—as in “*Қара қылды қақ жарған*”.

Other colors such as *сары* (yellow) and *көк* (blue) represent seasonality, wisdom, or cosmic freedom. For instance, “*Сабыр түбі – сары алтын*” illustrates how patience, though associated with aging or slowness (sary), leads to golden outcomes. Likewise, “*Көкке қарап түкірме – бетіңе түседі*” transforms the sky-blue symbol into a moral compass, warning against disrespect toward the divine or fate.

This chromatic system operates as a culturally specific framework through which life experience, ethics, and emotion are encoded in metaphor. The meanings of colors are fluid yet contextually bound, and their symbolic use in proverbs functions as both pedagogical and mnemonic devices in oral tradition. Notably, such color-coded wisdom also reflects evolving perceptions in contemporary Kazakhstan. While many of these proverbs are rooted in traditional settings, their usage today—in media, education, and even advertising—attests to their adaptive capacity and continued relevance. Proverbs remain a dynamic channel through which heritage and modern identity coalesce.

Comparisons with other languages reveal that while the symbolic interpretation of colors can be culturally specific, certain associations – like white with purity, red with passion or beauty, and gold with value are cross-cultural and deeply embedded in human cognition.

Kazakh proverbs that incorporate color terms provide a rich site for understanding the nation's ethical values, aesthetic norms, and cultural worldview. Colors in these expressions go far beyond literal description; they are metaphors loaded with historical meaning and symbolic resonance. By examining proverbs involving red, black, white, yellow, and blue, this study has shown how each hue operates within a specific cultural logic. These linguistic forms not only convey moral judgment and emotional nuance but also encode cosmological beliefs, social roles, and behavioral expectations. As such, Kazakh chromatic proverbs are not just linguistic artifacts—they are living expressions of national consciousness. In an era of globalization and digital communication, the symbolic richness of traditional proverbs offers a meaningful counterbalance to rapid cultural change. Understanding and preserving these color-coded expressions can play a vital role in cultural education, intergenerational dialogue, and the assertion of identity in both local and global contexts.

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From Stillness to Presence: A Comparative Study of Spatial Poetics in Vietnamese Zen Poetry and Japanese Haiku

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Abstract—While spatiality has been extensively theorized in literary studies, the comparative spatial poetics of Vietnamese Zen poetry and Japanese Haiku remain largely unexplored. This study situates the two traditions within the broader landscape of East Asian Buddhist aesthetics, examining how they share metaphysical foundations yet diverge in aesthetic realization. Vietnamese Zen poetry generates expansive, porous spaces of emptiness and ontological dissolution, where the lyrical self merges with the Dharma realm. By contrast, Haiku crystallizes fleeting perceptual moments of sensory immediacy anchored in seasonal imagery. Drawing on Gaston Bachelard's poetics of space, Juri Lotman's cultural semiotics, and Maurice Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology of perception, the study conducts close readings of poems by Pháp Thuận, Tuệ Trung Thước Sĩ, and Trần Nhân Tông, alongside haiku by Bashō, Issa, and Shiki. Through spatial metaphors and symbolic motifs, it identifies two distinct logics: the meditative void and the momentary real. On this basis, the study proposes a dual-axis model juxtaposing ontological silence with sensory presence, thereby advancing intercultural literary theory and contributing to comparative poetics, phenomenological aesthetics, and broader efforts to theorize space as an embodied structure of perception.

Index Terms—spatial poetics, Zen poetry, Haiku, Buddhist aesthetics, phenomenology

I. INTRODUCTION

Poetic space is never neutral. As Bachelard (1994) asserts, space in poetry is not a passive container but an affective, phenomenological force—infused with memory, reverie, and metaphysical imagination. Tuan (1977) distinguishes between abstract space and intimate place, while Casey (1997) defines place as the “thickened now,” a convergence point where embodiment, perception, and meaning coalesce. Together, these perspectives establish poetic space as a dynamic intersection of cultural cosmology and experiential consciousness rather than a geometrical abstraction.

This study explores Vietnamese Zen poetry and Japanese Haiku as two paradigmatic articulations of East Asian Buddhist poetics, each offering a distinct spatial ontology. While both traditions emerge from shared metaphysical foundations—particularly Mahāyāna Buddhist notions of impermanence, emptiness, and interbeing—they diverge in how poetic space is conceived, encoded, and experienced. Vietnamese Zen poetry tends to generate expansive, contemplative spaces characterized by cyclical temporality, metaphysical silence, and non-dual awareness. The spatial logic is centripetal, dissolving the lyrical self into the Dharma realm. In contrast, Japanese Haiku compresses perception into microcosmic fragments—fleeting impressions tied to seasonal phenomena, sensory immediacy, and the haiku moment (*ichigo ichie*). Here, poetic space is centrifugal: it affirms the observer's embodied presence through compressed imagery and natural detail.

Despite their philosophical kinship, the spatial grammars of these two traditions remain undertheorized in comparative poetics. Existing studies often emphasize thematic, historical, or linguistic contrasts without sufficiently addressing the semiotic infrastructures of spatial representation. To address this gap, the present study is guided by three central questions:

- 1) What semiotic mechanisms of spatial encoding operate within Vietnamese Zen poetry and Japanese Haiku?
- 2) How is the lyrical subject situated within each spatial framework?
- 3) What cultural logics and cognitive schemas underpin their divergent spatial constructions?

To investigate these questions, the study employs a comparative and intercultural theoretical constellation that integrates Bachelard's (1994) *Poetics of Space*, Lotman's (1990) cultural semiotics, Merleau-Ponty's (2012) phenomenology of perception, and anthropogeographic insights from Tuan (1977) and Casey (1997). This composite framework enables a multidimensional inquiry that bridges metaphysical aesthetics, embodied cognition, and symbolic spatiality.

