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# Reconfiguring Identity Through Historical Consciousness: A Rüsenian Reading of Vishakanya in Roshani Chokshi's Mythic Fiction

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**Abstract**—Our inherent tendency toward retrospective meaning-making is interrogated through a critical examination of past narratives, which are often shaped by bias and presentist concerns. This paper proposes historical consciousness as an expanded interpretive framework for navigating the present and anticipating the future through engagements with the past. While the transmission of historiography through formal education has been widely examined, comparatively less attention has been paid to the role of fictional narratives in cultivating historical consciousness. Mythic fiction functions as a narrative medium in which myth and history intersect, facilitating the articulation of temporal consciousness while reflecting cultural and historical sensibilities. This study analyses how historical consciousness is mediated through select mythic works by Roshani Chokshi, namely *A Crown of Wishes* (2017) and the short story “Poison and Gold” from *Star-Touched Stories* (2018). The analysis centres on the character Aasha, a Vishakanya, to examine the interplay between cultural memory, temporality, morality, and identity formation. Employing hermeneutic textual analysis, the study explores the reinterpretation of the Vishakanya motif within shifting cultural and historical contexts. The application of Jörn Rüsen's framework demonstrates Aasha's evolving historical consciousness and its implications for psychosocial and moral transformation, shaped by inherited cultural narratives. The findings suggest that mythic fiction operates as a significant narrative site for reinterpreting cultural memory and fostering historical consciousness in contemporary readerships.

**Index Terms**—historical consciousness, temporality, Vishakanya, cultural memory, moral consciousness

## I. INTRODUCTION

In the 21st century, authors retell mythological stories to address contemporary social realities, encouraging readers to reconsider the cultural and historical representations embedded in these narratives. Writers treat myth as a reservoir of belief systems that enable the populace to interpret human complexities within their processes of meaning-making. It is regarded as a distinctive genre that differs from related forms such as legends and fables due to its historical foundations (Cruz & Frijhoff, 2009). Consequently, mythic narratives evoke a sense of historical plausibility among readers while implicitly transmitting cultural memory. Myth and history cannot be regarded as entirely separate domains, as they function as complementary modes of discourse (Heehs, 1994). While myth operates through symbolic narratives and imagery, history attempts to document and interpret factual events.

Biased interpretations have shaped historical accounts, raising questions about one's dependence on such narratives for retrospection. History cannot be regarded as an epistemically neutral domain, as it is constructed according to the needs of different time periods (Frog, 2020). Historical distance presents an additional obstacle, particularly for younger audiences who may find it difficult to establish emotional connections with events from the distant past (Clark & Peck, 2018). The inheritance of experiential dimensions from the past remains complex, as historiography tends to rely on objective premises. Meanwhile, historiography underwent a significant transformation in the 20th century, as scholars increasingly scrutinised grand narratives and replaced them with pluralistic interpretations of history (Seixas, 2012). This shift enabled individuals to infuse their own memories and cultural values into the historicity of communicated narratives. Postmodernist scholarship has challenged conventional methods of acquiring historical knowledge, as various media increasingly fictionalise history.

Understanding past interpretations requires a conceptual framework that maps their intersection with subjective premises rather than merely learning factual accounts of the past (Zanazanian, 2019). The framework of historical consciousness allows individuals to engage with history at a deeper level. “The concept of historical consciousness refers both to the ways people orient themselves in time, and how they are bound by the historical and cultural contexts which shape their sense of temporality and collective memory” (Clark & Peck, 2018, p. 2). It amplifies an individual's ability to interpret the past through practical and ethical choices, thereby denoting one's orientation within social positioning

(Zanazanian, 2019). It provides a critical framework for addressing challenges associated with historical interpretation, including cultural plurality and the instability of identity (Rüsen, 2012).

Mapping the role of historical consciousness through historical fiction foregrounds analytical concerns regarding the interpretive and representational potential of narratives in cultural and historical contexts (Curthoys, 2011; Abdigapbarova, 2020). In this context, mythic fiction serves as an alternative medium through which the legitimacy of transmitted historical knowledge can be questioned. It tends to portray universal contingencies through symbolic storytelling, an aspect that remains limited in factual narratives. Such discourse provides a functional paradigm for evaluating the interaction between cultural memory and temporal consciousness. Mythic retellings represent adapted versions of culturally distant narratives that are reinterpreted within contemporary contexts. They carry temporality in ways that restore lived experiences, which eventually kindle collective identity (Cruz & Frijhoff, 2009). The emotional ethos inherent in mythic storytelling revitalises the cultural and historical zeitgeist that conventional historiography may not fully capture.

Existing scholarship on historical sensibility has largely been confined to historiography and educational pedagogy. While existing research highlights the role of historical media, limited attention has been paid to deconstructing mythic fiction as a medium for cultivating historical consciousness within specific cultural contexts. History education requires embedding awareness of an individual's ontological positioning, as such awareness significantly influences how individuals interpret their identities within narrated historical frameworks (Seixas, 2012). This necessitates further scholarly attention to illustrate how past narratives inform one's social positioning through specific characters in fiction.

Contemporary writers fuse mythic or legendary narratives with historical crises, thereby portraying ancient stories as forms of historical experience (Hossain, 2024). The works of Roshani Chokshi integrate mythological elements with historical sensibilities by situating legendary figures within narrative frameworks. Existing studies of these texts focus on uncovering archetypal elements and the fusion of cultural dimensions within mythic space (Pallapati, 2018; Chitra, 2024). The portrayal of Vishakanya in these works provides a narrative lens for analysing the dynamics of historical consciousness, as the figure is often associated with historical imagination. Vishakanyas are described as "poison maidens" who acquired immunity to toxic substances through the practice of mithridatism. According to certain historical accounts, young girls with unfavourable horoscopes were trained to become poisonous courtesans capable of alluring political rivals. Thus far, Vishakanya has rarely been subjected to qualitative literary analysis. This study examines the dissemination of historical consciousness through the mythic fictions *A Crown of Wishes* (2017) and the short story "Poison and Gold" from *Star-Touched Stories* (2018). It focuses on the representation of the legendary figure Vishakanya, whose narrative trajectory reflects the negotiation between identity, inherited traditions, and individual agency.

The typology of Jörn Rüsen conceptualises historical consciousness as an ontogenetic process operating at the level of individual cognition and moral reasoning (Rüsen, 2004). His framework explicates the role of pre-established narratives in shaping an individual's understanding of reality (Zanazanian, 2019). It outlines four modes of historical interpretation: traditional, exemplary, critical, and genetic. These modes represent progressive ways in which individuals interpret historical experiences and integrate them into their understanding of the present and future. This theoretical framework functions as a guiding structure that informs human activity and establishes meaningful connections across temporal dimensions (Rüsen, 2004). The paper addresses the following research questions:

- How can mythic fiction function as a medium for conveying historical consciousness?
- What role does historical consciousness play in the identity formation of Vishakanya in the selected fiction?
- How does historical consciousness contribute to moral consciousness and psychosocial development?

The study adopts a qualitative interpretive approach to analyse traces of historical consciousness in the representation of Vishakanya within selected mythic fiction. Roshani Chokshi's works, *A Crown of Wishes* (2017) and the short story "Poison and Gold" from *Star-Touched Stories* (2018), are selected for analysis. These texts reinterpret the legendary figure Vishakanya through the character Aasha and provide narrative contexts in which historical sensibilities can be explored. Applying Jörn Rüsen's typology to Vishakanya's trajectory reveals the dynamics involved in negotiating individual social positioning in relation to inherited narratives of the past. The study employs hermeneutic textual analysis to interpret the selected texts. It begins with close reading, leading to the identification of thematic codes related to the portrayal of Vishakanya. This is followed by a contextual analysis of Aasha within historical and psychosocial frameworks across different stages of the theoretical model. The analysis explores the relationship between identity formation and moral awareness as represented in mythic narratives. The study further investigates how historical consciousness may influence the development of psychosocial attitudes and moral awareness within a literary framework.

The objective of the study is to emphasise the significance of temporal frameworks in shaping individual experience, as reflected in the trajectory of Vishakanya's psychosocial development and moral consciousness. The study posits mythic fiction as a potent narrative medium for representing past conventions, thereby fostering a critical reconsideration of historical understanding.

## II. DISCUSSION

### A. Narrative Reconfiguration of Vishakanya in Roshani Chokshi's Works

Modern and postmodern writers have amplified myths through techniques such as satire, parody, and allegory to address social failings. Roshani Chokshi is one such writer who has retold Indian mythological narratives that exist at the fringes of grand narratives. She employs the genre of fantasy to integrate cultural and historical references in her works, treating them as entities that gain meaning through characters' experiences. She states in her course, namely *The Muse, the Myth, the Legend: Storytelling from Start to Finish*, "we do not read a book set in World War I because trench warfare makes us feel some way. The setting is a powerful anchor in a story, but what is anchoring is the emotional magnitude of the characters' choices" (Chokshi, 2025, 00.06.58).

The selected works for this study illustrate the aforementioned narrative approach. The analysis focuses on the Vishakanya named Aasha in the selected works of Chokshi. In *A Crown of Wishes*, the protagonists Gauri, Vikram, and Aasha participate in a magical tournament, while Aasha, a Vishakanya, seeks the possibility of experiencing human life (Pallapati, 2018). "Poison and Gold" from *Star-Touched Stories* presents Aasha's struggle between complicit self-acceptance and her desire for freedom, as she attempts to live as a human within the Bharata empire (Chitra, 2024). The character's movement between human and otherworldly realms functions as a liminal narrative space in which understandings of history are reshaped to become interpretive, active, and ethically engaged. Mythic spaces perform varied roles, serving as social boundaries among humans and as sites of supernatural agency in the Otherworld (Frog, 2020). The use of liminal space enables Chokshi to subvert traditional stereotypes and to give voice to marginalised representations of certain mythological figures. The representation of Vishakanya in the selected works diverges from culturally rooted narratives, as she is portrayed as seeking liberation from imposed identity and constrained agency.

In historical and legendary narratives, Vishakanyas are typically represented as poisonous young women employed as instruments of execution within royal courts of ancient India. They are described as using various methods to kill, including fatal glances, poisonous breath, perspiration, bites, and sexual contact (Penzer, 1952). References to such figures appear in multiple narrative and artistic traditions, including the Puranas and historical murals (Jain, 2017). Historical discourse has produced varied accounts regarding the existence of Vishakanyas. The political intrigue of the Mauryan Empire is depicted in the Sanskrit play *Mudrarakshasa*, which records that Chanakya employed a Vishakanya to assassinate King Parvatak (Modi, 1929). Similarly, *Gesta Romanorum* describes a Vishakanya as an agent sent to assassinate Alexander.

In these ancient narratives, Vishakanyas are portrayed as paradoxical figures embodying both power and vulnerability. This symbolic duality provides a critical lens for interpreting the figure in contemporary retellings. In contrast, Roshani Chokshi reimagines the Vishakanya as a resistant subject who challenges imposed roles, as the character actively seeks to reconstruct her agency within the framework of human experience.

### B. Historical Consciousness Through the Trajectories of Jörn Rüsen

Chokshi unfolds the repressed emotions and desires of Vishakanya within the socio-cultural context. In a live interaction with Chokshi, she states the reason for injecting human desires into the character Vishakanya: "I was always taken by this idea that a woman who is raised to be a weapon, I wanted to know what she would feel like as a woman" (R. Chokshi, personal communication, February 15, 2025). Aasha's transformation is interpreted through four stages, namely, traditional, exemplary, critical, and genetic, as laid out by Jörn Rüsen. The following analysis mirrors how Aasha's journey reflects a progression in historical consciousness. Preconditions noted in the character, which track the transition to subsequent stages, are also mentioned.

#### (a). Adherence to Traditionality and Ethnic Customs

The traditional type denotes the preservation of inherited traditions and emphasises continuity with the past as a means of legitimising present actions. Traditions derived from past actuality are considered significant extensions of the present and future. Aasha and her sisters preserve their customs by being adept in dance, poetry, philosophy, singing, and seduction, which they use to trade in the market of the Otherworld. They allure humans with deep-seated desires and entice them into their unconscious through beauty or seduction. Aasha's adherence to traditions mirrors her conformity to the obligations of heritage, reflecting her relational identity with her sisters. Individuals who use the past as material to configure their present provide the temporal matrix for one's relational self (Rüsen, 2004). Similarly, Aasha's conformity to the traditions stands as an anchor to guide her actions and decisions during her stay in the Otherworld. The secret desire of Aasha to live a human life is the main precondition for progressing through subsequent stages that shape identity, as reflected in the following line,

A living nightmare that snapped her joy. What was that life she had been denied? Maybe it would have been short, but at least it would be hers. But no one cared that she desperately wanted to touch someone and feel their pulse rising to her fingertips and not their life withering at her touch. (Chokshi, 2017, p. 119)

This line conveys the emotional weight of Aasha, which is instilled by the restrained pressure to conform to existing conventions. The constructivist viewpoint treats emotions as performative acts embedded in shared narratives, and their regulation strengthens the moral self (Gergen, 1998). Aasha's emotional regulation aligns her morale by upholding her

siblings' legacy. Amidst this ambivalence, her love for her sisters dominates her desires, and this psychic state serves as the precondition for the subsequent stage.

Continuity of traditions extends to the exemplary type, which involves interpreting past experiences as guiding models for current behaviour, with emphasis given to morality. In this stage, individuals treat past narratives as a medium to establish guidelines for human conduct. Here, tradition is used as an empirical reference to derive a message or lesson for the present. Aasha's actions reveal her loyalty and commitment towards her ancestry, despite the repression of her desires. Her partial disclosure of information regarding the way to exit the Otherworld to the protagonists denotes the norm of maintaining secrecy to avoid eagerness and anticipation. The decision to impart the secret in a conscious manner reflects the moral stance derived from customs. Historical consciousness serves as a hidden machinery that links learned values to current dilemmas (Rüsen, 2004). The explained incident serves as an example to indicate how Aasha is reminded of her bond with lineage to introspect her dilemmas. Aasha confronts her internal desires in a disguised manner, as she is invited to the human world by Gauri. This depicts the 'Call to Adventure' phase of Campbell's hero's journey. When she faces the question of leaving her sisters, the protagonist refuses, explaining that she cannot survive as a Vishakanya in Gauri's place by compromising her innate nature.

Her negotiated agency is defined by the conflict between the manifestation of internal desires and her external actions to maintain harmony in her surroundings. This negotiation stems from the impact of historical consciousness, as it integrates empirical constraints of the past with a longing for a better future, which implies that the self is continuously configured according to existing needs (Seixas, 2012). Aasha tends to handle the dilemma posed by her personal desires, though she gives primary importance to adhering to the conventions of her community. According to psychoanalytic theory, repressed desires are locked inside the unconscious mind to safeguard oneself from anxiety. Conscientious behaviour overshadows one's internal desires, which might be triggered later. Repression of Aasha's desire is reflected in the line given below,

Night after night, she would unspool a person's desire, slaking her hunger and trying to forget that the moment the beings left her arms, they would touch someone they loved, place food upon their tongue that would keep flavour and never turn to ash, maybe even sink their hands into the dirt simply because they could. (Chokshi, 2017, p. 181)

The moral dilemma she confronts after her encounter with humans also serves as a prior initiation into choosing life, driven by desire and curiosity. Despite her loyalty and endearing attachment to her sisters, the desire to experience human vitality grows stronger within her, serving as the precondition for the next stage.

*(b). Disruption of Ancestral Continuity and Its Reconfiguration Within Contemporary Contexts*

The continuity of established norms and belief systems gets ruptured in the critical type. Limitations posed by inherited values lead to questioning the validity of traditional conventions, and this leads an individual to disengage from inherited traditions. It allows an individual to develop a sense of otherness, enabling them to stand against binding commitments. The critical stage emerges when Aasha begins to question the limitations imposed by her inherited identity. Aasha has always carried reluctance about her magical abilities, which allows her inner desire to catalyse resistance. The significant realisation that makes her take the pivotal decision of leaving her identity as a Vishakanya is given below,

Knowledge and curiosity would never brush against her mind. She would only know an enclosure of silk and poison. She would know only the desires of others and nothing of her own. In a hundred years, perhaps the Vishakanya magic would ebb little by little, turning them human once more if they lived that long. (Chokshi, 2017, p. 323)

Aasha's desire to become human signals a departure from unquestioned acceptance of tradition. It also resolves the dilemmas she has been carrying, and she prioritises her desires by negotiating her state of existence. In the human world, Aasha struggles with complexities due to her unfamiliarity with the customs of the Bharata empire, which turns out to be an intriguing experience for her. In Aasha's quest for self-discovery and independence, she experiences anxiety about carrying her innate abilities as a Vishakanya, such as her allure to feed on humans. She eventually confronts an affective burden due to the vulnerability that arises from her twofold nature. The historical past is often imbued with emotional charge and mobilised through negotiating oneself and addressing contemporary concerns (Pihlainen, 2013). It paves the way for internal conflict between an individual's abilities and the pressure to conform to established conventions. This conflict is mirrored in Aasha's struggles to reconcile her identity as a Vishakanya within the constraints of societal expectations. Aasha gets excited to explore her sensibilities as a human; in contrast, she gets petrified by her toxic instincts, which she finds hard to control.

Aasha is sent to the tower of the Spy Mistress to receive the required training for becoming the ideal successor. The challenges she faces during her training period evoke her susceptibility. Aasha entrusts Zahril, the previous Spy Mistress of the Bharata Empire, but their incompatibility deepens her ambivalence. Her vulnerability initially leads her to violate the norms established by Zahril, and these challenges pave the way for her to identify her true self. Aasha questions her nature as a Vishakanya, and various human emotions influence her growing resistance to her identity. This interrogation of her nurtured customs serves as the precondition for the subsequent stage.

The genetic stage represents a dynamic understanding of historical change, where individuals reinterpret the past in relation to evolving contexts, thereby enabling adaptive transformation. In this stage, an individual's past is revisited to navigate current situations, as Aasha reflects on her experiences to understand how they shape her identity. Accepting

transformation becomes a necessary condition for sustaining the continuity of the past alongside the present. Aasha's journey of overcoming her insecurities leads her to embrace her true identity, instilling in her self-awareness and competence. Later, she realises that her true identity helps her overcome fears and control her abilities, which is encoded in the following line, "But now she saw that the key to controlling her abilities was simply to be herself. That the very act of freeing herself from trying to be anyone but herself had released the grip of her worst fears" (Chokshi, 2018, p. 202). The series of insecurities that Aasha encounters in the Spy Mistress tower makes her understand the value and richness of being a Vishakanya.

She relies on the skills and instincts she has acquired in the Otherworld as a Vishakanya to survive in the human world. During her final examination of navigating the right path in a chaotic environment, she uses available resources and her previous experiences to solve the riddle. Prioritising desire leads Aasha to attain self-acceptance, which stands as the root of her transformation. When Aasha returns to the Bharata empire, she comprehends her significant role in the court's political dynamics. Her empathy and ability to connect with others make her feel valued and appreciated, despite the distance from her sisters. Aasha realises the value of holding on to her identity, which is intertwined with her emotional and behavioural responses. Her self-reclamation occurs through an understanding of her strengths and weaknesses, which denotes an optimistic transformation. Liberation from the illusion of romanticising past conventions is intertwined with the acknowledgement of their continuous reconfiguration in the present (Pihlainen, 2013). Parallel comparisons between Aasha's present and her past serve as a catalyst for shedding her sense of inferiority. Aasha's acknowledgement of her origins deepens her understanding of identity and agency as she adapts to new possibilities. Her adaptation to the current environment in which she resides, while maintaining a hold on her roots, indicates her competence and flexibility.

### C. Interpretive Synthesis and Psychosocial Implications of Historical Consciousness

Fiction does more than merely narrate past events; it reaffirms collective identity through a presentist impression and showcases how the represented character might respond to contemporary contingencies (White, 2005). Similarly, analysing Vishakanya through the lens of historical premises parallels the experiences of oppressed women seeking liberation amidst patriarchal constraints, guided by experiential learning. Analysing the historical consciousness of Aasha maps out the array of psychosocial traits that account for the maturation of consciousness. The progression of her character demonstrates that identity formation evolves through continuous negotiation between past experiences and present aspirations. The accompanying psychosocial traits identified in the analysis of Aasha are illustrated below.

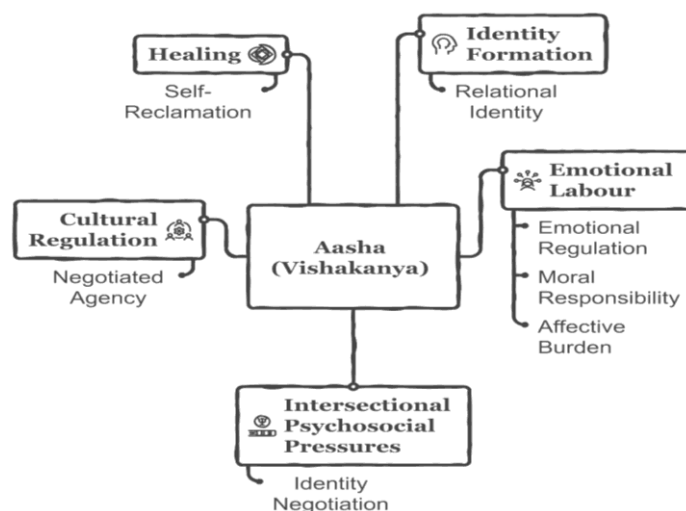


Figure 1. Psychosocial Attitudes of the Character Aasha

Iterations of psychosocial attitudes across various stages of historical consciousness elucidate that identity is not a static element and that its formation is not a linear progression. In Aasha's journey, resistance is observed twice through the paths of individuation. One instance occurs when she exercises her autonomy, and the other is noted in the trials that she confronts in the Spy Mistress's tower due to internal conflict. Sustained emotional labour has refurbished her former self by acknowledging the value of her ethnic roots. Aasha's identity and understanding of reality evolve through the resurfacing of emotional and moral dilemmas. The historical consciousness of an individual is rejuvenated through emotional dilemmas and resistance. The inherited past tends to question one's identity when it clashes with personal will.

Moral consciousness is the primary psychosocial aspect that is intertwined with historical reasoning. It is harnessed through values that are assimilated with the apprehension of past actuality (Gergen, 1998). Likewise, Aasha's morality is intertwined with her gratitude for her clan and its customs, which prompts her to reflect on her past in times of uncertainty. Her moral reasoning aligns with her social positioning, as evinced by her preservation and expression of attitudes derived from her dual identity. Thus, the accumulation of moral reasoning stems from historical memory, which relies on the representation of the past. By reflecting on the influence of customary conventions in past experiences, individuals

develop the ability to reinterpret them in an informed manner and make reasoned decisions (Seixas, 2012). Aasha's historical consciousness aids her in actively redefining identity, alongside the acceptance of established traditions. For every individual, embracing past legacy becomes a necessary stipulation for mobilising moral consciousness in one's actions, as it binds past actuality with present values (Rüsen, 2004).

Myths act as a durable medium that conveys the past as a collective experience, imbued with truth as an indispensable quality (Cruz & Frijhoff, 2009). This study validates mythic fiction as an instrumental factor in sharpening the sense of temporality through the analysis of historical consciousness. Chokshi's representation of Vishakanya illustrates the role of contemporary literature in challenging mythological stereotypes while raising questions about broader concerns such as history, identity, and cultural memory. The impact of historical consciousness on Aasha reveals the psychosocial attitudes involved in identity formation. The study tends to elevate the interpretive relevance of myths in the posthuman era by integrating historical consciousness with mythic fiction. Therefore, it stands as a contribution to mythic discourse and to the study of the legendary figure Vishakanya.

### III. CONCLUSION

Tracing Aasha's historical consciousness through different stages reveals her development from imbibing her heritage to acknowledging her identity and personal agency. The study demonstrates how an individual internalises temporal sensibility by configuring representations of the past to navigate present complexities. Application of Jörn Rüsen's typology to Aasha highlights her attachment to cultural heritage and transmitted values associated with the Vishakanya lineage. The initial stages reflect her internalisation of communal traditions and her sense of loyalty to the collective identity she shares with her sisters. However, the growing uncertainty surrounding her inherited legacy marks a transition into the critical stage, in which she begins to question the cultural assumptions that define her existence. Tension between Aasha's heteronomous self and personal aspiration exposed her to psychological conflict. It is resolved at the genetic stage as Aasha reconciles with her historical heritage, acknowledging her individuality.

Within this framework, mythic fiction emerges as a powerful medium for illuminating the relationship between historical consciousness and personal identity. Though mythic fiction is considered the least reliable source for understanding history, it could be credible for depicting the climate of the past and its cultural sensibilities. Chokshi's representation of Vishakanyas deviates from portraying them as female agents used solely for political affairs by foregrounding Aasha's struggle with the nature of her existence. Through this representation, she emerges as an individual capable of negotiating tensions between tradition and self-determination.

This study is a contribution to existing scholarship on historical consciousness, as it addresses a research problem situated within historiography and educational pedagogy. This paper also attempts to analyse the representation of Vishakanya, the character who is rarely subjected to analysis. It does not insist on mythic fiction as the ideal medium for the propagation of historical awareness. Rather, it highlights its interpretive potential in fostering reflective engagement with cultural memory. Consequently, the stages in Rüsen's typology are not to be understood as rigid psychological phases experienced uniformly by individuals, but as analytical categories that illuminate diverse modes of engaging with the past. The study is limited to the revelation of associated psychosocial attributes with regard to Aasha and does not indulge in the analysis of psychic nuances associated with the progression of temporality. The scope of this study is limited to the textual analysis of selected works, focusing specifically on the character Aasha as a narrative embodiment of temporality.

The findings indicate that mythic fiction functions as a narrative medium that showcases the interconnection between cultural memory and contemporary social concerns. Mythic discourse can be employed in classrooms, which enables the learners to track the influence of imbibed past narratives in shaping their actions and decisions. Future research may extend this inquiry by examining Aasha's depersonalisation in her efforts to balance historical lineage and flexibility with contemporariness. The study, therefore, affirms the analytical significance of mythic fiction as a narrative medium through which historical consciousness, identity formation and moral consciousness can be critically reinterpreted within contemporary literary discourse.

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# Affective and Motivational Dynamics in Peer Scaffolding for Academic Writing Among Vietnamese University EFL Students

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**Abstract**—Grounded in Sociocultural Theory (SCT), this mixed-method study investigates the underexplored emotional and motivational dimensions of peer scaffolding in academic writing among Vietnamese EFL university students. Addressing the dominance of cognitively oriented research, the study examines learners' perceptions and experiences of affective support in collaborative writing. Data were collected through surveys (N=150), interviews (N=20), and observations of peer interactions (10 dyads). Findings reveal a strong shared perception of the emotional value of peer scaffolding ( $M = 4.19/5$ ) and identify a two-layer support system combining dynamic peer motivation and emotional support, forming an Emotional ZPD that facilitates cognitive risk-taking. However, Confucian face-saving norms simultaneously foster harmony and constrain critical feedback. The study advances SCT by operationalizing *perezhivanie* and extending the concept of Emotional ZPD with pedagogical implications for similar EFL contexts.

**Index Terms**—sociocultural theory, peer scaffolding, Emotional ZPD, academic writing, Confucian heritage values

## I. INTRODUCTION

Peer scaffolding, an extension of the broader concept of scaffolding (Donato, 1994; Wood et al., 1976) grounded in Sociocultural Theory (SCT), is widely recognized as a powerful mechanism in second language (L2) writing (Lantolf & Poehner, 2023; Storch, 2002). Previous studies have documented its cognitive and strategic functions, including idea development, error correction, and feedback exchange (Chairinkam & Yawiloeng, 2021; Tinggie et al., 2023; Zhang et al., 2023). However, the equally important emotional and motivational dimensions of peer scaffolding have received far less scholarly attention and are often treated as peripheral affective variables rather than as central mediating processes.

This neglect is especially evident in educational settings shaped by Confucian Heritage Culture (CHC), such as Vietnam. Values such as social harmony, respect for hierarchy, and face (*mianzi*) strongly influence classroom interaction (Phan, 2020; Rošker, 2017). To maintain good relationships, students may prioritize group harmony over open disagreement and direct critique. As a result, the emotional fabric of peer interaction - the extent to which students feel safe, encouraged, and motivated by one another - may be a major predictor of the richness and effectiveness of cognitive collaboration. Vygotsky's notion of *perezhivanie*, understood as the emotionally charged experience through which individuals interpret

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and internalize their social environment, provides an important theoretical lens for this study (Cong-Lem, 2023; Veresov et al., 2024). Accordingly, this study asks: How do Vietnamese EFL university students perceive and experience the emotional and motivational dimensions of peer scaffolding in collaborative academic writing?

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

### A. *The Affective Turn in SCT and L2 Learning*

Although early SCT work emphasized cognitive mediation through language and tools (Vygotsky, 1978; Le, 2021), recent scholarship has renewed attention to its affective dimension through the concept of *perezhivanie* (Cong-Lem, 2023; Garcia & Pan, 2023; Veresov et al., 2024). *Perezhivanie* refers to the indivisible unity of personal characteristics and environmental conditions, with emotion serving as the prism through which social experience is interpreted and internalized (Cong-Lem, 2023). From this perspective, anxiety, confidence, and motivation are not merely background variables in L2 learning; rather, they are integral to how learners engage with and benefit from mediation (Tian & McCafferty, 2022). In the present study, peer interaction offers a psychologically safer space in which learners can exchange ideas, receive support, and participate in academic writing in culturally sensitive and emotionally meaningful ways. Peer scaffolding therefore operates not only at the cognitive level but also at the emotional level of writing development.

### B. *Peer Scaffolding Beyond Cognitive Strategies*

Previous research has carefully described strategic behaviors in peer scaffolding during writing, including questioning, suggesting, and correcting (Chairinkam & Yawiloeng, 2021; Nguyen, 2013; Saadat & Zahed Alavi, 2020; Tinggie et al., 2023). More recent work has begun to identify affective scaffolding as a distinct dimension that can reduce anxiety and sustain engagement (Zhang et al., 2023). Related studies also suggest that acknowledging peers' contributions can support motivation during interaction (Chairinkam & Yawiloeng, 2021). Nevertheless, most of this scholarship still treats emotion as only one category among many, rather than examining emotional and motivational support as underlying processes that shape all other forms of scaffolding - especially in contexts where social-emotional relations are highly valued. Understanding the role of emotion and motivation in language learning is therefore both timely and necessary (Reeve, 2024). The present study responds to this need by examining how emotional and motivational processes are intertwined with linguistic cognition in collaborative academic writing.

### C. *Cultural Context: Confucian Heritage Culture and Learning Emotions*

In CHC classrooms, the socio-emotional climate plays a central role. Students may hesitate to disagree openly because they wish to preserve harmony and avoid causing others to lose face, which can constrain critical peer feedback (Phan, 2020; Zhang & Gao, 2023). At the same time, this cultural framework promotes strong group values in which mutual support and collective success are highly appreciated (Rošker, 2017; Tuan & Anh, 2023). This creates a paradox: the same cultural orientation that supports cooperation may also inhibit the incisive critique often needed for academic writing development. Understanding how affective scaffolding operates within this tension is therefore essential.

### D. *Related Studies*

Peer scaffolding is widely recognized as a central process in L2 academic writing, rooted in SCT and the Zone of Proximal Development, where learners can achieve more through socially mediated interaction than they can independently (Vygotsky, 1978; Lantolf & Poehner, 2023). Much of the existing literature has mapped cognitive and interactive strategies, coding behaviors such as questioning, suggesting, elaborating, agreeing, and repairing linguistic errors, all of which support idea co-construction, language development, and text refinement (e.g., Saadat & Zahed Alavi, 2020; Chairinkam & Yawiloeng, 2021; Tinggie et al., 2023). Another line of work has examined the effects of peer scaffolding on writing accuracy, fluency, coherence, and organization (e.g., Zohrevandi et al., 2024; Axrorova, 2025). In Vietnam, peer scaffolding has also been associated with increased interest, motivation, and collaboration in writing classes (Nguyen et al., 2025).

More recently, researchers have begun to move beyond cognitive dimensions and to foreground affective and motivational variables. For example, Zhang et al. (2023) distinguish cognitive, behavioral, and affective scaffolding, with the latter reducing anxiety, providing encouragement, and enhancing motivation. Related studies report decreases in writing anxiety (Chairinkam & Yawiloeng, 2021), increases in confidence and motivation (Axrorova, 2025), and lower anxiety through peer questioning even at lower proficiency levels (Tinggie et al., 2023). In Vietnam, Nguyen et al. (2025) found that collaborative writing increased students' interest and motivation, although fear of losing face remained a constraint. Mohammad Hosseinpour et al. (2024) further showed that strategic L1 use in peer interaction can reduce anxiety and support thinking.

However, findings are not uniformly positive. Peungcharoenkun and Waluyo (2024), for instance, found that although students appreciated peer feedback at an emotional level, affective engagement did not lead to a significant improvement in writing outcomes. This suggests that the relationship between emotional support and writing development may be more complex and indirect than is often assumed.

### E. *Identified Research Gaps*

Despite this progress, important gaps remain, especially in relation to Vietnamese EFL undergraduates. First, there is a gap in our understanding of learners' lived experience. Most previous studies report the presence or effects of affective factors, such as reduced anxiety, but they do not sufficiently explore students' inner worlds. We know that emotional support matters, yet we still know too little about how Vietnamese students actually experience such support, what kinds of emotional assistance they value, how their motivation changes during collaboration, and how emotions such as anxiety, safety, or excitement are co-constructed during peer work.

Second, there is a gap concerning the operational mechanisms and roles of the emotion-motivation system in peer scaffolding. Although researchers such as Zhang et al. (2023) identify affective scaffolding as a category, its internal mechanisms remain underexplained. Emotional and motivational support should not be treated as a simple checklist of behaviors. Rather, it may function as an interconnected system that builds trust, sustains effort through moments of stagnation, and creates a psychologically safe space in which learners can take intellectual risks. Clarifying these mechanisms is necessary for theorizing what this study terms an Emotional ZPD.

Third, there is a context-specific gap related to Vietnamese higher education and CHC. Although international scholarship acknowledges culture and Vietnamese studies mention barriers such as fear of losing face, few studies have systematically examined how Confucian values shape the emotional fabric of peer scaffolding in Vietnam. Important questions therefore remain: How do collectivism, harmony, respect, and face influence students' perceptions and behaviors? Do these values encourage affirmation and support while discouraging direct critique? How do students manage the tension between maintaining good relationships and meeting the academic need for critical engagement? Without such insight, models of scaffolding developed in Western settings may not fully capture the nuances of supportive processes in Vietnamese collectivist classrooms.

Overall, this study is motivated by three interrelated gaps: (1) insufficient attention to students' subjective experiences and perceptions; (2) limited analysis of the operational mechanisms and underlying roles of emotional-motivational support in scaffolding; and (3) limited understanding of how these dynamics are shaped by the Vietnamese higher-education context. By addressing these gaps, the study contributes to SCT and scaffolding theory while offering culturally sensitive insights for designing more effective collaborative writing activities in Vietnamese EFL classrooms.