The paper proceeds in six sections. Following this introduction, Section 2 surveys relevant scholarship and delineates the theoretical framework. Section 3 outlines the methodology and corpus selection. Section 4 presents the key findings, with Section 5 providing a comparative discussion. Section 6 offers concluding remarks and academic implications, situating the study within broader discourses in intercultural literary theory and spatial semiotics.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

A. Review of Related Scholarship

Contemporary literary scholarship increasingly regards poetry as a mode of spatial epistemology—an embodied medium through which cultures construct and experience reality via language. Within this paradigm, spatial poetics is not simply a stylistic device but a semiotic system encoding cultural values, metaphysical assumptions, and cognitive orientations (Bachelard, 1994; Casey, 1997; Tuan, 1977).

(a). *Studies on Vietnamese Zen Poetry*

Vietnamese Zen poetry has traditionally been analyzed through its Buddhist foundations, particularly the doctrines of impermanence (*anicca*) and non-self (*anatta*) embedded in poetic form. Foundational contributions by Nguyễn Huệ Chi (2004) and Trần Đình Hượu (1992) frame Zen poetry as a distinctly Vietnamese expression of Buddhist philosophy, emphasizing its spiritual, ethical, and political dimensions. Canonical poets such as Pháp Thuận, Mãn Giác, Trần Nhân Tông, and Tuệ Trung Thúc Sĩ are interpreted as exemplars of the integration between poetic language and Zen meditative insight. However, these studies tend to emphasize doctrinal and spiritual content while underexploring spatial poetics as a vehicle for cognitive and symbolic structuring.

Emerging comparative efforts have begun to position Vietnamese Zen poetry within broader East Asian metaphysical traditions. Yet these studies often remain descriptive rather than analytically rigorous, lacking a systematic framework that unites semiotics, phenomenology, and cognitive poetics. A clear theoretical lacuna persists regarding how space is configured and encoded in Vietnamese Zen verse.

(b). *Studies on Japanese Haiku*

Japanese Haiku, by contrast, has received more extensive attention, particularly in Western scholarship. Barthes (1970) famously characterizes Haiku as an “open semiotic system,” where language gestures toward the unsaid, embracing semantic indeterminacy. Building on this, Shirane (1998) explores how *kigo* (seasonal words) not only organize temporal experience but also structure spatial affect and cultural memory. Ueda (1998) and Qiu (2005) examine Haiku’s perceptual compression, emphasizing its phenomenological orientation toward immediacy and the micro-moment.

Nonetheless, much of this literature remains culturally bounded, treating Haiku as an isolated phenomenon rather than part of a broader Buddhist poetic lineage. Few studies pursue sustained comparative analysis with Vietnamese Zen poetry, and fewer still investigate how their divergent spatial grammars reflect differing ontologies and cultural logics. This scholarly omission signals a significant gap that the present study aims to address.

(c). *Research Gap*

Despite robust individual literatures on Vietnamese Zen poetry and Japanese Haiku, no study has undertaken a direct comparative analysis of their spatial poetics. The absence of an integrated framework that unites spatial semiotics, phenomenological perception, and conceptual metaphor theory limits current understandings of how space, time, and self are constructed in Buddhist-inflected poetic discourse. Addressing this lacuna offers a critical opportunity to explore the interplay between form, perception, and metaphysical vision across divergent yet interrelated literary traditions.

B. Theoretical Framework

This study is grounded in an interdisciplinary framework that weaves together four intersecting strands: spatial poetics, cultural semiotics, phenomenology of perception, and conceptual metaphor theory. Each provides a discrete yet complementary lens for analyzing the spatial constructions in Vietnamese Zen poetry and Japanese Haiku—not as ornamental devices but as culturally embedded epistemologies shaped by cognitive and symbolic processes.

(a). *Spatial Poetics – Gaston Bachelard*

In *The Poetics of Space*, Bachelard (1994) proposes that poetic space is not merely physical but affective and ontological—a resonant domain where memory, sensation, and imagination converge. Central images such as “the house,” “the corner,” and “the night” exemplify what he terms the poetics of imagination, where space becomes interiorized and emotionally charged. This view allows Vietnamese Zen poetry to be read as a symbolic architecture of transcendental emptiness and metaphysical stillness. By contrast, Japanese Haiku engages a more externalized spatiality, anchored in the immediacy of sensory encounters—a distinction that echoes Merleau-Ponty’s (2012) insights into perception.

(b). *Cultural Semiotics – Yuri Lotman*

Lotman’s (1990) concept of the *semiosphere* posits that every culture exists within a bounded symbolic field governed by its own rules of meaning-making. Within this field, poetic language functions as a generator and transmitter of cultural worldviews. Spatial poetics, therefore, is not ideologically neutral but embedded within a culture’s semiotic infrastructure. Applying this to Vietnamese Zen poetry and Japanese Haiku highlights how each tradition—though sharing Buddhist cosmology—operates through distinct symbolic grammars and expressive strategies.

Zen poetry constructs inward, dissolutive spaces aligned with non-duality, whereas Haiku constructs outward, perceptual spaces grounded in seasonal flux.

(c). *Phenomenology of Perception – Maurice Merleau-Ponty*

Merleau-Ponty (2012) emphasizes that spatial awareness is fundamentally embodied—it arises from lived sensory interaction with the world rather than abstract measurement. In Haiku, this manifests in the rendering of dense experiential moments—dewdrops, rustling leaves, a single breath—that activate a compact but existentially potent spatial field. In contrast, Vietnamese Zen poetry often suspends such immediacy, embracing metaphysical silence and cyclical time. Its spatial logic reflects absence rather than presence, aligning with Buddhist concepts such as *śūnyatā* (emptiness) and *anupalabdhi* (non-perception).