### III. METHODOLOGY

#### A. Research Design

This study employed a convergent parallel mixed-methods design (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018) to obtain a multidimensional and relatively holistic account of emotional and motivational peer scaffolding in academic writing. This design enabled the simultaneous collection and analysis of quantitative and qualitative data, followed by the integration of findings to produce a richer and more persuasive explanation of the phenomenon.

#### B. Research Context

The research was conducted in the natural context of a third-year mandatory Academic Writing course for English majors at a top-ranking state university in Central Vietnam, thereby ensuring contextual authenticity and enhancing transferability.

#### C. Participants

The quantitative phase involved 150 students. The demographic profile was predominantly female (92.7%), and most participants were at the upper-intermediate (B2) level of English proficiency according to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) (72.7%).

From this group, 20 students were purposively selected for in-depth interviews to generate qualitative data. In addition, 10 pairs of students identified as symmetrical peers in terms of academic performance were audio-recorded during collaborative writing activities to capture naturally occurring interaction.

#### D. Instruments and Data Collection Procedures

Three main data-collection instruments were used. First, a questionnaire based on a 5-point Likert scale measured students' perceptions of the emotional and motivational impact of peer scaffolding (e.g., stress reduction, confidence enhancement, and motivation maintenance). The instrument was piloted and demonstrated excellent internal consistency (Cronbach's  $\alpha = .938$ ).

Second, 20 semi-structured interviews, each lasting 30–45 minutes, were conducted to explore in depth students' lived experiences, personal narratives, and subjective interpretations of giving and receiving emotional-motivational support.

Third, classroom observation was conducted through audio-recording 10 pair-work sessions, each lasting 90 minutes, in order to collect data on natural verbal and non-verbal interactions across the three writing stages: pre-writing, while-writing, and post-writing.

#### E. Data Analysis

Data were analyzed separately by type before the findings were integrated. For the survey data, descriptive statistics (e.g., means and standard deviations) were calculated to describe general trends. A one-sample t-test was then used to

compare the observed mean score with the neutral midpoint in order to determine whether students' overall perceptions were significantly positive.

For the qualitative data, all interview and observation recordings were transcribed verbatim and analyzed using thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke (2006). The analytic process involved familiarization with the data, initial coding, theme searching, theme review, theme definition and naming, and report writing. The resulting themes focused on the manifestations, mechanisms, and meanings of emotional-motivational support.

To enhance trustworthiness, the study used strict data triangulation by comparing, contrasting, and integrating findings across all three data sources - survey, interviews, and observations. This procedure enabled cross-verification and supported the development of a robust and holistic explanation of the research question.

#### IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

##### A. Social Consensus on Emotional Value

Findings from the 150 valid survey responses indicate a strong social consensus regarding the importance of peer scaffolding. The mean score on the 5-point Likert scale was high ( $M = 4.19$ ,  $SD = 0.45$ ), showing substantial agreement among participants. A one-sample t-test confirmed that this mean was significantly higher than the neutral midpoint of 3.0,  $t(149) = 35.522$ ,  $p < .001$ , with a 95% confidence interval for the mean difference ranging from 1.13 to 1.27. This result provides a strong empirical basis for arguing that positive emotional responses to collaborative interaction are not isolated cases but a broadly shared norm in this learning context.

TABLE 1  
EMOTION & MOTIVATION IN PEER SCAFFOLDING ACROSS WRITING STAGES

| Stage         | Statement                                                                         | Mean | SD   | Emotional and Motivational Values                                                                                                                    |
|---------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------|------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Pre-writing   | Brainstorming with peers helps generate more ideas.                               | 4.43 | 0.73 | Positive Emotion & Initial Motivation: Reduces blockage, increases creative excitement, provides momentum to start a difficult task.                 |
| Post-writing  | I can self-correct better thanks to peer feedback.                                | 4.42 | 0.63 | Confidence & Intrinsic Motivation: Reduces anxiety about quality, increases sense of competence and desire for perfection.                           |
| Post-writing  | I recognize errors and accumulate experience from peer suggestions.               | 4.42 | 0.64 | Confidence & Learning Motivation: Reduces fear of mistakes, increases awareness of progress, promotes a learning spirit.                             |
| While-writing | I learn more relevant vocabulary from peers.                                      | 4.31 | 0.71 | Sense of Competence: Accumulating language tools increases feelings of readiness and progress.                                                       |
| Pre-writing   | I understand the writing requirements more clearly when discussing with peers.    | 4.29 | 0.66 | Reduced Insecurity & Confidence: Eliminates initial ambiguity, creates a solid psychological foundation to begin.                                    |
| Post-writing  | Peer feedback helps improve the next draft.                                       | 4.30 | 0.70 | Improvement Motivation: Seeing a clear path for progress sustains effort across drafts.                                                              |
| Post-writing  | I learn editing procedures and how to avoid errors by working with peers.         | 4.32 | 0.67 | Reduced Anxiety & Procedural Confidence: Grasping the "how-to" reduces fear of complex rules.                                                        |
| While-writing | I understand my writing more deeply through peers' opinions and suggestions.      | 4.15 | 0.87 | Exploratory Motivation: Sustains interest and curiosity throughout the writing process.                                                              |
| Pre-writing   | I know how to outline more effectively after exchanging with peers.               | 4.25 | 0.61 | Reduced Confusion & Structural Confidence: Clear direction, reduces feeling overwhelmed by a blank page.                                             |
| While-writing | I gradually become familiar with writing skills through each stage of group work. | 4.00 | 0.92 | Incremental Motivation: Sensing systematic development sustains commitment.                                                                          |
| While-writing | I manage writing time more effectively when collaborating.                        | 3.83 | 0.94 | Limitation of Affective Scaffolding: Weaker impact on pure self-regulatory skills, highlighting focus on direct psychological and cognitive support. |
| Overall       | Overall perception of the value of peer scaffolding.                              | 4.19 | 0.45 | Strong Social Consensus: Affirms the prominent value of collaboration in shaping positive emotional experiences and learning motivation.             |

The survey results (composite mean = 4.19/5) not only confirm generally positive perceptions of peer scaffolding but also suggest an emotional-motivational mediation mechanism that is consistent with SCT. The highest-scoring items illustrate this clearly. Brainstorming with peers (4.43) did not simply provide cognitive support; it transformed personal blockage into shared creativity, thereby energizing task initiation. Similarly, the high ratings for self-correction and learning from errors in the post-writing stage (4.42) indicate that peer feedback reduced evaluation anxiety and strengthened confidence, which in turn supported intrinsic motivation to improve. These findings suggest that emotions (e.g., anxiety to confidence) and motivation (e.g., obligation to voluntary improvement) are co-constructed through social interaction and become catalysts for development. By contrast, the lower mean and wider dispersion for time management (3.83) suggest that peer scaffolding may be more effective in mediating direct emotional-social processes than in developing individual self-regulatory skills. This pattern underscores the specifically social and affective nature of the support mechanism within an SCT framework.

##### B. Qualitative Analysis: A Two-Tier Support System and Its Mechanism

Thematic analysis of 20 depth interviews and observations on 10 dyads indicated that emotional and motivational support is not a one-dimensional phenomenon, but rather a pair of dialectically related two levels: a surface level of dynamic motivational propulsion, and a deeper level of emotional support.

The Dynamic Motivational Propulsion layer was manifested through three major functions reported by students. First, it had a transformative role: the writing task became not an individual burden but a collective intellectual project. One student explained, "This is interesting because it creates motivation to complete the task, making the essay better and more appealing" (S5). Second, it served a maintaining and navigational function, acting as an external mechanism that helped students overcome stagnation and redirection problems. As Student S18 noted, "Sometimes I write in the wrong direction, and my peer will guide me back." Third, this motivation was partly self-generating, because the process of producing a better text became rewarding in itself and gradually shifted students' orientation from mere task completion toward collaborative skill development.

Beneath the motivational layer lies Foundational Emotional Support. Its central function is to reduce anxiety and build psychological safety. Student S4 articulated this clearly: "I think it also helps me relax before writing because I usually feel stressed, but interacting with others makes the atmosphere more comfortable and pleasant." This form of support resembles a lowering of the affective filter that prepares the way for cognitive engagement. It also creates a sense of solidarity and shared burden, thereby fostering resilience. Together, these elements contribute to what this study conceptualizes as an Emotional ZPD - a co-constructed psychological space in which students feel sufficiently safe to take intellectual risks, including trying more complex sentences. As S12 stated, "Knowing someone will correct errors with me, I dare to try more complex sentences".

TABLE 2  
DIALOGUE ILLUSTRATING EMOTIONAL & MOTIVATIONAL SUPPORT

| Statement                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             | Scaffolding Behavior                                     | Emotional/Motivational Factor                                                                                                                                       |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| S3: Where do we begin? This is an individual assignment, right? First, we need an introduction, but what would the topic sentence be?                                                                                                                                 | <b>Questioning--Clarifying</b>                           | Confusion, initial lack of confidence. Shows a need for guidance and direction.                                                                                     |
| S4: That's right, this is an individual paper. To make it clearer, we first need to define the topic sentence clearly. The topic sentence could be something like: 'Tourism not only brings economic benefits but also promotes cultural exchange between countries.' | <b>Stating--Organizing &amp; Stating--Modeling</b>       | Provides affirmation and safety. Reduces confusion by offering structure and a specific model, creating clear direction.                                            |
| S3: Sounds good. Let's start with the economic benefits, shall we?                                                                                                                                                                                                    | <b>Agreeing--Accepting &amp; Questioning--Confirming</b> | Confidence is built. Accepts the support and proactively proposes the next step, showing that motivation has been ignited.                                          |
| S4: Exactly! The first part could talk about 'how tourism helps generate a lot of money for local areas.' For example: The price of tourism packages is often higher than for local people.                                                                           | <b>Stating--Informing &amp; Elaborating--Detailing</b>   | Encourages and reinforces. Uses affirmative language ("Exactly!") and provides detailed ideas, continuing to maintain work momentum and motivation for the partner. |

The brief dialogue in Table 2 illustrates the effect of emotional-motivational scaffolding particularly well. S3's anxiety and confusion were quickly transformed into confidence and action through S4's affirming, organizing, and encouraging support. The safe interactional environment enabled S3 to admit uncertainty and then re-engage in the writing process. In this sense, emotional support did not merely accompany cognitive work; it actively enabled it.

### C. Cultural Shaping and the Harmony Paradox

The observational data also indicate that this two-tier system is deeply shaped by Confucian cultural values, producing a context-specific paradox. Across the 10 recorded sessions, agreeing behaviors ( $f = 40$ ) far outnumbered disagreeing or critical behaviors ( $f = 9$ ), demonstrating a strong tendency toward harmony-oriented interaction (see Table 3).

TABLE 3  
SYNTHESIS OF EVIDENTIARY DATA FROM THREE KEY SOURCES

| Central Focus                                  | Quantitative Data                                                                                               | Interview Data                                                                                                                                                                     | Evidence from Recorded Data                                                                                                                                                                                               |
|------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>1. Strong Positive Perception</b>           | Composite Mean = 4.19/5<br>SD = 0.45<br>T-test: $t(149) = 35.522, p < .001$                                     | <b>Quote:</b> "This is exciting because it creates motivation to complete the task, making the essay better and more engaging" (S5).                                               | Overall Communication Tone: Highly affirmative and consensual, consistent with the high mean from the survey.                                                                                                             |
| <b>2. Motivational Mechanism: Navigation</b>   | Related Survey Items (e.g., Q8, Q14): Mean scores ranging from 4.00 to 4.30.                                    | <b>Quote:</b> "Sometimes I write things incorrectly, and peers help remind me. If I'm going in the wrong direction, they guide me back" (S18).                                     | Requesting-Guiding Behavior: Frequency (f) = 28. This behavior demonstrates students actively seeking and receiving specific guidance from their peers.                                                                   |
| <b>3. Support Mechanism: Anxiety Reduction</b> | Related Survey Items (e.g., Q4, Q17): Mean scores ranging from 4.29 to 4.42.                                    | <b>Quote:</b> "I think it also helps me relax before writing because I usually feel stressed, but interacting with others makes the atmosphere more relaxed and comfortable" (S4). | Agreeing-Accepting Behavior: Frequency (f) = 40 (Highest). This continuous affirming behavior creates a safe environment that supports anxiety reduction.                                                                 |
| <b>4. Cultural Preference: Harmony</b>         | Low Composite Standard Deviation (SD = 0.45): Indicates high social consensus and low variation in perceptions. | _____                                                                                                                                                                              | Agreeing/Disagreeing Ratio: Agreeing (f=40) / Disagreeing (f=9) $\approx$ Ratio 4.4:1. This large disparity clearly demonstrates a priority for maintaining harmony.                                                      |
| <b>5. The Trade-off: Lack of Critique</b>      | _____                                                                                                           | <b>Description of Disagreement:</b> Described by students in a <b>subtle, indirect</b> manner (e.g., "suggesting an alternative" rather than "criticizing") (S3)                   | Disagreeing Behaviors:<br>• Disagreeing-Replacing: f=5 (suggesting a different idea).<br>• Disagreeing-Rejecting: f=4 (more direct rejection).<br>→ Total disagreeing frequency is low (f=9) compared to agreeing (f=40). |

This disparity provides clear evidence that collectivism, harmony, and face mediate the form of affective scaffolding by channeling it toward affirmation and support in order to preserve group relationships. The downside of this preference, however, is the possibility of limited critical engagement. The relative scarcity of disagreeing behaviors ( $f = 9$ ) and especially direct rejection ( $f = 4$ ) suggests a cultural trade-off: the Emotional ZPD may be strong in terms of psychological safety but potentially limited in terms of cognitive challenge. In other words, the boundaries of the Emotional ZPD are shaped not only by reduced anxiety but also by implicit social pressure to maintain agreement, which may constrain the refinement of ideas through constructive conflict.

#### D. Discussion

This research has presented a multi-dimensional and comprehensive empirical image of the operation of emotion and motivation in peer scaffolding ecosystem of the Vietnamese EFL students based on a convergent parallel mixed-methods design. The research question is addressed directly by the findings, and the gaps are addressed, not to mention that new theoretical and contextual contributions are made.

##### (a). Lived Experience (Perezhivanie) and the Two-Tier Mechanism

The research question asked how students perceived and experienced the emotional and motivational aspects of peer scaffolding. At the level of shared social perception, the quantitative results provide a clear answer: students reported strongly positive views of these interactions, as shown by the high mean score (4.19/5) and low standard deviation (0.45), with the one-sample t-test confirming that this pattern was statistically significant ( $p < .001$ ). This result is consistent with previous work that highlights the importance of affective scaffolding (Zhang et al., 2023).

However, the present study goes beyond confirming a general positive pattern. Through the qualitative findings, it operationalizes Vygotsky's concept of perezhivanie within peer scaffolding research. Interview excerpts about feeling relaxed, facing challenges together, and daring to try are not merely reports of isolated emotions; rather, they represent lived emotional experiences through which the social context of collaboration is interpreted and internalized. More specifically, our analysis shows that this lived experience is structured through a dialectically related two-tier system. Dynamic Motivation propels the writing process through transformative, navigational, and self-generating functions, whereas Foundational Emotional Support creates the psychological safety that makes such motivation sustainable. Their interaction explains not only that affective scaffolding matters, but how it works.

##### (b). Emotional Zone of Proximal Development

Building on this two-tier mechanism, the study proposes the notion of an Emotional ZPD. Whereas the traditional ZPD concerns the gap between independent performance and performance supported by cognitive mediation (Vygotsky, 1978; Aljaafreh & Lantolf, 1994), the Emotional ZPD refers to the psychosocial space in which learners feel sufficiently safe, accepted, and motivated to enter and remain active in their cognitive ZPD.

The empirical evidence supports this proposition. Survey items linked to stress reduction and confidence building, interview accounts of daring to try, and the high frequency of agreeing behaviors ( $f = 40$ ) all indicate that peer interaction created a psychologically supportive environment. These confirmatory behaviors were not merely conversational moves; they functioned as cultural tools for building the Emotional ZPD. The findings therefore suggest that writing development under peer scaffolding is a process of both cognitive and affective mediation, with the Emotional ZPD acting as a necessary condition for effective participation in the cognitive ZPD.

*(c). Cultural Shaping and the Harmony Paradox*

This is also the study's most contextually significant contribution. Earlier research in Vietnam has typically noted the general benefits of collaborative writing or mentioned fear of losing face as a barrier, but it has rarely unpacked the mechanism through which CHC values shape affective scaffolding. The present study does so by showing that the striking imbalance between agreeing ( $f = 40$ ) and disagreeing ( $f = 9$ ) behaviors reflects the influence of harmony and face on interaction. These values encourage support, affirmation, and conflict avoidance.

This context-specific pattern helps explain why emotional support does not always translate directly into stronger writing outcomes. If the Emotional ZPD is built primarily on agreement and the avoidance of critique, it may produce psychological safety while still limiting the kind of constructive cognitive conflict needed for deeper argument development. This interpretation offers one possible explanation for prior findings in which positive affective engagement did not necessarily lead to measurable improvement in writing quality.