(d). *Supporting Lens: Conceptual Metaphor Theory – Lakoff and Johnson*

Lakoff and Johnson's (1980) theory of conceptual metaphor provides a cognitive map for how spatial meaning is structured via image schemas such as containment, verticality, and polarity (e.g., full/empty, rising/falling, inside/outside). These schemas operate beneath conscious awareness, shaping poetic language and perception. Haiku often employs verticality—rising mist, falling leaves—to suggest transience, while Zen poetry deploys vastness or voids to express ontological dissolution. Recognizing these metaphoric patterns enables deeper insight into the cognitive architectures that underlie spatial poetics across both traditions.

III. METHODOLOGY AND RESEARCH DATA

A. Research Approach

Situated at the intersection of literary theory, semiotics, and embodied cognition, spatial poetics reconceptualizes space not as a static backdrop but as a culturally encoded and perceptually enacted structure of meaning (Bachelard, 1994; Lakoff & Johnson, 1980; Lotman, 1990; Merleau-Ponty, 2012). This study adopts a cross-cultural comparative model to investigate how Vietnamese Zen poetry and Japanese Haiku articulate spatiality through distinct symbolic logics and sensory orientations rooted in Buddhist cosmology.

By integrating comparative poetics, cultural semiotics, and phenomenology, the analysis moves beyond abstract metaphysical content to examine the concrete mechanisms by which poetic language configures spatial perception as both aesthetic structure and ontological expression. Within this framework, space is not merely represented but inhabited—functioning as a poetic worldview wherein each spatial sign carries layered existential and cultural resonance.

The methodological design unfolds along three interlinked axes:

- **Spatial poetics** (Bachelard, 1994): Examining spatial imagery in relation to the dissolution or emergence of the lyrical self.
- **Cultural semiotics** (Lotman, 1990): Decoding spatial codes within the symbolic grammar of each poetic tradition.
- **Phenomenology of perception** (Merleau-Ponty, 2012): Analyzing sensory immediacy, especially in Haiku's engagement with momentary perception.

In addition, Conceptual Metaphor Theory (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980) is employed to trace recurring image schemas—such as full/empty, near/far, and high/low—that structure spatial cognition. These schemas illuminate how each tradition encodes spatial meaning through culturally specific yet cognitively grounded metaphoric logic. Together, these frameworks offer a transferable model for analyzing transcultural poetic systems where metaphysical vision converges with embodied awareness.

B. Research Data

(a). *Vietnamese Zen Poetry Corpus*

The Vietnamese corpus is drawn from the Trúc Lâm Yên Tử Zen lineage and prominent Buddhist poet-monks of the Lý–Trần dynasties:

- Pháp Thuận: *Quốc tộ như đằng lạc*
- Mãn Giác: *Cáo tật thị chúng*
- Trần Nhân Tông: *Cư trần lạc đạo* and selected verses from *Thạch thất mị ngữ*
- Tuệ Trung Thượng Sĩ: selected *kệ ngôn* from *Thượng Sĩ ngữ lục*

Selection criteria include:

- Salient spatial imagery and symbolic frameworks (e.g., mountains, night, emptiness)
- Poetic conciseness with high metaphysical density
- Representation of Zen aesthetics: “stillness without stagnation” and “emptiness without void”

(b). *Japanese Haiku Corpus*

The Japanese corpus spans from the Edo period to the early modern era, representing four canonical voices:

- Matsuo Bashō: excerpts from *Oku no Hosomichi* and *Fuyu no Hi*
- Yosa Buson: Haiku emphasizing seasonal landscapes and painterly composition

- Kobayashi Issa: Haiku of everyday life and human vulnerability
- Masaoka Shiki: modern Haiku highlighting realism and individual perception

Selection criteria include:

- Consistent use of *kigo* (seasonal terms)
- High spatial concreteness (e.g., mist, frogs, cherry blossoms, falling snow)
- Emphasis on *iki no aware*—the aesthetic sensitivity to transience and presence

C. Analytical Procedure

The analytical process is conducted in three interrelated stages:

1 Spatial Encoding

- Identification and classification of spatial markers (e.g., clouds, darkness, vastness)
- Mapping these markers onto conceptual image schemas (e.g., containment, emptiness, verticality)

2 Poetic–Semiotic Decoding

- Analyzing how spatial imagery operates within each poem’s symbolic architecture
- Comparing strategies of spatial construction across the two traditions

3 Phenomenological Reconstruction

- Reconstructing the experiential positioning of the lyrical self in relation to poetic space
- Tracing the interplay between sensory presence, metaphysical void, and spatial metaphor

Each stage directly corresponds to a theoretical pillar outlined in Section 2.2, ensuring coherence between analytic procedure and conceptual orientation. This alignment strengthens interpretive rigor and grounds the findings within a clearly articulated interdisciplinary framework.

IV. FINDINGS

A. Space in Vietnamese Zen Poetry: Transcendental Emptiness and the Flow of the Dharma Realm

Pháp Thuận – Harmonious Cosmology and the Structure of Simultaneity

Pháp Thuận (914–990), a pioneering monk-poet of early Vietnamese Zen Buddhism during the Early Lê Dynasty, was also a prominent political advisor and metaphysical thinker. His poem *Quốc tộ* (“The Fate of the Nation”), composed in response to Emperor Lê Đại Hành’s inquiry regarding the nation’s future, transcends the confines of political prophecy. It becomes a condensed articulation of Zen Buddhist cosmology, where moral order, metaphysical rhythm, and cosmic interdependence converge within a resonant poetic field:

*The nation’s destiny is like entwining vines,
The Southern realm overflows with rightness.
Though storms may yet arise,
Peace and harmony shall endure through the ages.*

Despite lacking explicit geographical referents—no mountains, rivers, or spatial delineations—the poem evokes a richly relational topology in which metaphor, structure, and rhythm encode a vision of non-possessive spatiality. The central metaphor of “entwining vines” (*đằng lặc*) operates beyond mere flora; it functions as a symbol of ethical, political, and cosmic interdependence. Space is constructed not through visual orientation but through organic cohesion.