*(d). From Awareness to Intentional Action*

The pedagogical implications of these findings extend beyond simply promoting group work. First, instructors should explicitly recognize and legitimize the value of the Emotional ZPD. This can be done by establishing classroom expectations that position emotional support and intellectually constructive challenge as twin foundations of effective collaboration. Second, collaborative writing should be scaffolded through structured tasks and feedback guidelines. For example, rubrics can ask students to begin with a positive observation before posing an open-ended question that invites deeper thinking, thereby preserving emotional safety while promoting critical engagement. Third, students should be encouraged to engage in metacognitive and meta-affective reflection so that they become more aware of how group interaction shapes their emotions, motivation, and writing quality.

Overall, this study reframes peer scaffolding not as a simple list of strategies or benefits, but as a complex process of affective-cultural mediation. In doing so, it offers a more detailed analytical framework for understanding and improving collaborative learning processes in Vietnamese collectivist EFL contexts.

## V. CONCLUSION

### A. Summary of Key Findings

This study has examined the emotional and motivational dimensions of peer scaffolding among Vietnamese university students learning academic writing in English. The mixed-methods design provided a nuanced account showing that these dimensions are not peripheral but central to collaborative writing development. The qualitative findings revealed a two-tier mechanism consisting of Dynamic Motivational Propulsion and Foundational Emotional Support. Their interaction illustrates Vygotsky's concept of *perezhivanie* in action, as positive emotional experiences during collaboration become a channel through which writing development is internalized. On this basis, the study proposed the concept of the Emotional ZPD as a psychologically safe transitional space that enables students to engage productively in their cognitive ZPD. Another major contribution is the demonstration that Confucian cultural values shape the form of affective scaffolding, promoting harmony and support while potentially limiting critical discussion.

Several directions for future research follow from these findings. First, intervention-based studies are needed to test pedagogical tools that balance emotional support with cognitive critique. Second, cross-cultural comparative research could clarify whether the Emotional ZPD is a broadly applicable concept or one that is especially salient in collectivist settings. Third, longitudinal studies could track how these mechanisms evolve over time. Finally, future work should examine the role of teachers in facilitating affective scaffolding, thereby linking theoretical insight with practical classroom design.

### B. Scientific Contribution

The study makes both theoretical and pedagogical contributions. Theoretically, it enriches SCT by operationalizing *perezhivanie* in language-education research and by proposing the Emotional ZPD as an extension that foregrounds the affective dimension of developmental space. It also highlights collaborative learning as a process of dual mediation in which culture and emotion jointly shape participation and development. Pedagogically, the findings call for a shift from treating group work as an informal arrangement to designing it as an emotional-social learning environment. This includes creating tasks that balance emotional support with cognitive challenge and incorporating meta-affective reflection activities that help students become more aware and agentic co-constructors of a positive learning environment.

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# English to Arabic Translation of Medical Texts: A Review of Research (2015-2025)

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**Abstract**—Translating medical texts from English to Arabic is challenged by terminological inconsistency, register variation, and uneven methodological practices, with direct implications for patient safety and medical education in Arabic-speaking countries. This study adopted a systematic literature review methodology guided by the PRISMA framework. Five major databases—Scopus, ERIC, SpringerLink Nature, Nature, and BMC—were searched to identify relevant studies published between 2015 and 2025. A total of 22 studies were included and analysed to map publication trends, translation procedures, the use of digital technologies, and implications for medical education. The findings show that most research has focused on instrument development, with particular attention to patient safety and the translation of clinical instruments and leaflets. The analysis further reveals that only a very limited number of studies have examined the use of technology and artificial intelligence in this field. The review suggests that AI-based tools, when used alongside human-led translation workflows, may help expand access to high-quality medical translations for Arabic-speaking populations.

**Index Terms**—medical translation, machine translation, AI in translation, English–Arabic translation

## I. INTRODUCTION

Translating medical terminology from English into Arabic is a high-stakes task with direct clinical, educational, and ethical implications. In contemporary healthcare systems, accurate translation is essential not only for patient safety but also for effective research communication, medical education, and equitable access to care. Demand has increased as Arabic-speaking populations rely more heavily on bilingual medical records, clinical trial documentation, and patient-facing materials. Despite its importance, this practice is constrained by linguistic, cultural, and technical factors that may compromise clarity and accuracy. These challenges are particularly pronounced in Arabic due to the coexistence of Modern Standard Arabic and regional variants, as well as the absence of fully unified medical terminology across Arabic-speaking healthcare systems.

A central challenge lies in terminological inconsistency and ambiguity. Many medical terms are polysemous or used variably across subfields, increasing the risk of misinterpretation. For example, serious mistranslations, such as rendering *myocardial infarction* or *dementia* as symptoms rather than diagnoses, illustrate the clinical consequences of terminological inaccuracy (Almahasees & Husienat, 2024). Competing labels for the same medical concept further hinder knowledge transfer, affecting both researchers and healthcare professionals (Martin et al., 2022). Beyond terminology, cultural mediation complicates the task. Translators must balance scientific precision with culturally appropriate communication, and failure to achieve this balance may result in significant clinical consequences (Ødemark & Engebretsen, 2022; Song, 2024; Latif, 2020; Farahat, 2025).

Arabic's morphological richness and syntactic flexibility introduce additional layers of complexity. Errors may arise when tense, voice, or syntactic scope are misinterpreted, particularly in dense medical discourse. These challenges are often amplified in machine-translation output, where systems struggle to maintain semantic and syntactic coherence in specialised contexts (ElSabagh et al., 2025). The extensive use of abbreviations and acronyms without explicit expansion presents further risks, especially when overlapping meanings exist across medical specialties (Bell & Torres, 2024; Mohammed, 2022). Hasani et al. (2025) show that avoiding abbreviations in AI-generated summaries improves doctor–patient communication.

Without systematic training in terminology management, such ambiguity may compromise patient safety.

The consequences of mistranslation are well documented. Inaccuracies in dosage instructions, diagnostic descriptions, or symptom reporting can directly endanger patient outcomes (Bell & Torres, 2024; Song, 2024). Although machine-translation tools such as Google Translate and Microsoft Copilot offer speed and accessibility, they lack sufficient domain sensitivity and contextual awareness for high-stakes medical use (Al-Jarf, 2024). These risks may be amplified in English–Arabic translation, where structural differences, morphological complexity, and terminology variation increase the likelihood of inaccurate or ambiguous outputs. Studies on AI-assisted interpretation suggest potential benefits in limited

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contexts but highlight the need for continuous human oversight to mitigate risks related to literal translation, dialectal variation, and ethical accountability (Brandenberger et al., 2025). Hybrid approaches combining translation memories and example-based methods have shown efficiency gains; however, they remain limited when applied to specialised medical content (Amini et al., 2024; Fan & Zhang, 2025).

To address these challenges, existing scholarship highlights the importance of robust quality-assurance mechanisms and sustained professional development. Peer review, systematic validation, and continuous training are widely recognised as essential for maintaining translation reliability (Williams, 2024; Mohammed, 2022). A domesticating approach that adapts terminology to culturally familiar expressions while preserving clinical accuracy has been proposed to enhance patient comprehension (Yateem et al., 2023). In addition, recent research advocates the development of standardised Arabic medical-terminology resources to reduce inconsistency and promote safer communication across healthcare settings (Yateem et al., 2023; Almahasees & Almahasees, 2025).

Despite the urgency of the issue, research on English–Arabic medical translation remains fragmented. Many studies focus on isolated terms, specific instruments, or individual technological tools, while relatively few offer a systematic account of translation procedures across different types of medical texts. This lack of synthesis limits the development of evidence-based guidelines for translators and healthcare institutions.

The present study addresses this gap by systematically reviewing research on English–Arabic medical translation published between 2015 and 2025. It synthesises evidence on terminological, cultural, and technological challenges, examines the application of translation procedures, and evaluates the roles and limitations of human- and machine-assisted translation.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

### A. Theoretical Framework in Translation Studies

Medical translation is guided by established frameworks in translation studies that explain how meaning and function transfer between languages. Structural differences between English and Arabic require careful procedural and linguistic decisions. Vinay and Darbelnet (1995) identify procedures such as borrowing, transposition, and modulation to address structural differences effectively. Newmark (1988) distinguishes semantic translation, which prioritises accuracy, and communicative translation, which prioritises clarity for readers. House (2015) emphasises register equivalence across field, tenor, and mode, providing a basis for evaluating whether translations preserve communicative function and meaning in specialised medical contexts.

### B. Growing Demand for Medical Translation

The demand for accurate English–Arabic translation of medical texts is increasing, particularly for patient records, clinical trials, and clinical instruments. International agencies have acknowledged both the opportunities and the risks in this domain. The World Health Organization (WHO, 2025) highlights the potential of artificial intelligence (AI) and large language models (LLMs) in clerical and administrative tasks, including electronic health record entries, drafting visit notes, and simplifying jargon for patient-friendly communication. At the same time, WHO warns that “serious errors could arise” from inaccuracies or hallucinations, stressing that such functions should not be fully automated and that human oversight remains essential.

### C. Accuracy and Reliability of Machine Translation

Empirical studies show mixed results in the use of machine translation (MT) in healthcare. In emergency department materials, Google Translate preserved meaning in 82.5% of short instructions, but performance varied widely across languages, reinforcing warnings against relying on MT alone for patient-critical text (Taira et al., 2021). A comparative study of discharge instructions reported 90% or higher sentence-level accuracy for Spanish and Chinese but lower accuracy for Russian, with the authors recommending disclosure, human review, and provision of the original-language text as part of best practices in clinical education (Kong et al., 2025). Accuracy drops further for low-resource languages, such as Haitian Creole, raising concerns about equity and access (Brewster et al., 2024).

For plain-language patient education pamphlets, MT scored above 3 out of 5 in many domains, yet consistently underperformed relative to professional translation, supporting calls for curriculum modules on plain-language authoring and post-editing (Ugas et al., 2025). A clinical systematic review likewise advises that AI be used as a supplement, often as a last resort, and never as a replacement, aligning with training in ethics and professional values (Genovese et al., 2024).

### D. Translation and Validation of Clinical Instruments

Patient-reported outcome measures (PROMs) are a cornerstone of standardised, patient-centred evaluation, and their translation requires rigour. Jamjoom et al. (2023) document the widespread use of translated, adapted, and validated PROMs in Arab spine research. Sawaqed and Suoub (2021) confirm the reliability of the Overactive Bladder Symptoms questionnaire in tracking treatment response across adult patients. Almohaya et al. (2024) highlight the importance of rigorous workflows, including forward–back translation, expert review, and cognitive debriefing, in Arabic PROM adaptations to ensure conceptual equivalence and cultural acceptability. These examples illustrate the level of methodological discipline now expected in the translation of clinical instruments and trial outcomes.

### *E. Lexical and Terminological Challenges*

Terminological accuracy is among the most persistent challenges in English–Arabic translation of medical texts. Ambiguous terms and acronyms often create inconsistency, with recommendations to expand acronyms at first mention to reduce ambiguity (Bell & Torres, 2024; Almahasees & Husienat, 2024). Translators require biliterate competence, search skills, and familiarity with domain-specific technology to manage uncommon acronyms (Bell & Torres, 2024).

In safety-critical contexts, mistranslations of diagnoses, unclear dosing, or inconsistent abbreviations can lead to adverse outcomes (Mohammed, 2022; Almahasees & Husienat, 2024). In Jordanian healthcare centres, Almahasees and Almahasees (2025) found that inconsistent physiotherapy terminology, particularly in cardiopulmonary and musculoskeletal subdomains, confused patients and undermined adherence. Interviews with physiotherapists confirmed that inconsistency weakens patient education and engagement, strengthening the case for a standardised Arabic physiotherapy lexicon. These challenges are particularly significant in Arabic-speaking contexts, where variation between Modern Standard Arabic and regional usage, inconsistent terminology development, and limited standardisation across healthcare systems increase the risk of ambiguity and misunderstanding in medical communication.

### *F. Syntactic and Stylistic Issues*

Beyond terminology, English and Arabic diverge significantly in structure and style. Translators must account for differences in clause structure, information packaging, and verbal versus nominal preference. Sharkas (2024) shows that nominalisation in Arabic translations of patient-information leaflets serves three functions: signalling formality, depersonalising agency, and increasing abstractness. These functions align with genre conventions in the target culture and highlight the need for comparative corpus studies of Arabic expert–lay and institutional–user genres.

Syntactic ambiguity in English, such as multi-parse sequences, can yield divergent Arabic realisations, and dynamic equivalence often produces clearer translations than strict correspondence (Sharkas, 2024). Medical texts also reflect cultural-linguistic conventions. For example, drug inserts address both clinicians and laypersons, requiring careful adjustment of technicality without loss of accuracy (Khayyal, 2022). In Arabic medical texts, these structural differences directly influence clarity, authority, and accessibility, making register-appropriate choices essential for ensuring effective communication between healthcare providers and Arabic-speaking patients.

### *G. Roles and Limits of Machine vs. Human Translation*

Machine translation offers efficiency and consistency in standardised contexts, but its limitations are widely recognised. Research emphasises its role as a supportive tool rather than a replacement, particularly in high-stakes scenarios such as consent or individualised counselling (Fan & Zhang, 2025; Adiel et al., 2023). Human oversight remains indispensable, with deep post-editing identified as essential and pre-editing as a useful but secondary step (Matheson & Kollmer, 2024; Zappatore & Ruggieri, 2024).

Asynchronous document translation in well-resourced language pairs, such as English–Spanish or English–Chinese, can be effective with post-editing, but synchronous or live communication requires greater caution and restriction to lower-risk content (Zappatore & Ruggieri, 2024). Polysemy further complicates translation, as MT often misses subtle sense distinctions (Attieh, 2024; İsmayilli, 2024; Adiel et al., 2023). Automated quality assurance tools are not sufficient substitutes for human expertise. For instance, Matheson and Kollmer (2024) show how a correct translation (“27 years of age”) was wrongly flagged as a numerical error, illustrating how tools without contextual understanding can mislead.

### *H. Emergence of AI in the Translation of Medical Texts*

Healthcare AI translation has evolved from the ad hoc use of broad machine translation to targeted evaluations of large language models and neural MT, with growing emphasis on safety, governance, and educational deployment. Early pragmatic studies on Google Translate (GT) for emergency department discharge instructions reported mean adequacy of approximately 82.5% across seven languages, but with wide language variability and significant risks to meaning fidelity, emphasising MT as an adjunct to professional translation within clinical contexts (Taira et al., 2021). Medication instruction research identifies the highest-risk surface: GT accuracy declined sharply for counselling points (for example, Arabic 54.1% and Spanish 38.2%), and approximately 29% of incorrect outputs were extremely clinically significant or potentially fatal, requiring close human surveillance for drug-related information (Cornelison et al., 2021).

Head-to-head comparisons with LLMs show incremental improvement but continued safety limitations. In paediatrics, ChatGPT-4 and GT were equivalent to human translation in Spanish and Portuguese discharge instructions but fell short of professional translators for Haitian Creole, with substantially fewer clinically meaningful errors, illustrating the equity gap for low-resource languages (Brewster et al., 2024). A more general comparison of GPT-4 to GT in patient-specific emergency department instructions reported generally high sentence-level accuracy (for example, 97% for Spanish, 95% for Chinese, and 89% for Russian), but potentially unsafe mistranslations ranged from  $\leq 1\%$  at the sentence level to up to 6% when assessed across full instruction sets, where a single error can be clinically significant (Kong et al., 2025). Implied safety measures include disclosure of MT or LLM usage, presentation of the original-language output, human evaluation before use, avoidance of jargon, secure handling of data, and teach-back to patients (Kong et al., 2025).

Syntheses of the field confirm the overall pattern: neural MT dominates, LLMs widen the toolkit, but proper deployment is contingent upon in-domain corpora, controlled language, post-editing, and task-based safety checks (Zappatore & Ruggieri, 2024). Broader assessments of ChatGPT and LLMs in healthcare confirm these assertions, noting

their utility for drafting, summarising, and translating, balanced by risks of hallucination, bias, and privacy issues, and thus the need for open governance and human oversight (Sallam, 2023).

### *I. Implications for English–Arabic Translation*

The findings support a tiered approach: (i) allow supervised AI or MT for low-stakes, templated educational materials, with disclosure and post-editing; (ii) require obligatory human review for routine written instructions; and (iii) avoid AI-only use for high-stakes content, such as medication orders, consent forms, and individualised counselling. For Arabic specifically, where register differences and dialect variation complicate mapping, priority should be given to plain-language writing, terminology control through glossaries, and bilingual clinical verification before dissemination. This approach maximises access advantages while safeguarding patient safety and aligns with current governance guidance.

## III. METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a systematic literature review (SLR) design to synthesise research on the translation of medical texts between English and Arabic. Systematic reviews are widely used in education and applied linguistics research to identify trends, evaluate practices, and map gaps in an emerging field. The review follows established principles of transparency, rigour, and replicability as outlined by Kitchenham (2004), Gough et al. (2012), and the PRISMA framework (Moher et al., 2009).

### *A. Research Questions*

The review is guided by the following research questions:

RQ1. What are the emerging trends in the translation of medical texts from English into Arabic between 2015 and 2025 (year-wise, area of study, and domain of medical text)?

RQ2. How have translation procedures been applied in the translation of medical texts from English into Arabic in the past decade?

RQ3. What technologies have been used for translating medical texts from English into Arabic?

RQ4. What recommendations have been proposed for improving the translation of medical texts from English into Arabic?

### *B. Subjects / Corpus of the Review*

As this study is a systematic literature review, the “subjects” are published research articles rather than human participants. The review corpus consists of peer-reviewed journal articles that address the translation of medical texts between English and Arabic or Arabic and English.

Following the application of inclusion and exclusion criteria, a total of 22 full-text studies published between 2015 and 2025 were identified as relevant and included in the final analysis. These studies represent diverse medical domains, translation procedures, and methodological approaches.

### *C. Instruments*

The instruments used for this review include:

- Academic electronic databases: Scopus, Springer Nature, ERIC, Nature, and BMC
- Structured search strings developed using Boolean operators
- Clearly defined inclusion and exclusion criteria
- Title, abstract, and full-text screening procedures
- A data extraction framework for recording publication year, domain, translation procedures, technologies used, and recommendations

The search strings, including keywords and limiters, are presented in Table 1 under the “Search Terms” column.

TABLE 1  
RESULTS OF INITIAL SEARCH

| Search Terms                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            | Search Limiters                                                                         | Databases       | Frequency distribution of primary results |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------|-------------------------------------------|
| “Medical translation” OR “medical discourse” OR “biomedical translation” AND “translation” OR “interpreting” OR “translation procedures” AND “machine translation” OR “AI translation” OR “post-editing” AND “English to Arabic” OR “Arabic to English” | 1. Document type: Journal Articles<br>2. Language: English<br>3. Year Range: 2015- 2025 | Scopus          | 45                                        |
|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |                                                                                         | Springer Nature | 13                                        |
|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |                                                                                         | ERIC            | 7                                         |
|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |                                                                                         | Nature          | 45                                        |
|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |                                                                                         | BMC             | 86                                        |
|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |                                                                                         | Total           | 196                                       |

### *D. Data Collection Procedures*

Data collection followed a systematic multi-stage process. Boolean operators were used within each database to retrieve relevant studies. The initial search yielded 196 records across the five databases. After removing seven duplicate records, 189 studies were screened.

During title and abstract screening, 132 records were excluded because they were either unrelated to medical translation or did not involve the English–Arabic language pair. An additional 35 records were excluded due to closed access. Ultimately, 22 full-text articles met all eligibility criteria and were included in the review. Table 1 summarises the search strategy, databases, and frequency of retrieved records to enhance transparency and replicability, in line with established guidelines for systematic literature reviews (Kitchenham, 2004; Moher et al., 2009).

The selection process followed PRISMA guidelines, and the flow of study identification, screening, and inclusion is illustrated in Figure 1.

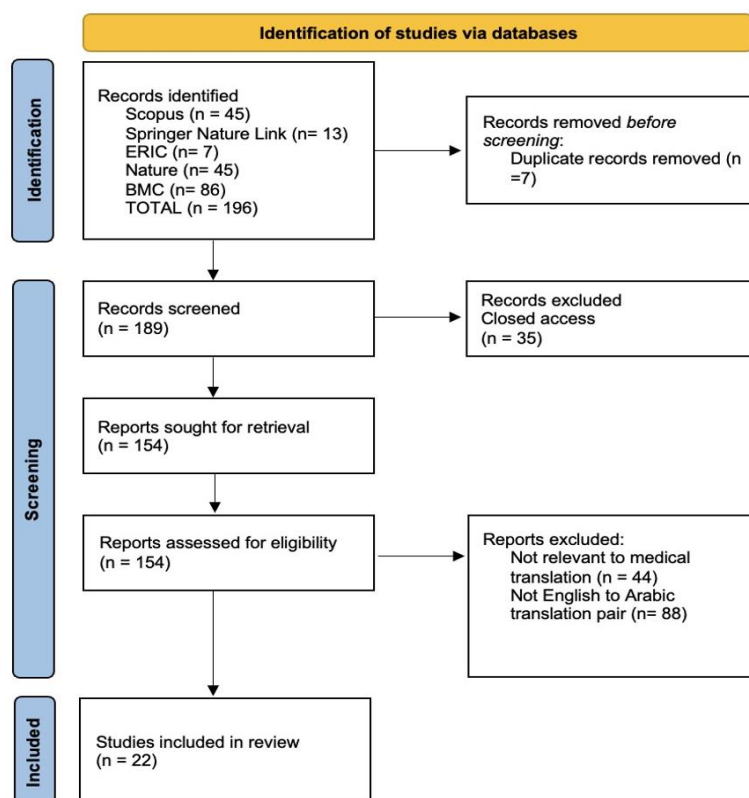


Figure 1. Prisma 2020 Flow Diagram

#### IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

To answer the research questions, an in-depth analysis of the included studies was conducted to identify patterns in publication trends, areas of study, domains of medical texts, translation procedures, and the use of technology in English–Arabic medical translation.

##### A. Year-Wise Distribution

The year-wise distribution of research studies was analysed to identify emerging trends in English–Arabic medical translation. The findings show that research activity has increased notably in recent years, with the highest number of studies published in 2025 (n = 5, 22.73%). A substantial number of studies were also published in 2021 (n = 4, 18.18%) and 2024 (n = 4, 18.18%), indicating sustained research interest during this period. The year 2023 accounted for three studies (13.64%), while 2022 and 2018 each recorded two studies (9.09%).

In contrast, very limited research output was observed in the earlier years of the review period, with only one study published in 2015 (4.55%) and one in 2016 (4.55%). This uneven distribution suggests that English–Arabic medical translation has gained stronger scholarly attention only in recent years, particularly alongside growing concerns about patient safety, instrument validation, and technology-assisted translation. Figure 2 provides a graphical representation of the year-wise distribution of the reviewed studies.

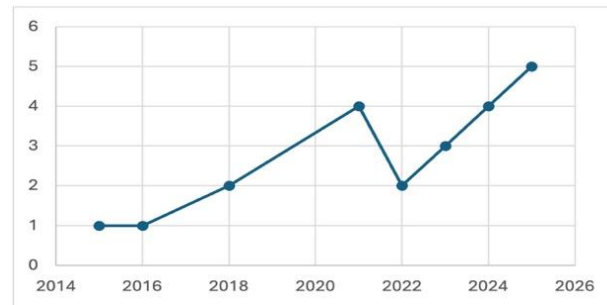


Figure 2. Year-Wise Distribution

### B. Area of Study

Analysis of the reviewed articles revealed five major areas of study addressed in English–Arabic medical translation research. As shown in Table 2, infectious diseases and public health ( $n = 5$ , 22.73%) and paediatrics and nursing care ( $n = 5$ , 22.73%) constituted the largest thematic clusters. These studies focused on areas such as COVID-19 communication, falls, overactive bladder, foot health, paediatric care, and nursing practice, reflecting strong links between translation research and applied healthcare needs.

TABLE 2  
AREA OF STUDY

|   | Area of Study                         | Number of Articles | Topics covered                                     |
|---|---------------------------------------|--------------------|----------------------------------------------------|
| 1 | Chronic & Non-Communicable Diseases   | 4                  | Diabetes, Cancer, Osteoarthritis, Tumours          |
| 2 | Mental & Developmental Health         | 4                  | Mental Health, Autism, Disability                  |
| 3 | General Medicine & Health Terminology | 4                  | Medicine (General), Medical Terminology, Nutrition |
| 4 | Infectious Diseases & Public Health   | 5                  | COVID-19, Falls, Overactive Bladder, Foot Health   |
| 5 | Paediatrics & Nursing Care            | 5                  | Paediatrics, Nursing                               |

Chronic and non-communicable diseases ( $n = 4$ , 18.18%) also received considerable attention, particularly in relation to diabetes, cancer, osteoarthritis, and tumour-related care. Similarly, mental and developmental health ( $n = 4$ , 18.18%) emerged as a key area, covering the translation of assessment tools for mental health, autism, and disability. General medicine and health terminology ( $n = 4$ , 18.18%) addressed broader issues such as terminology consistency, nutrition, and general medical discourse. Figure 3 illustrates the distribution of studies across these areas, highlighting the breadth of domains in which English–Arabic medical translation research is applied.

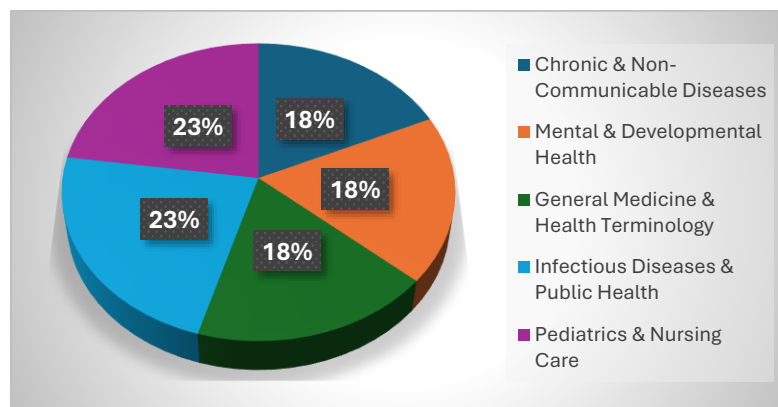


Figure 3. Area of Study

### C. Domain of Medical Texts

To further understand the research focus, the domains of medical texts translated from English into Arabic were examined in detail. As presented in Table 3, instrument validation studies dominated the field, accounting for 14 of the included articles (68%). These studies primarily focused on the translation, cultural adaptation, and validation of questionnaires, scales, and clinical instruments for use with Arabic-speaking populations.

TABLE 3  
DOMAIN OF MEDICAL TEXTS TRANSLATED FROM ENGLISH TO ARABIC

| Domain                                                | Number of Articles | Citation                      |
|-------------------------------------------------------|--------------------|-------------------------------|
| Instrument Validation Studies                         | 14                 | (Batais et al., 2021)         |
|                                                       |                    | (Halaweh et al., 2016)        |
|                                                       |                    | (Ziouziou et al., 2018)       |
|                                                       |                    | (Alajmi & Al-Ghamdi, 2021)    |
|                                                       |                    | (Sawaqed & Suoub, 2021)       |
|                                                       |                    | (Awad et al., 2025)           |
|                                                       |                    | (Obeid et al., 2024)          |
|                                                       |                    | (Masoud & Mosli, 2023)        |
|                                                       |                    | (Alshammari et al., 2023)     |
|                                                       |                    | (Amri et al., 2022)           |
|                                                       |                    | (Alshaygy et al., 2025)       |
|                                                       |                    | (Elboim-gabyzon et al., 2015) |
|                                                       |                    | (Maryem et al., 2023)         |
|                                                       |                    | (Alharbi et al., 2024)        |
| AI & Technology in Medical Translation/Interpretation | 3                  | (Qiu et al., 2024)            |
|                                                       |                    | (Brandenberger et al., 2025)  |
|                                                       |                    | (Gilad et al., 2025)          |
| Public Health Communication & Health Literacy         | 2                  | (Tjaden et al., 2022)         |
|                                                       |                    | (Halboub et al., 2021)        |
| Standardization & Cross-Cultural Screening            | 4                  | (Halboub et al., 2021)        |
|                                                       |                    | (Huda et al., 2024)           |
|                                                       |                    | (Halaweh et al., 2016)        |
|                                                       |                    | (Al-Jarf, 2018)               |

Other domains were represented to a lesser extent. Studies on AI and technology in medical translation or interpretation accounted for three articles (14%), while public health communication and health literacy were addressed in two studies (9%). Standardisation and cross-cultural screening were also examined in two studies (9%). Figure 4 presents a graphical overview of this distribution. It is worth noting that one study by Halboub et al. (2021) addressed two domains simultaneously, focusing on both public health communication and standardisation and cross-cultural screening.

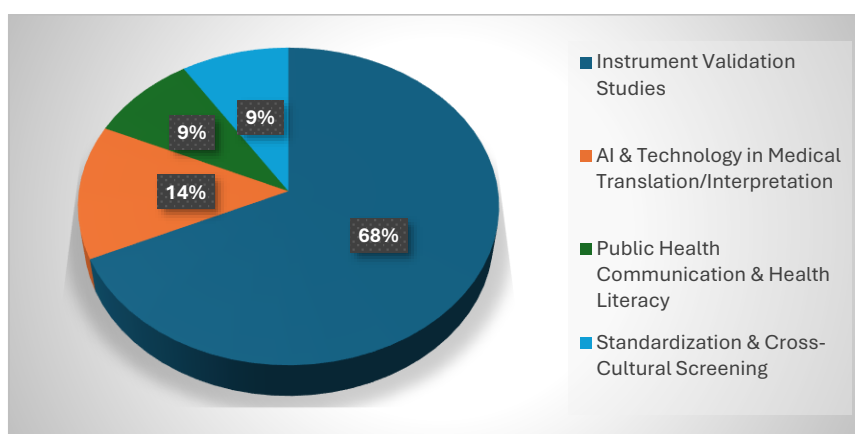


Figure 4. Domain of Medical Texts Translated From English Into Arabic

These findings indicate a strong research emphasis on producing reliable Arabic versions of clinical instruments, reflecting practical healthcare needs across Arabic-speaking contexts. This reflects the specific needs of Arabic-speaking healthcare systems, where validated Arabic instruments are essential for reliable clinical assessment and patient communication.

#### D. Translation Procedures

A range of translation procedures was identified across the reviewed studies. As shown in Table 4, forward-back translation (FBT) was the most frequently employed procedure ( $n = 13$ ), confirming its role as the standard approach for the cross-cultural adaptation of medical instruments. Expert or committee review was explicitly reported in six studies, often as a complementary step to strengthen content validity.

TABLE 4  
TRANSLATION PROCEDURES ADOPTED

| Translation Procedures                      | Number of Articles | citation                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |
|---------------------------------------------|--------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Forward + Back translation (FBT)            | 13                 | (Batais et al., 2021)<br>(Halaweh et al., 2016)<br>(Ziouziou et al., 2018)<br>(Alajmi & Al-Ghamdi, 2021)<br>(Alzeer et al., 2025)<br>(Sawaqed & Suoub, 2021)<br>(Awad et al., 2025)<br>(Obeid et al., 2024)<br>(Alshammari et al., 2023)<br>(Amri et al., 2022)<br>(Alshaygy et al., 2025)<br>(Elboim-gabyzon et al., 2015)<br>(Maryem et al., 2023) |
| Expert/committee review (explicit mention)  | 6                  | (Masoud & Mosli, 2023)<br>(Amri et al., 2022)<br>(Huda et al., 2024)<br>(Elboim-gabyzon et al., 2015)<br>(Maryem et al., 2023)<br>(Alharbi et al., 2024)                                                                                                                                                                                             |
| Not mentioned                               | 3                  | (Tjaden et al., 2022)<br>(Halboub et al., 2021)<br>(Huda et al., 2024)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |
| Back-translation only (reported standalone) | 3                  | (Halaweh et al., 2016)<br>(Ziouziou et al., 2018)<br>(Alajmi & Ghamdi, 2021)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
| Cognitive/face validation                   | 2                  | (Masoud & Mosli, 2023)<br>(Alharbi et al., 2024)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
| Linguistic translation (unspecified method) | 1                  | (Gilad et al., 2025)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
| Machine/AI tool named                       | 1                  | (Qiu et al., 2024)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
| LLM/AI (general)                            | 1                  | (Brandenberger et al., 2025)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
| Terminology strategies (not a workflow)     | 1                  | (Al-Jarf, 2018)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |

Three studies relied mainly on back-translation without further methodological detail, while three did not specify the translation procedure used. Less commonly reported approaches included cognitive or face validation ( $n = 2$ ), general linguistic translation ( $n = 1$ ), terminology-based strategies such as borrowing or transliteration ( $n = 1$ ), and the use of machine translation or large language models ( $n = 2$ ). Figure 5 provides a graphical overview of the distribution of translation procedures.

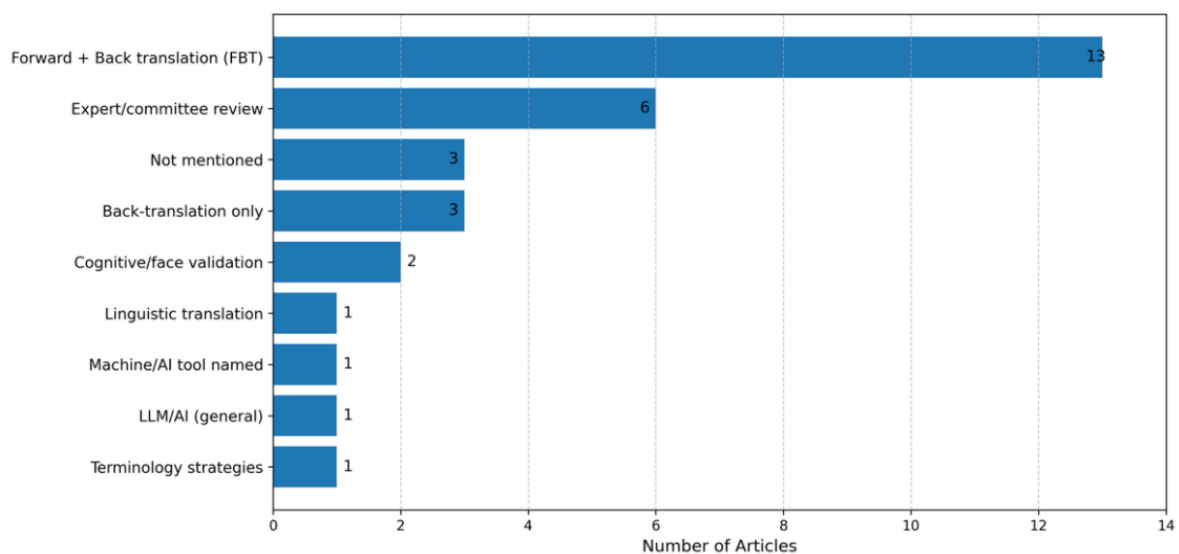


Figure 5. Translation Procedures

These findings demonstrate strong alignment with internationally recognised cross-cultural adaptation and psychometric frameworks. The inclusion of expert review and cognitive validation reflects increasing awareness of the need to ensure conceptual equivalence and semantic accuracy, rather than relying solely on literal translation. At the same time, variation in reporting practices suggests that translation workflows are often adapted flexibly to local contexts and available resources within Arabic-speaking research settings.