Under Merleau-Ponty’s (2012) phenomenology, in which space arises from embodied perception rather than Cartesian coordinates, *Quốc tộ* performs a spatial shift: space is not seen but felt. This aligns with Bachelard’s (1994) view of poetic space as intimate dwelling—a being-with rather than being-in. The final phrase, “eternal peaceful dwelling” (*vạn cổ lặc an cư*), expresses harmony not through dominance but through attunement with the Dharma realm.

Barthes’ (1970) notion of parataxis further illuminates the poem’s structure: its four lines present images side by side, without narrative hierarchy. The entwining vines, Southern realm, potential storms, and peaceful dwelling coexist in simultaneity, producing a multidimensional resonance. This non-linear, spatial logic anticipates the Haiku’s privileging of perception over chronology.

Viewed through the lens of Vietnamese Zen aesthetics, *Quốc tộ* enacts an ontological topology—one constructed through ethical affect rather than spatial geometry. It embodies the indigenous principle of *thuận thiên* (“following Heaven’s way”), where cosmic alignment supersedes control (Tuan, 1977). While Bashō opens poetic space through the splash of a frog in stillness, Pháp Thuận weaves his through entwining vines—kinetic symbols of continuity, harmony, and metaphysical fluidity.

Tuệ Trung Thượng Sĩ – Non-Dual Space and the Dissolution of Dichotomies

Tuệ Trung Thượng Sĩ (1230–1291), Zen master and Trần dynasty prince, is often considered the philosophical forerunner of the Trúc Lâm Zen lineage. Unlike Pháp Thuận’s cosmic–political cosmology, Tuệ Trung constructs poetic space as a non-dual perceptual field, where dichotomies dissolve into unified immediacy:

*Spring blossoms laugh in sunlight, red as brocade;
Night rain hums by the window, green as mist.
If not for the spring wind’s ceaseless blowing,
What place on Earth would not be paradise?*

This verse—rich with chromatic and auditory texture—does not represent an external scene. Rather, it evokes a state of interbeing in which nature and consciousness permeate each other. What Bachelard (1994) calls a “soul-space” is manifest: not spatial enclosure, but existential intimacy.

The motif of the “ceaseless spring wind” (*bất đoạn*) serves as a spatial generator, producing an immersive, centerless field. As Merleau-Ponty (2012) notes, such space is not geometrically mapped but phenomenologically lived—the subject is not outside the scene but enfolded within its unfolding. Wind, in this context, flows not across terrain but through awareness.

Barthes (1982) distinguishes Zen poetics as favoring pure presentation over symbolic representation. Tuệ Trung’s rhetorical question—“What place on Earth would not be paradise?”—dissolves the sacred/profane binary. Paradise is not elsewhere; it is thus, accessible through perceptual immediacy.

Trần Đình Sử (2020) argues that Vietnamese Zen poetics resists linearity and fixed spatial frames, favoring ontological simultaneity and affective resonance. The poem’s sensory elements—spring, rain, wind, paradise—are not sequential but coexistent, mirroring Suzuki’s (1970) understanding of Zen insight as *śūnyatā* realized through *pratītyasamutpāda* (dependent co-arising).

Where Pháp Thuận creates ethical topologies, Tuệ Trung dissolves all representational scaffolding. His poetic space is not something to be depicted or possessed but dwelt within—a luminous field where form and emptiness pulse in rhythmic interpenetration.

Trần Nhân Tông – Spatial Silence and the Presence of Suchness

Trần Nhân Tông (1258–1308), both monarch and Zen patriarch, founded the Trúc Lâm school after abdicating the throne and retiring to Yên Tử Mountain. His poetry reflects a poetics of spiritual renunciation, marked by stillness, clarity, and inwardness:

*Living in the world, delighting in the Dharma,
Eat when hungry, sleep when tired.
Within the house is a priceless jewel—seek it not.
Facing all things with no mind—that is Zen.*

This poem eschews external representation. Instead, it constructs a spatiality rooted in *vô tâm* (no-mind)—a receptive field where perception is unmediated by ego or conceptualization. For Merleau-Ponty (2012), this represents a suspension of interpretive filtering, allowing phenomena to present themselves directly.

Bachelard’s (1994) “mode of inhabitation” helps elucidate this: Zen space is not delineated but inhabited, not measured but embodied. Acts like eating and sleeping become ontological rituals of sufficiency, expressing *wuwei* (non-action), the Daoist principle of effortless alignment with reality (Laozi, 2003, 1998).

Barthes (1970) calls this aesthetic “language without pressure”—where meaning arises not through elaboration but through resonance. The line “Within the house is a priceless jewel” functions as a *kōan*, disrupting rational thought and redirecting attention toward *tathatā* (suchness). As Trần Đình Sử (2020) asserts, silence in Vietnamese Zen verse is not absence but an active semantic field.

In contrast to Haiku’s flash of image that seizes the transient now, Trần Nhân Tông’s space is expansive and ungraspable—an openness that accommodates presence without fixation.

Mãn Giác – Impermanent Space and the Rebirth of Intuition

Mãn Giác (1052–1096), born Nguyễn Trường, left a legacy of deeply introspective Zen verse. His renowned *Cáo tật thị chúng* (“A Farewell to the Sangha”), written just before his death, exemplifies a temporal-spatial fusion grounded in impermanence and intuitive awakening:

*Spring departs—hundred flowers fall.
Spring arrives—hundred flowers smile.
Events pass before the eyes.
Old age settles atop the head.
Say not: ‘Spring ends, all blossoms gone’—
Last night in the courtyard: one plum blossom.*

Rather than describing scenery, the poem enacts a rhythmic simultaneity of decay and renewal. The plum blossom becomes a focal point of perceptual clarity, not as metaphor but as direct encounter. Bachelard (2000) refers to this as the rhythm of time shaping inner space—a lived spatiality borne from duration and attunement.

Merleau-Ponty (2012) would describe this as trans-apparent spatiality: time and space co-arise within embodied perception. The opposition between departure and arrival, fall and bloom, is resolved through rhythm, not contradiction.

Barthes (1982) claims Haiku offers “a slice of reality without symbolic ambition.” Similarly, Mãn Giác’s blossom resists allegorical reading—it simply is, embodying *tathatā*. Nguyễn Văn Hạnh (2019) interprets this mode as “spiritual temporality,” where spatial form arises through meditative awareness rather than description.

Synthesis

In synthesis, each poet offers a distinct model of Zen spatiality:

- Pháp Thuận articulates ethical–cosmic harmony.
- Tuệ Trung dissolves dualities into interbeing.
- Trần Nhân Tông dwells in silent suchness.

- Mãn Giác enacts impermanence-in-motion.

Together, they construct a transcendent yet embodied Vietnamese spatial poetics—fluid, non-dual, and spiritually attuned—distinct from, yet convergent with, the fragmentary immediacy of Japanese Haiku.

B. Spatiality in Japanese Haiku: Genealogical Paradigms and Microstructural Poetics

In Japanese Haiku, space is not a passive backdrop but an emergent phenomenon shaped through landscape, sensory immediacy, and perceptual tactility. Rather than being depicted or narrated, it is evoked through micro-events—momentary contact points that catalyze awareness. This aligns with Barthes' (1982) notion of the “semiotic spark” in Eastern aesthetics, wherein meaning arises through absence rather than semantic fullness.

Unlike Vietnamese Zen poetry, which often constructs ontological and contemplative space, Haiku cultivates a perceptual field that is ephemeral yet ontologically potent—rooted in seasonal attunement, embodied minimalism, and non-symbolic presence (Merleau-Ponty, 2012). This section traces the genealogical unfolding of spatial paradigms in Japanese Haiku through four canonical figures—Bashō, Buson, Issa, and Shiki—each of whom enacts a distinct spatial modality within an evolving matrix of poetic cognition (Bachelard, 1994; Shirane, 1998).

Matsuo Bashō – Emptiness and Emergent Presence

Matsuo Bashō pioneered a sensory-poetic paradigm in which spatiality is not mapped but allowed to surface. His poetry foregrounds not explanation but evocation—where perception crystallizes without mediation. One of his most iconic haiku illustrates this logic:

*The old pond—
A frog leaps in—
The sound of water
(古池や / 蛙飛びこむ / 水の音)*

This poem unfolds across three sensory loci: the temporal stillness of the old pond, the kinetic trace of the frog's leap, and the sonic ripple of water. The result is a liminal space where silence, motion, and sound momentarily converge. Bachelard (1994) sees such space as affectively intimate, generated through resonance rather than geometry. It is the disruption of stillness that reveals presence.

Barthes (1970) contends that Haiku suspends semiotic closure. In Bashō's verse, the “sound of water” is not metaphorical but ontologically immediate—a sensory trace that resists interpretation. From a phenomenological standpoint, Merleau-Ponty (2012) would regard the frog's leap as an embodied gesture that co-constitutes space through perception and motion.

Ueda (1982) emphasizes that Bashō's spatiality is grounded in Zen insight: the Dharma is not symbolized but disclosed through ordinary acts. The old pond and the frog's splash are not representations—they are *tathatā*, or suchness, manifesting reality without interpretive filters.

Yosa Buson – Visual Ellipsis and Incomplete Composition

Yosa Buson (1716–1784), both poet and painter, introduced a pictorial modality of Haiku spatiality grounded in *ma* (間)—the aesthetic of the interval. His haiku often substitute direct depiction with gestural suggestiveness. One example captures this:

*Summer river—
The joy of crossing it—
Taking off my sandals
(夏川を / 越すうれしさよ / 草鞋ぬぎ)*

Rather than describing the river, Buson evokes it through the act of removing sandals. Spatiality arises through tactile transition, not visual detail. This aligns with Merleau-Ponty's (2012) corporeal spatiality, wherein space is lived through the body's threshold engagements.

Barthes (1970) interprets such moments as poetic fragments that resist completion. The reader must co-create the space—a process of perceptual invitation rather than narrative resolution. Shirane (1998) situates this within the aesthetics of *sumi-e* painting, where unpainted space becomes active, not empty. Buson's *ma* operates not through Bashō's contemplative *mu* (emptiness), but through visual deferral.

Thus, Buson's space is gestural and elliptical. His haiku generates an aperture—glimpsed but incomplete—requiring the reader to step in barefoot, so to speak, into a field of partial visibility.

Kobayashi Issa – Affective Suspension and Microscopic Spatiality

Kobayashi Issa (1763–1828) reconfigures spatiality through emotional condensation and micro-phenomena. Insects, children, dew, and other fragile presences become spatial operators charged with existential depth. His most famous haiku exemplifies this:

*This world of dew—
A world of dew it is indeed—
And yet, and yet...
(露の世は / 露の世ながら / さりながら)*

Composed in mourning for his daughter, the poem affirms Buddhist impermanence while hesitating to surrender to it. The third line (*sarinagara*) suspends closure, creating an affective ellipsis. For Merleau-Ponty (2012), such spatiality emerges not from abstraction but from bodily proximity—dew as a tactile, transient encounter.

Barthes (1970) might call this a “commentary without commentary”—a space where language ceases and sensation carries meaning. Koren (1994) connects this to *wabi-sabi*, the aesthetic of incomplete beauty. Issa’s space is emotionally porous and unresolvable; it does not transcend suffering but dwells in it.

Shirane (1998) notes Issa’s departure from Edo-period restraint. His haiku fuses perception with empathy, offering a non-neutral field where loss and presence entwine. Compared to Bashō’s perceptual rupture and Buson’s visual suspension, Issa’s space is fragile, embodied, and affectively unresolved.