Taken together, many studies repeat similar purposes and procedures, largely relying on standard FBT-based adaptation workflows for instrument validation across medical domains.

#### *E. Technology Used for Translation*

Only two studies explicitly examined the use of technology in English–Arabic medical translation. One study focused on the development and evaluation of multilingual medical large language models (Qiu et al., 2024), highlighting their potential to support cross-lingual understanding of complex medical texts. The second study examined the use of Google Translate in non-urgent paediatric emergency consultations through staged, low-acuity clinical interactions, in which clinicians conducted simulated consultations and a professional interpreter acted as the caregiver (Brandenberger et al., 2025). The analysis combined performance testing with a detailed legal and policy review, identifying generally high accuracy in controlled contexts while also drawing attention to challenges related to dialect variation, pronoun use, and broader medico-legal issues, such as liability, consent, and ethical responsibility.

Overall, these two studies represent 9.1% of the reviewed literature. While limited in number, they provide important insights into both the potential and the constraints of AI-based tools in Arabic medical translation. The findings suggest that research on translation technology in this context remains exploratory, with cautious adoption driven by concerns related to linguistic complexity, patient safety, privacy, and legal accountability. Table 5 summarises the translation technologies identified in the reviewed studies and their frequency of use.

TABLE 5  
TECHNOLOGY USED FOR TRANSLATION

| Technology Used                                   | Number of Articles | citation                    |
|---------------------------------------------------|--------------------|-----------------------------|
| Multilingual medical large language models (LLMs) | 1                  | Qiu et al. (2024)           |
| Google Translate / AI-based interpretation        | 1                  | Brandenberger et al. (2025) |

#### *F. Critical Interpretation of Trends*

The observed trends reflect the strong influence of clinical priorities on English–Arabic medical translation research. The dominance of instrument validation studies ( $n = 14$ ) indicates that translation is primarily driven by the need to adapt clinical tools for Arabic-speaking populations. This reflects the essential role of translated instruments in diagnosis and patient evaluation. However, this emphasis has limited attention to linguistic and procedural aspects of translation. Although forward–back translation was widely used ( $n = 13$ ), few studies examined how translation procedures affect meaning or clarity in Arabic medical texts. Terminology-focused research remains limited ( $n = 4$ ), despite persistent inconsistency in Arabic medical terminology. Similarly, the relatively small number of AI studies ( $n = 6$ ) reflects ongoing safety and legal concerns. Overall, these patterns highlight the need for stronger theoretical grounding and greater focus on Arabic-specific translation challenges.

### V. CONCLUSION

This systematic review offers the first comprehensive mapping of English–Arabic medical translation published between 2015 and 2025, bringing together evidence on translation practices, domains of application, and emerging technological developments. The findings show that the field continues to rely primarily on traditional human-led workflows, particularly forward–back translation, expert panel review, and cognitive validation. This reflects the ongoing need for accuracy, cultural appropriateness, and clinical safety in medical communication. Despite this methodological stability, the persistence of terminological inconsistency across medical subfields remains a major barrier to consistent and reliable communication. Divergent Arabic equivalents, inconsistent use of technical terms, and the absence of unified glossaries point to an urgent need for stronger standardisation efforts across healthcare institutions. This review also contributes to translation studies by providing the first systematic synthesis of English–Arabic medical translation research across multiple domains, including clinical instruments, terminology, and emerging AI technologies. By situating translation procedures within both clinical and linguistic contexts, the study clarifies the structural and terminological factors shaping translation practices and identifies priorities for future theoretical and empirical research.

Although artificial intelligence is increasingly discussed in the broader medical translation landscape, its adoption in English–Arabic medical translation remains very limited. Only two studies explicitly examined technological tools, and their findings confirm that while AI and machine translation may support low-risk or administrative tasks, they remain immature for high-stakes clinical communication. Challenges such as dialectal sensitivity, contextual misinterpretation, and medico-legal risks underline the importance of cautious and supervised implementation. These insights highlight the need to integrate technology thoughtfully within established human-led workflows rather than viewing it as a replacement.

From a practical and clinical perspective, the review underscores the need for clearer guidelines on translation procedures, expanded psychometric testing across diverse Arabic-speaking populations, and stronger collaboration between linguists, clinicians, and healthcare educators. The development of standardised medical terminology resources and the inclusion of translation awareness in medical and allied health training can further strengthen communication and patient safety. Overall, the evidence points to growing recognition of the importance of reliable Arabic medical translation,

alongside a clear need for more targeted research, richer methodological reporting, and careful integration of emerging technologies to support safe, consistent, and culturally grounded healthcare communication.

#### A. Implication of the Study

From a practical standpoint, the results of this review carry important implications for improving English–Arabic medical translation across clinical practice, education, and policy. The dominance of instrument-validation studies indicates that Arabic-speaking healthcare systems rely heavily on translated clinical tools to support diagnosis, screening, and patient follow-up. This pattern highlights the need for continued development and refinement of Arabic versions of established medical instruments, ensuring that healthcare providers can generate accurate and culturally appropriate patient data. Healthcare institutions are therefore encouraged to adopt validated instruments whenever available and to follow standardised workflows when adapting new tools.

Persistent challenges related to medical terminology also emerge as a key concern, particularly variation across countries, specialties, and even within the same research field. This observation underscores the importance of establishing unified medical terminology resources that can support clinicians, translators, and researchers alike. Shared glossaries and terminology guidelines can reduce confusion, improve clarity, and strengthen communication across Arabic medical texts in different regions.

Regarding translation technologies, only a small number of studies addressed their use, yet their findings point to the growing relevance of AI in this area. While AI and machine translation tools may offer useful support in low-risk situations or educational settings, human oversight remains essential in clinical contexts. This reinforces the need for clear institutional policies defining when such technologies can be used, how accuracy should be verified, and what safeguards are required to protect patient safety.

At a broader systemic level, the review points to the need for coordinated national and regional frameworks that support high-quality translation of medical materials. Establishing clear standards, reviewing translation workflows, and encouraging collaboration between translators and healthcare professionals can contribute to a more unified and accessible healthcare environment for Arabic-speaking populations.

#### B. Recommendations

Building on the findings of this review, several priorities emerge for advancing English–Arabic medical translation research and practice. Greater collaboration between translators, clinicians, and researchers is needed to support the development and maintenance of shared terminology resources and updated translation guidelines. Coordinated initiatives at national and regional levels would help promote consistency and improve the quality of translated medical material.

Future research should extend beyond the translation and validation of clinical instruments to include a wider range of medical genres. Greater attention to consent forms, clinical guidelines, digital health systems, and patient education materials would provide a more comprehensive understanding of translation challenges across real healthcare contexts.

Stronger methodological transparency is also needed. Studies should clearly document translation procedures, validation steps, and decision-making processes. Multi-centre and cross-country research designs would further strengthen the generalisability of findings and allow comparison across different Arabic-speaking settings.

The increasing availability of machine translation and AI tools also creates new research opportunities. Future studies should evaluate these technologies specifically in English–Arabic medical contexts, with attention to accuracy, safety, and appropriate clinical use. Clear evaluation frameworks will help determine where such tools can be used safely and effectively.

Finally, sustained investment in professional training is essential. Expanding training opportunities in medical terminology, translation methods, and technology use will help prepare translators and healthcare professionals to meet the growing demand for accurate and reliable Arabic medical translation.

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# Ecological Aspects in the Poem of Exile: Saadi Yusuf's Poetry as a Model

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**Abstract**—The ecological aspects in Yusuf's poetry are important because they reveal how the poet establishes a perception of exile through his relationship with nature. This study aims to explore these aspects as presented in the poetry of this Iraqi poet through: Detecting the most important mechanisms embodied in environmental imagination. Illustrating how the incorporated symbols reflect the nature of the relationship that links the poet to his surroundings as manifested in the experience of exile. Unfolding the poet's concern with ecological issues to create an awareness of nature, which helps protect it from damage. The study poses the following crucial question: How does the poetry of exile harness the environmental imagination to express an exile experience that has existential and ecological dimensions? To explore how the environment in the selected texts was used to reflect the poet's experience of exile, the researcher adopted a descriptive-analytical approach. She also made use of some eco-critical essays that helped reveal how important the environment is. Study results unveiled that Yusuf's exile poetry has ecological qualities that convey awareness, values, and concerns of nature. Yusuf could achieve environmental imagination by using symbols from nature, combining reality with imagination, poetic artistry with the philosophy of vision, and the profound meaning of the environment's message. The study concludes that the exile poetry of Yusuf can serve as a model for ecological reading, as it relates human suffering to nature's concerns. It emphasizes that ecocriticism has to be employed in analyzing contemporary Arabic texts.

**Index Terms**—ecocriticism, environmental imagination, environmental symbol, personifying nature, simile, sustainability

## I. INTRODUCTION

The poem of exile is a prominent phenomenon in contemporary poetry in which poets who were exiled or moved away from their homelands because of political, social, or economic circumstances, expressed their individual or collective experiences in exile. Therefore, it incorporates several meanings of humanity and profound existential issues such as alienation, nostalgia, identity, freedom, and belonging. It might reflect philosophical contemplation and an endeavor to reshape the meaning of human existence in the face of loss and separation. Therefore, the self is torn between two places: the place of memory and nostalgia, represented by the absent homeland, and the place of alienation and estrangement, represented by lived reality (Ibrahim, 2016, (7), p. 13).

The Iraqi poet Saadi Yusuf is one of the most prominent poets whose experience of exile greatly influenced his poetry (AlRawashdeh, 2025, pp. 1157-1158). The theme of exile occupied a vast space in his poetic works, spanning about seven decades of creative output. Thus, it became one of the aspects with which his poetry is distinguished. Therefore, some critics consider him to be the real founder of the modern Arabic exile poem. Through him, the notion of exile matured and evolved over the successive decades he lived outside his homeland (Khourani, 2007, p. 13).

Because of his revolutionary ideas and political activities, Saadi Yusuf spent most of his life in exile, moving, through a variety of Arab and European cities: Beirut, Damascus, Algeria, Sidi Bel Abbes, Aden, Sanaa, Amman, Tunis, Moscow, Nicosia, Belgrade, Paris, and London. Therefore, he might be the Iraqi poet with the longest experience of exile or of enforced living outside his homeland. (Khourani, 2007, p. 23)

Khourani believes that,

exile provided him with diverse environments through which he could develop his poetry, successively, without clamor, through direct contact with various cultural sources. About migration and its impact on his poetry, Saadi Yusuf said: Migration was a salvation, a means of preserving the creator's independence and freedom. It saved me the horror of distortion and kissing the tyrants' boots. It gave me the chance to explore new cultural and poetic sources. It also broadened my vision and illuminated various landscapes of people, cities, and civilizations for me. Yet, in return, it prevented me from intimate touching of the roots, which I used to enjoy before. (Khourani, 2007, pp. 23-24)

As a result of this rich cultural tapestry, Saadi Yusuf transcended the political dimension of exile in his poetry to the human-ecological domain, where the existential concern of exiled intertwines with its cosmic counterpart. This can be achieved by protecting the Earth, which is the space that all living beings share. Here, human conditions intersect with images of the environment, which become the objective correlative to the exiled self, as both share suffering and unity of fate.

Saadi Yusuf's openness to environmental vision reconnects humans to their natural surroundings despite the geographical separation from their homeland.

This openness distinguishes his poetry, as it shows how the Arab poet engages with the most pressing environmental issue of the time. This is why Yusuf addresses such an issue from an ecological viewpoint.

Therefore, examining the ecological features of his poetry is crucial to understanding how exile shifted from existential estrangement to a communication with nature and the cosmos, revealing a poetic awareness of the environment.

The study's statement of the problem highlights how the ecological aspects manifested in Saadi Yusuf's poetry, particularly in the context of exile, where elements of nature environment interact with the poet's human experience.

Several questions emerge from this problem, which are:

- How does the poet's exile poem harness images of nature to convey an exile experience with existential and ecological dimensions?
- What kind of relationship between the exiled and nature does Yusuf's poetry have?
- Does the environment in his poetry serve as a descriptive background, or does it represent an active identity that reflects the poet's awareness of his surroundings?
- How does nature become a means of resisting alienation and affirming the sense of belonging in his poetry?

The study aims to investigate the ecological aspects of the poem of exile in the poetry of the Iraqi poet, Saadi Yusuf, through:

- Examining environmental imagination with its numerous manifestations.
- Explaining the symbolic implications and ecological intentions the poem of exile encompasses, which embody the relationship between the human and his new environment (reflection of the environment upon the self and the extent to which it interacts with nature's system), in exile.
- Highlighting the poet's concern about environmental issues and establishing an ecological awareness that calls for preserving nature and protecting it from damage.

Due to the nature of the subject, it was divided into two parts: the theoretical, embedded in the introduction, where the most critical terms that constitute the theoretical framework of poetry's ecological aspects were tackled. The empirical part tackles the environmental imagination in Yusuf's poetry of exile. The two parts conclude with the study's most important findings, some recommendations, and a list of references.

Many primary studies in the field of ecocriticism enriched this study by providing a theoretical framework for identifying the concept of this type of criticism and illustrating how to use its mechanisms to analyze poetic texts to uncover their potential environmental content. The foremost of these studies are:

In a study by Branch (1994), the researcher discussed ecocriticism as a recent movement in literary studies that emerged from the interaction between ecological philosophy and literature. This criticism studies the relationship between literature and environment. It does not consider literature to be just an independent human expression, but a part of an integral environmental system. Drawing on the concept of ecological philosophy, Branch points out that ecocriticism seeks to challenge human centrism by reconsidering the relationship between humans and nature.

This criticism calls for granting nature an intrinsic value independent from its benefits to humans. For him, ecocriticism affects the creativity of literary texts, analyses, and teaching. Nature is no longer considered the background of events but an essential element in the buildup and meanings of texts.

Branch, in the article, seeks to establish the concept that ecocriticism not only analyzes literary texts but also aims to change the way we think about the environment and our relation to it. He proposed a new perspective on the interaction between literature and the environment. In this respect, he was affected by the latest environmental perspective that calls for abandoning the traditional model, which considers the human the center of the universe, and adopting a model based on integration among all living organisms instead.

The study by Buell (1996) calls for rereading American literary heritage, especially the works of Thoreau, to understand how the environment is presented in literary texts. He urges closer attention to environmental texts, especially environmental nonfiction, in literary studies, as integral to cultural heritage.

Buell sheds light on the contradictions between love of nature in American cultural discourse and the excessive consumption of resources in reality. Buell also highlights how environmental imagination can be impacted by gender perception. In general, the book is a form of ecocriticism that seeks to establish equilibrium between ecological texts and history-based cultural content. Therefore, once literature is reread with an eco-centric eye, one can recognize the complex and often contradictory relationship between humans and nature.

As for the poem of exile in Saadi Yusuf's poetry, to the best of the researcher's knowledge, she did not find any study that addresses it from an ecocritical perspective, despite its environmental orientation and the profound feeling the poet bears toward the environment and its issues. Therefore, this research might help fill a gap in this field and reveal the environmental vision embodied in Yusuf's poetry of exile.

Studying the ecological aspects of poetry necessitates explaining the key terms that constitute the theoretical framework scholars use when approaching texts in this type of environmental study that deals with literature from an ecological perspective. These terms include the following:

#### A. *Environmental Literary Criticism*

Ecocriticism:

It is a branch of literary criticism that is concerned with "the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment" (Garrard, 2004, p. 3), examining how nature is depicted in literary texts and how the relationship between

humans and nature is expressed. He did that to uncover the manifestations of environmental awareness in these texts and to interpret them in a way that fosters a sense of ecological belonging. In doing so, he reveals the moral responsibility that humans must have in dealing with their environment, both influencing and being influenced by it (Muhammed, 2022, p. 458).

This critical approach emerged in the late 20th century as a response to growing awareness of global environmental crises that threaten the natural balance of our planet, such as pollution, global warming, and biodiversity loss:

This critique is part of green cultural studies that began earlier, guided by ecological philosophies that called for reconsidering the relationship between the human and natural environment systems to foster a sense of belonging to them, to confront human dominance and exploitation. (Muhammed, 2022, p. 461)

Ecocriticism considers literature to be a medium for understanding and perhaps even reshaping the relationship between humans and nature. "It combines two distinct and different fields: environmental science and literary criticism, to restore Earth's flourishing, which was lost through human exploitation" (Tosic, 2018, p. 329).

The term first appeared through the American critic William Rueckert in his 1978 essay "Literature and Ecology: An Experiment in Ecocriticism." It then evolved into an independent critical field by establishing the Association for the Study of Literature and Environment (ASLE) in 1992 in America, along with the publication of its journal, ASLE. Thus, the approach became institutionalized and academically recognized (Hamdawi, 2012).

Given the relatively recent emergence of this critical approach, various definitions have been proposed to clarify the term (ecocriticism). For example:

Ecocritic Cheryll Glotfelty offers the following straightforward definition of the emerging critical approach: Ecocriticism takes as its subject the interconnections between human culture and the material world, between the human and the nonhuman. Ecological literary criticism is that subset of ecocriticism that focuses specifically upon the cultural elements, language, and literature, and their relationship to the environment; it is a critical stance that one foot in literature and the other on land. (Branch, 1994)

Branch (1994) provides a more detailed definition, shedding light on the methodological shift that ecocriticism introduces to literary studies; it redirects interest away from social relationships between humans and the natural environment.

Thus, according to Branch, ecocriticism emphasizes that the human is a part of the overall ecosystem, not an independent individual who can act freely.

Such an approach makes the place transcend the concept of the backdrop as a setting for events, becoming an aspect of belonging or alienation.

Therefore, ecocriticism views literature as a reflection of the relationship between humans and nature and proposes an alternative conception of that relationship.

It emphasizes that nature is not merely a secondary issue, but an entity with an aesthetic and cognitive value on par with that of humans in literature. Thus, ecocriticism considers the literary text a structure deeply rooted in a natural context. It reflects the writer's or character's embodiment in the context and evokes awareness of the spiritual and moral values associated with humans' interactions with their environment.

It might be said that this critical trend not only examines texts but also questions the human stance toward nature:

It is clear that every ecocriticism must discuss environmental consciousness, paying attention to the positive values when criticizing the environment. It should examine the aesthetic sense in tackling manifestations and elements of nature by disclosing the environmental vision of nature's elements. Everything that is represented environmentally and aesthetically in literature falls within ecocriticism's scope of interest. (Muhammad, 2022, p. 462)

## B. *Environmental Literature*

In the introduction to his book (*The Environmental Imagination*), Lawrence Buell identifies environmental text through four standards, which, from his perspective, constitute components of the text with environmental orientation. He considers the environmental text a literary or artistic work in which humans and nonhuman organisms are portrayed as active participants in the narrative or intellectual structure, where human history and natural history intertwine. Thus, non-human interests are recognized and valued. Therefore, the text raises ethical questions about the human impact on the environment, offering a vision of nature as a dynamic, ever-changing system rather than a static backdrop for events (Buell, 1996, p. 7).

Adopting such a vision opens a new field for literature that trespasses human centrism. It makes the reader better aware of the mutual relationship between him and the natural surroundings.

The Russian writer Postnikov (2001) wrote an article on ecological poetry that aligns with the new ecological values. He mentioned the following five qualities that distinguish this kind from other types:

"(1) Feeling of enchantment, (2) emphasis on spiritual, rather than sensuous, (3) simplicity and spontaneity, (4) philosophical depth, (5) rhythm, "attuned" to eternity" (Postnikov, 2001).

Badran (2015) affirms that the concept of environmental literature requires the writer to have a sense of the environment in which he is a part. Such a feeling makes us overlook literature that just describes nature, without trying to understand it, engage in a dialogue with it, or be aware of it (p. 196).



Given the previous standards and privileges, one can say that environmental literature is that which portrays the relationship between the human and physical environment, reflecting the aesthetic and moral interaction with it. Its goal is to reinforce environmental awareness through an implicit critique of destructive behaviors. It is an indirect call to preserve the environment and interact with it as if it were a living being. It also calls for getting along with humans' natural surroundings.

Any literary discourse that transcends mere environmental description and the aesthetic use of nature can be considered part of environmental literature. Thus, it becomes an intellectual and epistemic tool for diagnosing the environmental imbalance caused by unsustainable human behavior. In doing so, environmental literature plays an active role in raising awareness of environmental dangers. Thus, it seeks to foster collective global awareness that helps correct the natural system and preserve life on Earth (Al-Sultani et al., 2021, p. 20).

Finally, it should be noted that the environmental literary text combines an aesthetic dimension with an environmental message. Thus, it challenges the literary creator to balance these two dimensions lest the text become a direct didactic discourse.

### C. *Environmental Imagination*

Environmental imagination is a critical term widely used in environmental literary studies, especially in the practical tradition. Scholars collectively agree that the American critic Lawrence Buell was the first to coin the term in his book: (*The Environmental Imagination*), where he explores "how the physical environment shapes imagination" (Tosic, 2018, p. 331).

Buell believes that the contemporary environmental crisis is also an imaginative one (the way we imagine nature). Dealing with it depends on finding better ways to depict nature and the human relationship with it. He said:

If, as environmental philosophers contend, western metaphysics and ethics need revision before we can address today's environmental problems, then environmental crisis involves a crisis of the imagination, the amelioration of which depends on finding better ways of imaging nature and humanity's relation to it. (Buell, 1996, p. 2)

To show that environmental imagination is not an aesthetic luxury but an essential condition for restoring our relation with nature, Buell focuses on how we perceive nature, as that determines how we deal with it practically and morally. He says:

How we imagine a thing, true or false, affects our conduct toward it, the conduct of nations as well as persons. Walden Woods in Concord, Massachusetts, has become a legal battleground because Thoreau's writings have led many to perceive it as a sacred space that should be kept in its "natural" state. (Buell, 1996, p. 3)

From his viewpoint, the environmental imagination that achieves real environmental change requires rethinking the primary literary concepts of representation, metaphor, reference, and characterization: "I shall argue below that environmental interpretation requires us to rethink our assumptions about the nature of representation, reference, metaphor, characterization, personae, and canonicity" (Buell, 1996, p. 2).

From the preceding discussion, it seems that environmental imagination for Buell stands for: the literary and cultural ability to represent nature and human relationships with it, using methods that uncover and address environmental crises by reviewing images, symbols, and inherited concepts that have shaped our understanding of nature. This can be achieved by inventing new images and representations of nature, in which imagination becomes a critical and moral tool for reconstructing our awareness and behavior toward the natural world. Nature should not be merely used as an embellishment of the text with natural images.

### D. *Environmental Symbol and Personifying Nature*

Environmental symbolism and personifying nature are the foremost manifestations of environmental imagination in Yusuf's poem of exile. This is what the researcher will elaborate on in the analysis, but the two terms should be initially explained.

#### (a). *Environmental Symbol*

It is a distinctive form of literary symbolism that invests elements of nature (plants, animals, water, climate...) with the exact mechanisms by which literary symbols in general are crafted: allusion, compression, displacement, and multiple meanings. It is distinctive for directing its semantic energy to express the relationship between human beings and the environment by considering nature as a semantic center and a partner in meaning-making. In doing so, it achieves the symbol's poetic dimension on the one hand and, at the same time, the objectives of ecocriticism by fostering a collaborative vision between humanity and nature, calling for the preservation of ecological balance, and questioning modes of attrition and pollution.

The environmental symbol in exile poetry has a double function. it incorporates the relationship between humans and nature, thereby highlighting the environmental equilibrium that ecocriticism calls for, while also tackling the existential dimension of exiled people. Therefore, nature's elements, such as trees, birds, water, and seasons, become symbols with double meanings. On one hand, they signal the environment, and on the other, they serve as mirrors that reflect the exile's own experience of alienation, nostalgia, and loss. Here, nature is not merely used as a neutral background, but a living entity that internalizes the exile's emotions and reflects his anxiety and nostalgia for his homeland. In this sense, the environmental symbol in exile texts becomes a vortex for the aesthetic, ecological, and existential dimensions. Thus, it

gives the text a profound artistic dimension that relates the individual's personal alienation to the universal concern of safeguarding the Earth, the space shared by all beings.

*(b). Personifying Nature*

The term is one concept in ecocriticism. It combines the rhetorical dimension of personification, which portrays the non-human as if it possesses human traits such as emotions, will, or the ability to act (Qutub, 2004, p. 73), with the environmental dimension that respects and protects nature's entity.

Blending the rhetorical and environmental dimensions is, according to eco-critics, a condition for including personification within what is known as environmental imagination, so that it functions aesthetically and morally to the fullest (Buell, 1996, pp. 180-218).

Thus, from an ecocritical perspective, personifying nature implies transforming it into a living entity that shares humans' feelings and actions. Such a thing not only adds a persuasive rhetorical and aesthetic dimension to literary discourse but also opens the door for readers to read it eco-critically. Thus, nature's personifying becomes a tool of awareness and dialogue with nature. Hence, it is no longer considered an object for exploitation, but rather as an existential partner.

Thus, personification in exile poetry goes beyond the rhetorical role it plays, in which nature is considered an inanimate, exploited object, to a living entity with its own rights and values. Thus, personification enhances awareness of the importance of nature.

The descriptive-analytical method the study used combined description with a deep analysis of nature's components to uncover their implications, as manifested in exile poetry texts. It also used ecocritical principles to uncover the hidden environmental vision in these texts, showing how the environment impacted the poet's imagination and the means he employed to highlight his relationship with it. The texts chosen were those that reflected the poet's experience in exile, whether affecting or being affected, and that reveal an environmental orientation. They all belong to the collection of poems he created in the various places of exile.

## II. DISCUSSION

After discussing the concept of environmental imagination in the theoretical section, the researcher started analyzing the poetic texts that reflect such a phenomenon in the poet's experience. In the analysis, she will show how nature is dealt with as a living being that interacts with humans.

Thus, its elements become means of expressing the poet's ideas and feelings through using symbols, personifications, and similes.

The researcher will also discuss the semantic and technical impacts of such methods to unveil the environmental vision the poet presents and how that relates to the experience of exile.

### A. Environmental Symbolism

In the exile poem, Yusuf relies on environmental symbolism to express existential issues of exile; elements of nature serve as icons that reflect feelings of alienation, exile, non-belonging, and loss of identity:

Thus, nature is personified and imbued with the same emotions and feelings that haunt the poet's own self. Therefore, it might be gripped by nostalgia, alienation, and the anguish of estrangement. It might be overcome by despair and frustration, or might hold the power to endure and suffer. It might also become one of the significant existential meanings shaping human identity and giving it its humanity. (AlRawashdeh, 2022, p. 401)

These symbols carry various implications that produce levels of meaning that make the poem an emotional experience, transcending personal feeling to a more general human sense of estrangement.

Through symbols, the poet can reveal his environmental awareness, an integral consciousness in which issues of alienation and displacement intertwine with the sustainability of the earth and nature.

Among the symbols that embody the feeling of alienation in exile and reflect the impact of environmental exile on nature is the Irish rose symbol:

No flower by the name of Irish Rose ever blooms as we know  
or read about it...  
Yet, there it sits, in a corner of my garden  
(If I may call these mere four yards a garden.... I shall lose nothing!  
It has been with me since I first settled here three years ago, in this secluded rustic haven.  
And, so I tend to it  
water it...  
(every evening as it has decreed)  
Waiting for it to unfurl a rose or a promise of a rose,  
(Which is in Basra called Junbutha)  
The effort faltered!  
The effort faltered!  
People here say:

The Irish rose thinks ....  
 The plant is in London.  
 Not in Dublin...

So, how, then, will it be with Basra? (Yusuf, 2014, (5), pp. 133-134)

The Irish rose that does not flourish despite constant care becomes a symbol of the poet himself, a soul in exile that cannot fully flourish except in its own native cultural soil. The plant's failure to flower despite the devoted tending symbolizes the difficulty of integration, or the inability to develop a true identity and cultural flourishing outside the original environment.

Emphasizing that the rose is in London, not Dublin, reflects a feeling of non-belonging. The new environment does not secure the proper conditions for spiritual and cultural growth:

Exile reinforces the feeling of non-belonging; it is not merely a strange place, but a place where practicing belonging falters, as it is disruptive and lacks intimacy. It harbors a repellent force for the relationships of the exiled person, which become overshadowed by sorrow and shallow participation. There has always been a rift, a clash between the exiled and the place to which they moved. The attempts to reshape themselves to meet the demands and conditions of exile have rarely succeeded. (Ibrahim, 2016, (7), p. 15)

Environmental imagination in the text is manifested in the human qualities attributed to it: "Here, people say: The Irish rose thinks..."

This personification reflects a hidden awareness of nature, an environmental perspective that considers it a partner in the human experience. The plant that thinks stands for the nature that cooperates or resists, depending on its environmental conditions. The text here calls for reconsidering humans' relationship with nature, indicating that it should not be viewed as a source of beauty but as a living entity with its own memory and conditions. Thus, the Irish rose that thinks it is in London may suggest that an identity has been uprooted from its original environment, so it needs to contemplate before blooming. This is quite similar to ecosystems that require equilibrium to thrive.

Thus, the Irish rose did not blossom because it was uprooted from its original environment, exactly like the exiled poet who was uprooted from his cultural and geographical milieu.

Sustainability in the poem is reflected through attempts to maintain the plant's life in the new harsh environment. Within this scope lies the attempt to create a nurturing environment in exile, by calling a mere small space a garden. However, this environment is artificial and insufficient.

Failing to bloom in the new environment shows that sustainability cannot be maintained through individual efforts alone; rather, it requires an integrated ecosystem built on coordination and collaboration among all stakeholders. This aligns with the vision of the United Nations through the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, adopted by all member states to achieve a more sustainable future by 2030. The Sustainable Development Goals represent a comprehensive framework that connects environmental, economic, and social dimensions within a unified and globally integrated system based on partnership and collective action (Elnaklah et al., 2025).

Through environmental symbolism, Yusuf's poetry of exile presents a particular concept of "belonging" based on the idea that the estranged person takes nature as a substitute homeland, transcending geographical and political boundaries. Humans' relationship with nature as a substitute homeland is demonstrated in Yusuf's poem (The First Language):

Seven green-feathered parrots sat on two branches of a tree,  
 lonely, and forlorn  
 standing in the middle of the meadow...  
 slipping into my home  
 through a window that knows how to open it, even if unseen.  
 Seven parrots in the open morning  
 A blue sky  
 And a faint breeze  
 Nobody has awoken yet,  
 No sound was echoed...  
 Those seven parrots removed, like a tattered garment, the language of the human cage,  
 To fly far away... (Yusuf, 2014, (5), p. 417)

The seven parrots in the text are described as (free). They are liberated, overriding the cage's boundaries and rationally taking the tree as a secure haven. This is an environmental symbol of the exiled person who seeks freedom from the shackles of exile: cultural, political, and social. The poet here makes the natural environment a haven for tranquility, a substitute for belonging and freedom that dissipates the feelings of estrangement, alienation, and inadaptability that shackle the self. "A blue sky and a faint breeze".

The poem's title, (The First Language) alludes to nature's language that was not influenced by humans. In rejecting humans' language of the cage, the parrot goes back to nature's language, which is free and sustainable. In this respect, the experience of exile can be a form of rediscovering nature's language, emancipated from the dominance and cultural usurpation by that of humans.

From the viewpoint of ecocriticism, nature can be a substitute for belonging. Therefore, the parrots here symbolize the exiled self that looks for a language that is more credible and strongly related to nature's language. The lonely, forlorn tree symbolizes human alienation in exile.

Environmental imagination is identified through personification, which presents birds as conscious beings that protest, perceive, and think. They reject human shackles and behavior that limits their freedom. At the same time, they know how to choose the appropriate time to cast off these shackles, when humans are still not awoken. "No sound was echoed" The cage in exile's experience may symbolize constraints on the exiled (Shalabi & Abu Amrieh, 2024, p. 140). Birds' awareness represents the potential for rebellion and rejection of those shackles.

Personification also appears in the meadow depicted as someone who knows how to open the window and step into the poet's home, suggesting nature's ability to interact and communicate with humans, "in the middle of the meadow, slipping into my home through a window it knows how to open even if unseen".

In the text, there is an implicit critique of human centrality and superiority in the right to dominate other creatures. This is reflected in satirizing human behavior toward those creatures, especially in confining them for their own comfort, believing that other creatures exist solely to serve their well-being at the cost of the creatures' natural freedom "Those seven parrots cast off, like a tattered garment, the human cage language to fly far away".

Comparing Cage's language to the tattered garment underscores an awareness of the need to cast off the dominance and constraints that humans impose on other creatures. These constraints are nothing more than outdated values that caused significant damage to the ecosystem.

Such a perception aligns with Eco philosophy: "According to these Eco philosophers, anthropocentrism has caused unjust domination and exploitation of other members of the ecosystemic community" (Branch, 1994).

Thus, there is a call from Eco philosophy and post-structural theory to,  
decentering of the human subject as an affirmation and as a 'liberation of life' which results in a sense of interrelationship rather than a pattern of domination. Ecological egalitarianism, then, may be seen as a kind of contextualist discourse with nature. (Branch, 1994)

#### *B. Personifying Nature*

In the exile poem, Saadi Yusuf personified nature by attributing human qualities to it that reflect human feelings and experiences, like rights and awareness.

From Yusuf's perspective, personifying nature was not merely an aesthetic tool used to present a natural scenery. Instead, it went beyond that, becoming a mirror that reflects how humans perceive the world around them. Thus, it unveils his profound relationship, emotional interaction, and responsiveness to its shifts and transformations. Nature is no longer considered a silent, functionless entity or a background, but an active partner in human experience.

According to ecocriticism, which is concerned with the relation between literature and environment, such an approach can be a means of reconnecting humans with nature and an endeavor to bridge the rift imposed by exile, modernism, and compelling separation from one's homeland.

This can be taken as an awareness of the environment that goes beyond material boundaries to include spiritual and ethical dimensions. Therefore, personification in exile poetry not only reflects humans' enchantment with nature but also reveals their understanding of how it influences their lives and their responsibility to it.

The researcher will discuss one example of nature that Yusuf dealt with in his poetry of exile. She will analyze such an example from an ecocritical perspective to show how personifying nature can enhance environmental awareness, catalyzing the reader to reconsider their relationship with the environment.

Among the examples of Yusuf's poetry in which he deals with nature as a living, active being, pulsating with emotions:

As dawn rises  
The lake comes to me, still drowsy  
Draped in a gown of diaphanous mist  
The lake carries its trees toward my window  
And the pewter gleam....  
Time has elapsed for the birds that awoke before us.  
The road that crosses the village was jammed with cars.  
The lake was quiet  
It will remove a gown of the diaphanous mist  
And draws nearer, little by little, by little....