Masaoka Shiki – Descriptive Realism and Phenomenological Flattening

Masaoka Shiki (1867–1902), a key modernizer of Haiku, breaks from mystical and Zen-inflected spatiality by advancing *shasei* (写生)—the sketching of life. His poetry affirms the descriptive act as spatial production. A representative haiku reads:

After bathing—
The lake looks as though
Freshly shaved
(湯あがりの / 湖は剃られたる / ごとくなり)

Here, the lake is rendered not metaphorically but through sensory analogy. The “freshly shaved” simile links bodily experience to environmental perception. Merleau-Ponty’s (2012) notion of perception as embodied and situated resonates here: the lake’s texture is apprehended through the post-bathing body.

Barthes (1970) would classify this as “non-transcendent signification.” The poem does not allegorize but stays within empirical visibility. Shirane (1998) distinguishes Haiku’s vertical (spiritual) and horizontal (descriptive) axes; Shiki reorients the form horizontally, privileging modern phenomenological realism.

Keene (1999) argues that Shiki’s empirical flattening enabled Haiku’s entry into literary modernity. By neutralizing symbolic space, Shiki aligned the form with observational precision rather than metaphysical depth. His spatiality is thus dry, deliberate, and surface-bound—a marked contrast to Bashō’s metaphysical silence or Issa’s emotional saturation.

Synthesis

In synthesis:

- Bashō crafts a space of perceptual rupture—brief, liminal, ontologically open.
- Buson opens an elliptical space—gestural, fragmentary, visually suggestive.
- Issa dwells in affective suspension—where tenderness and impermanence intertwine.
- Shiki constructs an empirical space—flat, literal, and corporeally indexed.

These four spatial logics form a genealogical continuum—from contemplative presence to modern realism. While Vietnamese Zen poetry explores emptiness as stillness and interbeing, Japanese Haiku locates emptiness in momentum—the temporal rupture, the pause between breaths, the echo of a sound. In Haiku, spatiality is always becoming—never fixed, never resolved—attuned not to possession, but to passing.

C. Comparative Spatial Models in Vietnamese Zen Poetry and Japanese Haiku

(a). Similarities: Space as a Perceptual Act

Despite their distinct religious and aesthetic trajectories, Vietnamese Zen poetry and Japanese Haiku converge on a foundational epistemological stance: space is not a passive container but a lived field of perception. Rather than delineating space through objective description or narrative structure, both traditions frame it as a phenomenological unfolding shaped by embodied awareness and direct experience.

Informed by Merleau-Ponty’s (2012) phenomenology, this shared poetics reflects an ontological paradigm of interbeing, wherein subject and world co-arise. In both traditions, the poem acts as a perceptual event—minimal in form yet dense in existential resonance. Language is distilled to its elemental function: evoking presence without enclosing it in abstraction.

In Vietnamese Zen poetry, perception arises through inner stillness cultivated by *vô tâm* (no-mind) and contemplative insight (*quán chiếu*). Japanese Haiku, by contrast, is triggered by external sensory cues—seasonal shifts, tactile impressions, or acoustic phenomena. Yet both traditions construe perception as a site of engagement with being.

Zen poetry opens a metaphysical spatiality grounded in dharmic awareness, where form and emptiness interpenetrate. Haiku’s spatiality is sensory and temporal, crystallizing in a moment of perceptual rupture. Bashō’s iconic frog haiku, for instance, generates space not through depiction but through an acoustic incision that awakens presence (Barthes, 1970; Bachelard, 1994; Ueda, 1982).

Both traditions reject symbolic representation in favor of ontological disclosure. In Zen poetry, this surfaces through insight into *vô sinh pháp nhẫn* (the patience of non-arising); in Haiku, it emerges as the suspension of time in an epiphanic flash of *tathatā* (suchness). The purpose is not to communicate a message but to instantiate a direct awareness of being.

Technically, Zen poets employ aphasia, semantic erasure, and ontological silence to evoke the ineffable (Nguyễn, 2004), while Haiku relies on *kireji* (cutting words), juxtaposition, and *kigo* (seasonal referents) to generate perceptual rupture (Shirane, 1998). In both, poetic form is catalytic rather than representational.

Ultimately, both dissolve the boundary between word and world. As Barthes (1970) observes, this is “language without center”—a semiotic field that gestures toward presence without closure. Spatiality becomes not a description of external form, but a locus of encounter between self and the real.

TABLE 1
COMPARISON OF SPACE AS A PERCEPTUAL ACT

No. Aspect	Vietnamese Zen Poetry	Japanese Haiku
1 Source of perception	Inward: <i>vô tâm</i> , contemplative introspection	Outward: external sensory triggers
2 Nature of space	Metaphysical: dharmic, non-dual	Phenomenological: sensory, embodied
3 Aim of perception	Realization of non-arising insight	Suspension of being in <i>tathatā</i> (suchness)
4 Poetic technique	Semantic silence, aphasia, indirectness	<i>Kireji</i> , minimalism, juxtaposition
5 Language-perception	Dissolution of language to reveal insight	Condensation of language to trigger rupture

Source. Synthesized from Bachelard (1994), Barthes (1970), Merleau-Ponty (2012), Nguyễn (2004, 2014), Shirane (1998), Suzuki (1970), Tuan (1977), and Ueda (1982, 1992).

While both traditions regard poetic space as perceptual, the nature and orientation of that perception diverge in their metaphysical underpinnings and poetic techniques. These divergences are elaborated below.

(b). *Differences*

a. Ontological Divergence: Non-Abiding Space vs. Momentary Presence

The ontological divergence between the two traditions is most apparent in their spatial constructions. Vietnamese Zen poetry treats space as *vô trụ* (non-abiding)—unfixed, unpossessable, and fundamentally empty. Japanese Haiku, by contrast, articulates space through the sudden emergence of a transient perceptual event.

TABLE 2
ONTOLOGICAL DIVERGENCE: “NON-ABIDING SPACE” VS. “MOMENTARY PRESENCE”

No. Aspect	Vietnamese Zen Poetry	Japanese Haiku
1 Nature of space	<i>Non-abiding, formless, unattached</i>	<i>Singular moment of perceptual presence</i>
2 Spatial creation	Arises from no-mind, meditative stillness	Triggered by sensory rupture
3 Temporal ontology	Timeless, cyclic, metaphysically flowing	Ephemeral, punctual, presentist

Source. Developed from Merleau-Ponty (2012), Nguyễn (2004, 2014), Suzuki (1970), Ueda (1982), and Shirane (1998). Concepts of *vô trụ* (non-abiding) and *vô tâm* (no-mind) derive from Zen Buddhist metaphysics, while momentary presence in Haiku aligns with phenomenological ephemerality and *tathatā* (suchness).

Vietnamese Zen spatiality is rooted in Mahāyāna insight, where emptiness is not nihilism but the unfixed locus of awakening (Lý Thái Hư, 1936). Space here is to be realized, not represented. Japanese Haiku, by contrast, reveals space through sonic or visual rupture—a frog’s splash, a falling petal—offering a flash of being within temporal finitude (Shirane, 1998; Heine, 1997).

Zen space emerges from contemplative emptiness (*vô niệm*), collapsing dualistic distinctions and inviting intuitive awareness. Haiku space is generated through external triggers that punctuate the flow of perception—what Shirane (1998) terms a “poetics of rupture.”

Zen’s spatial ontology is cyclical and eternal, aligned with the rhythm of the Dharma. Haiku’s is momentary and incisive—a phenomenological incision into the now.

b. Aesthetic Divergence: Emptiness-as-Feeling vs. Concrete Presence

Aesthetically, Vietnamese Zen poetry and Japanese Haiku differ in their orientation toward the visible and the sayable. Zen poetics privileges “emptiness-as-feeling”—a resonance grounded in silence and ungraspability. Haiku, by contrast, favors concrete presence, capturing the transient world in sharply focused sensory images.

TABLE 3
AESTHETIC DIVERGENCE: EMPTINESS-AS-FEELING VS. CONCRETE PRESENCE

No. Aspect	Vietnamese Zen Poetry	Japanese Haiku
1 Aesthetic principle	Detachment, stillness, non-representation	Vivid imagery, perceptual immediacy
2 Perceptual orientation	Inward: evocation of the ineffable	Outward: perception through concrete stimuli
3 Foundational aesthetics	<i>Śūnyatā</i> , <i>wu wei</i> , ontological fluidity	<i>Wabi-sabi</i> , <i>yūgen</i> , <i>mono no aware</i>

Source. Synthesized from Barthes (1970), Bachelard (1994), Suzuki (1970), Nguyễn (2004, 2014), Shirane (1998), and Ueda (1982, 1992). Key aesthetic concepts such as *śūnyatā* (emptiness), *wu wei* (effortless action), *wabi-sabi* (austere beauty), *yūgen* (mysterious depth), and *mono no aware* (pathos of things) are interpreted within their respective Zen and Haiku traditions.

Zen poetry adheres to metaphysical aesthetics: *śūnyatā* (emptiness), *wu wei* (non-striving), and non-duality. As Lý Thái Hư (1936) emphasized, “form is emptiness, and emptiness is form” (*sắc tức thị không*). Beauty lies in the absence

of assertion—what Nguyễn (2019) calls “ontological stillness.” In Haiku, by contrast, beauty emerges from perceptual exactness—mist, dew, frogs, sandals—capturing *mono no aware*, the poignancy of fleeting things (Shirane, 1998).

Zen poetic space is ungraspable and interior. Haiku space is tactile and exterior. Zen evokes the unmanifest through quietude. Haiku arrests the manifest in a flash.

In sum, Zen spatiality is constructed through spiritual negation and meditative introspection; Haiku’s through perceptual affirmation and aesthetic minimalism. These divergent spatial logics reflect broader differences in how each tradition understands the relationship between being, language, and poetic form.

V. DISCUSSION

A. Overview of Key Findings

The comparative analysis reveals a nuanced spatial poetics in both Vietnamese Zen poetry and Japanese Haiku. Despite their distinct religious and formal genealogies, both traditions converge in treating space not as an external container but as a perceptual field. In each, poetic space arises through immediate awareness—internally generated in Zen, externally triggered in Haiku—aligning with a phenomenological poetics in which language enacts rather than merely describes presence.

This shared orientation is mapped in Table 1, which illustrates how both traditions structure poetic space through perceptual engagement rather than symbolic representation. Vietnamese Zen poetry privileges inner stillness and ontological resonance, while Haiku emphasizes perceptual rupture and sensory minimalism.

Beneath this convergence lie key divergences. Zen poetry articulates a “space of non-abiding” (*vô trụ*): fluid, non-possessive, and metaphysically open. Haiku, by contrast, isolates a transient, embodied moment—concrete, irreducible, and emotionally compressed. As summarized in Table 2, Zen spatiality resists fixation and unfolds across timeless metaphysical fields, while Haiku crystallizes being within a singular perceptual event. Aesthetically, as Table 3 indicates, Zen foregrounds absence and stillness, whereas Haiku captures fleeting presence through compressed sensory imagery. These findings provide a foundation for deeper theoretical engagement.

B. Theoretical Resonances and Implications

These insights resonate with broader theoretical domains, particularly phenomenology, semiotics, and cognitive poetics. Merleau-Ponty (2012) argues that space emerges from embodied perception—a notion mirrored in Zen’s meditative inwardness and Haiku’s sensory immediacy. Bachelard (1994) conceives poetic space as an affective dwelling; both traditions evoke spatial intimacy without relying on narrative scaffolding.

Barthes (1970) characterizes Eastern poetics as a form of “negative semiotics,” where meaning emerges through absence. Zen’s *vô ngôn* and Haiku’s *kireji* or *kigo* function as semantic lacunae, intensifying interpretive engagement. Lotman (1990) views poetic space as a semiotic model of culture: Zen encodes metaphysical non-duality, while Haiku encodes perceptual minimalism. These poetic spaces exemplify distinct yet symmetrical systems of cultural signification.

More crucially, the comparative framework drawn from Tables 1 through 3 confirms that poetic space in both traditions is not descriptive but generative—an ontological field shaped by perceptual orientation. Poetry thus becomes a medium of aesthetic and epistemic cognition rather than a repository of symbolic meanings.

C. Dialogue With Existing Research

Scholarship on Vietnamese Zen poetry (e.g., Trần, 2005; Nguyễn, 2014) has emphasized *vô ngôn* and ontological stillness but has rarely examined spatiality as a central poetic mechanism. This study addresses that lacuna by framing space as a structured perceptual field, open to cross-traditional comparison.

In Haiku studies, Ueda (1992) and Shirane (1998) have explored aesthetic and philosophical dimensions, though seldom through intra-Asian comparative frameworks. By aligning Zen poetry and Haiku, this study constructs a regional paradigm that challenges East–West binaries and repositions Asian poetics within a dialogic global context.

Moreover, the study contributes to emerging discourses in cognitive poetics and phenomenological aesthetics. Rather than treating Zen and Haiku as vessels of spiritual allegory, it interprets them as perceptual instruments that facilitate presence, attention, and resonance. The tables presented in Section 4.3 are integral in formalizing these perceptual grammars, making the spatial logics of Zen and Haiku analytically comparable.

D. Interdisciplinary Applications and Broader Implications

This research suggests four key interdisciplinary applications:

1) Philosophy and Religion. Both traditions enact ontologies of emptiness, impermanence, and immediacy grounded in Buddhist and Daoist cosmologies. The divergence between non-abiding space and momentary presence (Table 2) offers contrasting models of metaphysical time and embodiment.

2) Cognitive Poetics. Poetic form becomes a mechanism for perceptual reconfiguration—reshaping not only what is perceived but how perception unfolds. The comparison in Table 1 underscores the role of attention, silence, and sensory cues in poetic cognition.

3) Cultural Semiotics. Vietnamese Zen poetry and Japanese Haiku offer intra-Asian models of spatial-symbolic articulation within shared philosophical horizons. Table 3 highlights how emptiness and presence are aesthetically encoded through culturally specific yet dialogically resonant tropes.

4) Pedagogy and Creative Practice. The comparative spatial model developed here can inform the teaching of minimalist aesthetics, comparative poetics, and East Asian literature. It invites a mode of poetic inhabitation—one that resonates with presence rather than consumes it. Educators and poets alike may draw upon these frameworks to cultivate attentiveness, restraint, and reverence for the unspoken.

VI. CONCLUSION AND ACADEMIC IMPLICATIONS

A. Conclusion

This study has undertaken a cross-cultural inquiry into the spatial poetics of Vietnamese Zen poetry and Japanese Haiku, grounded in the theoretical frameworks of Merleau-Ponty's (2012) phenomenology, Bachelard's (1994) spatial aesthetics, Lotman's (1990) cultural semiotics, and Barthes's (1970) aesthetics of absence. Through close readings of representative poets—Pháp Thuận, Tuệ Trung, Trần Nhân Tông, and Mãn Giác from Vietnam; Bashō, Buson, Issa, and Shiki from Japan—three interrelated findings emerge.

First, both traditions conceptualize poetic space not as a geometric construct but as a perceptual act. In Vietnamese Zen poetry, spatiality is generated through meditative consciousness, aligning with the Buddhist principle of *vô tâm* (non-mind). In Haiku, it emerges from sensory immediacy, often grounded in seasonal imagery or acoustic cues. Both traditions resonate with Merleau-Ponty's (2012) notion of embodied perception as the basis of spatial experience.

Second, the two traditions diverge ontologically. Vietnamese Zen poetry constructs a “non-abiding space”—unlocalized, metaphysically open, and grounded in non-duality. In contrast, Japanese Haiku presents an “immanent space”—a perceptual field rooted in momentariness and sensory singularity. As demonstrated in Table 1, these ontological differences reveal contrasting models of temporality and presence.

Third, their aesthetic strategies also differ. Zen poetics realizes presence through absence—via negation, aphasia, and semantic quietude—whereas Haiku evokes presence through minimalism and formal condensation. Table 2 highlights this contrast: Vietnamese Zen relies on metaphysical ellipsis, Haiku on perceptual precision. These complementary logics exemplify divergent yet symmetrical modalities of poetic world-making.

B. Scholarly Contributions

This research offers three critical contributions to comparative poetics and literary theory:

1) It theorizes poetic space as a perceptual structure, integrating Eastern ontologies with Western phenomenology and semiotic theory.

2) It repositions Vietnamese Zen poetry as a distinct poetics within East Asia, proposing a dialogic rather than derivative relation with Haiku.

3) It proposes a regional comparative paradigm that displaces the East–West binary, privileging intra-Asian aesthetic diversity.

C. Interdisciplinary Prospects and Future Research

This study's findings extend into multiple disciplinary terrains:

• **Comparative Literature.** It provides a pedagogical model for teaching poetry as spatial and ontological encounter rather than linguistic ornamentation.

• **Translation Studies.** It suggests a perception-centered approach, emphasizing spatial and sensory resonance over strict lexical fidelity.

• **Creative Writing.** It advocates for minimalist and meditative techniques that foreground immediacy, silence, and embodied awareness.

Future research may extend this spatial–perceptual model to:

• Comparative readings between Vietnamese Zen poetry and Tang–Song Chinese verse to explore regional innovation.

• Dialogues between Haiku and Western minimalism (e.g., Pound, Armantrout) to map global aesthetics of space.

• Applications to visual poetry or experimental cinema, examining how poetic space transcends medium boundaries.

Ultimately, this study reconceptualizes poetic space not as background but as a mode of being. The meditative silences of Zen and the luminous instants of Haiku gesture toward a trans-Asian aesthetics in which emptiness is not absence but generative potential—and spatial poetics becomes an ontology of presence.

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