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Will it hold me  
Or will I hold it  
Or shall we try to be again? (Yusuf, 2014, (5), pp. 412-413)

Personification is clearly demonstrated through presenting the lake as if it were a human being capable of rising, putting on and taking off clothes, carrying elements of nature, moving, and communicating. It looks like a mollycoddle woman, woken, but still drowsy: "Coming to the lake, but still drowsy". She came wearing the diaphanous mist like a garment as

if it were preparing itself for a new day. The mist might be the objective correlative for the silky, fine dress that women usually put on when they want to appear in full adornment: "Draped in a gown of diaphanous mist".

The lake also appears as if it were an active person moving toward the window, carrying elements of nature as a gift for whoever wants to communicate with it: "the lake carries its trees toward my window".

The emotional and human dimension is revealed in the sentence: "She will remove a gown of the diaphanous mist". This image depicts a woman revealing her true self to her lover. The diaphanous mist becomes a kind of veil the lake hides behind, revealing its true beauty, just as a woman might shyly or excitedly conceal her charms.

The lake removing its gown is analogous to the moment of fidelity, temptation, and love that the beloved discloses to her lover.

Personifying the lake here turns it into an intimate beloved rather than just a charming scene. Thus, the personification reinforces the relationship between humans and nature by turning it into mutual love: "Will it hold me, or will I hold it?". Such words constitute a kind of dialogue in which humans and nature exchange roles, making it difficult to distinguish who communicates with whom. This dialogue reflects the harmony that must be established between nature and humans, rather than an exploitative stance toward it.

Considering the lake a living being, the central character in the text, and the intimate personal feeling toward it, remind us of the relationship between Thoreau and the Walden Pond,

the author establishes an extraordinary personal tie with the pond. He writes of it as his "neighbor", his "great bed-fellow", his soul-mate in its isolation, himself feeling "no lonely any more" than it: "What company has that lonely lake, I pray?" (Buell, 1996, p. 208)

The identification between him and the pond becomes apparent when he uses it as a symbol of his ideal self: "Walden serves as a multipurpose symbol: of steadfastness, calm, purity, and, most importantly, of the speaker's own better self, his soul's ideal" (Buell, 1996, p. 208).

Thoreau sees that: "Sympathy with nature is evidence of perfect health, and further that to ensure health, a man's relation to Nature must come very near to a personal one" (Buell, 1996, p. 209).

### C. *Simile*

Saadi Yusuf uses simile in the exile poem to create a vivid picture that links natural elements to human feelings, consolidating environmental and aesthetic awareness in the reader.

In the poem (The Blind Pig's Restaurant) from the collection of poems: (New York Poems), he says:

The Irish bartender dressed in black said:  
We are here, Irish  
Irish Americans,  
I am Irish...  
I asked her: Will you visit your country this year?  
She flustered like a severed branch,  
The Irish bartender said ...  
I do not understand what you mean...  
And I, too, do not understand  
When you say:  
won't you visit your country this year? (Yusuf, 2014, (5), p. 353)

In this section of the poem, the poet likens the Irish bartender who lives in America and flustered when he asked about the possibility of visiting her country to a severed branch. This symbolizes the living being that has been separated from its homeland. Such an image reflects the state of loss and alienation caused by separation from her origin. The Irish bartender lives in America, but she is not fully American, nor is she entirely linked to Ireland anymore. Thus, the bartender here is analogous to the tree that was uprooted from its natural environment and left rootless. Nature, in this case, is not considered an embellishment but a means of expressing feelings. Just as the severed branch loses its vitality and slowly fades away, the bartender loses a part of herself due to separation from her homeland. Resembling the flustered bartender to the severed branch suggests a kind of tension and fluttering, similar to the branch's trembling of its uprooting the moment before it falls. Such a thing reflects the sudden anxiety that the bartender felt at hearing the question. The poet disclosed this emotional disturbance through a vivid botanical image. Thus, the scene is presented in a more vivid and impactful way, he takes: "The severed branch as a symbol of a person who was forced to live under foreign skies for years" (Khourani, 2007, p. 103).

From the perspective of environmental imagination, one can see that a simile reflects the profound relation between humans and nature, in which the nature becomes an extension of human identity and an expression of psychological and existential situations. Attributing an emotional quality to the environment catalyzes the recipient to contemplate nature's beauty and significance, eventually enhancing a sense of responsibility toward it.

Yusuf, in the poem of exile, frequently associates simile with environmental memory. Examples of that are explicitly stated in the poem: (I will wait), from the collection of poems entitled: (Poems of the Public Garden):

"And this river  
This roaring river  
The plunging

Raging like a bull....  
Will it not calm down so that we gather shells from its bed  
And hear a song from a nymph?" (Yusuf, 2014, (5), p. 461)

The poet likens the tumultuous river with its sweeping movement to a raging bull that cannot be tamed.

The simile here combines both nature's extraordinary power and the tense relationship between humans and nature. Comparing the river to a bull deprives it of serenity and vitality, making it a ferocious beast, not a friend. Such a repellent force endangers human stability and interaction with nature. The bull symbolizes the unbridled words; it symbolizes an imbalanced nature, the force of nature. In other words, it symbolizes the imbalanced and incongruous nature.

Nature's violence, gathering shells (symbols of fertility and life), and communicating with nature (hearing a song from a nymph) represent a far-fetched hope that signals the death of environmental imagination.

Examining the preceding image reveals that the poet's imagination retains an ecological memory. In this poem, there is an implicit comparison between the river of exile and that of the homeland.

| Exile River                                                                                                   | Homeland River                                                                 |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Tumultuous.                                                                                                   | Habitable.                                                                     |
| A place for fear and seclusion.                                                                               | A place for meditation and waiting.                                            |
| Ambiguous and nameless.                                                                                       | Named and celebrated.                                                          |
| Aggressive and unfriendly, void of any intimacy.                                                              | Intimate.                                                                      |
| Does not allow sitting, enjoying its hidden treasures, or listening to a tale, but forces humans to run away. | Encourages sitting at its banks, taking its treasures, and listening to tales. |
| Water does not sing, have treasures, or give, but sweeps.                                                     | Water sings, rich with treasures, and gives.                                   |

Although nature in exile is hostile, repulsive, and non-cooperative, the poet still loves to reconnect with it. This reveals that he possesses ecological awareness that yet compels him to engage in dialogue with cruel nature. He doesn't try to withdraw from it, but instead tries to draw closer to it through imagination, tranquility and heedfulness. "Will it not calm down so that we gather shells from its bed and hear a song from a nymph?"

The query "Will it not calm down?" is addressed to the tumultuous river, but in fact it is a request for the river to subside, allowing a chance to ponder and listen. The query here implicitly echoes an inner feeling to create a relationship with the new environment.

The poet's desire to gather shells from the riverbed reflects a willingness to delve deep into the environment to find a meaning or an echo of that in this life. Thus, the poet's focus shifts from external nature to the deeper meanings hidden within it.

Listening to nature is one manifestation of awareness of it. It is one means of creating a relationship between humans and the natural world, in which nature is treated as a living entity worthy of listening to.

The environmental awareness of the Iraqi poet is not just a nostalgic feeling toward the rivers of Iraq, but a real attempt to create a relationship with the new environment of the reconciliation that he was after.

The excerpt can be considered a nostalgia for nature, in which memory longs for the time when nature speaks, chants, and whispers (AlTarawneh, 2020).

### III. CONCLUSION

The researcher came up with specific results outlined in the following:

- Saadi Yusuf's exile poem is an eco-literary text that conveys a profoundly sensitive awareness of the ecosystem that embodies nature's values and concerns.

- The environmental imagination is achieved in the exile poem through the use of symbols and images drawn from nature. The poem blends the real with the imaginative, uniting poetic artistry with the philosophy of vision and depth of the environmental message.

- Environmental symbolism, personification, and similes that draw one or both of their elements from nature are the most important aspects of this kind of poetry.

- The interaction between the environmental and existential concerns was revealed through symbolism, which played a pivotal role in the existential concern of the exile and that of the environment. The human exile and the environmental one were both expressed simultaneously by the poet. He used a symbolic language that unified personal emotion with cosmic awareness, presenting his vision on alienation and the search for belonging.

The poet balanced the exiled's attempt to free himself from ties of exile and the rejection of other beings being subjected to human dominance. This unveils the strong relationship between humans and nature as well as the unity of their destinies.

- Environmental symbolism reinforces respect for nature, being addressed as if it were a living being with rights and conditions that should be revered. Such a vision aligns with ecological philosophy that calls for the elimination of human centrism.

- Personification creates a living being from nature with whom the human communicates as an existing partner, not as a source of exploitation. Such an approach reinforces the idea that humans and nature are integrated, existing within an interconnected ecosystem.

- Similes unveiled an environmental memory pulsating with nostalgia for the original environment, with a strong desire for reconciliation and coexistence with the new environment.

- The poet highly values natural relationships over social ones. He believes in merging with nature rather than devaluing it. This is manifested in the positive impact nature has on humans: a field for contemplation and philosophical thinking, a source of inspiration, a close friend, and a haven for the exiled.

The study concludes by considering Yusuf's exile poetry as a good model for ecological reading, which connects human suffering with environmental concerns. It confirms that ecocriticism should be used in analyzing contemporary literary Arabic texts, as the ecological reading highlights a different impact from traditional exile studies by shifting the focus from narratives of alienation and separation to the dynamics of interaction and integration within the environment of exile. Rather than limiting the analysis to feelings of loss and displacement, this approach demonstrates how individuals reconstruct their relationship with the new place through adaptation to its natural and social elements, developing a renewed ecological sensibility grounded in participation and gradual belonging.

The researcher recommends the following:

- To examine the sense of place in Yusuf's poetry from an ecological perspective.
- To conduct an independent study on environmental sustainability in Yusuf's poetry.

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# An Acoustic Study of the Stop Consonants in Wu Dialects: Evidence From Tongdong Dialect

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**Abstract**—This paper presents key findings from an acoustic study on the stop consonants in Tongdong dialect, a language variety in Wu dialects. The research was conducted through voice recording and analysis of data collected from Tongdong native speakers. Recordings of 3240 overall tokens were collected and analyzed using Praat phonetic software. The mean VOT values, vowel lengths, vowel pitches and vowel intensities obtained from Chinese words with both prevocalic stops and intervocalic stops were compared and statistically tested using One-way ANOVA. The research findings show that in Tongdong dialect first, the prevocalic voiced stop has a positive VOT; the voicing begins just after the release of the stop followed by a strong voiced aspiration; the adjacent vowel is significantly longer in length and lower in pitch, which makes the stop sound voiced; and the stop is actually a voiceless stop followed by a voiced aspiration. Second, the intervocalic stop has a negative VOT; the voicing begins before the release of the stop, making a voicing lead in the spectrogram and followed by a less strong voiced aspiration; the adjacent vowel is significantly longer in length and lower in pitch; and the stop is a voiced stop followed by a voiced aspiration. The research presents proof that as a border region in Wu dialects, Tongdong dialect is relatively faster in its voiced stops devoicing. Meanwhile it still keeps the three grades of stops: voiceless unaspirated; voiceless aspirated and voiced aspirated, which is a distinctive feature of Wu dialects.

**Index Terms**—Tongdong dialect, stop consonant, voice

## I. INTRODUCTION

Wu dialects, which still keep the ancient voiced initial consonants now, have three grades of stops: voiceless unaspirated, voiceless aspirated and voiced. The three-grade-classification of stops is the distinctive feature of Wu dialects from the other six dialect regions in China, which are Mandarin dialects, Xiang dialects, Gan dialects, Kejia dialects, Yue dialects, and Min dialects (Shi, 1983, pp. 49-83). Nevertheless, the ancient voiced initial consonants have been turning voiceless as time goes by, the change of which is gradual and imbalanced. Till now, the devoicing progress of the so-called voiced initial consonants are quite different from place to place (Zhong & Chen, 2012, pp. 126-129).

Nantong, a city on the north side of Changjiang estuary, locates on the isogloss dividing Jiang Huai Mandarin and Northern Wu dialects. As a result, Nantong has comparatively complex dialects, among which the communities close to Haimen district, like Erjia, Yuxi, Yuanzao, etc. are connected with Qidong district and Haimen district, where Tongdong dialect is used as the language variety. Tongdong dialect, also called Jiangbei dialect by local citizens, is an extension of Wu dialects, and it is also classified into Wu dialects (Yan, 1984, pp. 1-14; Chen et al., 2010, pp. 101-105). As a small dialect region, Tongdong dialect has been existing between Wu dialects and Jianghuai Mandarin for long, and the acoustic features of the stop consonants in Tongdong dialect have experienced changes.

Thus, the aims of the given research are as follows:

1. To identify the VOT values of the stop consonants in Tongdong dialect;
2. To provide the distinctive features, or the devoicing progress of the stop consonants in Tongdong dialect.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

The three grades of stops in Wu dialects have drawn attention from quite a few Chinese linguists and researchers. In 1925, Liu Fu used a wave recorder in his acoustic experiment to prove that the voiced initial consonants in Wu dialects were not really voiced (Chao, 2002). Chao (2011) also disclosed that the voiced consonants in Wu dialects were actually voiceless consonants followed by a voiced aspiration. Chao (2002) transcribed the voiced initial consonants in Wu dialects by using a voiceless phonetic symbol followed by a [h] to represent a voiced aspiration, such as [p<sup>h</sup>] [t<sup>h</sup>] [k<sup>h</sup>], etc. From then on, the saying of “voiceless initial consonants followed by a voiced aspiration” in Wu dialects has been a popular view in Chinese linguistic circle. In his later research, Chao (1970, pp. 45-56) made a clear statement:

For simplicity in notation and terminology, we are calling these voiced stops: b, d, g. Actually, they are purely voiced only in unstressed intervocalic positions, whereas when stressed they are voiceless stops followed by a voiced aspiration.

Later researchers made similar discoveries when recording Wu accents. Qian (1992) pointed out that in most part of Wu dialects, the voiced initial consonants were not really voiced, but voiceless consonants followed by a voiced aspiration. The voiced aspiration was an auditory impression caused by the lower pitch at the beginning of these



voiceless consonants, owing to which the bilabial stop and the alveolar stop can be transcribed as [p<sup>h</sup> t<sup>h</sup>], but usually as [b d]. One of the major contrasts between the so-called voiced stops [b d] and the unaspirated voiceless stops [p t] is the closure duration: the so-called voiced stops [b d] have short closure durations while the voiceless stops [p t] have long closure durations. The voiced initial consonants in Wu dialects can be classified as voiceless lax stops. The annotations in *Syllabary of Dialect Pronunciations of Chinese Characters* say in Suzhou dialect, the voiced initial consonants are not voiced at the beginning, but voiceless consonants followed by strong voiced aspirations. *The Overview of Jiangsu Dialect and Shanghai Dialect* also says the voiced initial consonants in Suzhou, Wuxi, Changzhou, Haimen, and Shanghai are not very voiced at the beginning of articulation.

Nevertheless, not all the ancient voiced initial consonants in Wu dialects region are voiceless consonants followed by a voiced aspiration. In some parts, there exist “voiced consonants followed by a voiced aspiration”, or “very authentic voiced consonants”, so different dialect regions should be dealt with differently while doing researches. In Wenzhou dialect, for example, the voiced initial consonants are produced with a not very strong voiced aspiration, and thus they are voiced consonants followed by a voiced aspiration (Zhong & Chen, 2012). Cao (2022) pointed out that in the cities like Dongyang, Suichang, and Wenzhou, etc., the ancient voiced initial consonants are still voiced now: Wenzhou dialect keeps voiced consonants followed by a not very strong voiced aspiration, and Changshu dialect even keeps very authentic voiced initial consonants.

The initial devoicing is a popular trend in the evolution of Chinese language, as well as the direction of language change in Wu dialects. Nevertheless, language never changes in balance, owing to which we can feel the real existence of voiced consonants and make researches on the different types of devoicing. In some areas of Wu dialects, the ancient voiced initial consonants have totally devoiced, such as Qingyan district in Lishui city, Zhejiang province, the town of Hengdu in Shitai district, Chizhou city, Anhui province, and the town of Lingyang in Qingyang district, Chizhou city, Anhui province. Meanwhile, in some other areas of Wu dialects, the voiced initial consonants have been completely kept till now, like the Wu dialect in Wenzhou, Zhejiang province. Generally speaking, in a dialect region the step of devoicing of the ancient voiced initial consonants is faster in border areas than that in the center areas (Zhong & Chen 2012).

This study aims at conducting an instrumental analysis of the initial stop consonants in Tongdong dialect.

### III. METHODOLOGY

#### A. Participants of the Study

The participants of the study are four local citizens in Yuxi district, all of whom speak Tongdong dialect and Chinese mandarin, and their ages are between 48 and 76.

#### B. Experimental Words

The stop consonants in Wu dialects are [b p p<sup>h</sup> d t t<sup>h</sup> g k k<sup>h</sup>]. The experimental words used in this study are composed of three parts, which are one-character Chinese words with pre-vocalic stops, two-character Chinese words with pre-vocalic stops, and two-character Chinese words with intervocalic stops. Part 1 is 270 one-character Chinese words, composed of 9 sets, with 30 words for each set. The 30 words in each set are composed by one of the nine stop consonants above and 30 rhymes in Chinese Mandarin, like 扒 [ba], 牌 [pai], 旁 [paŋ], etc. Part 2 is 270 two-character Chinese words, with the 9 stop consonants at prevocalic positions, like 扒手 [basɛr], 牌匾 [paipin], 旁边 [paŋpin], etc. Part 3 is 270 two-character Chinese words, with the 9 stop consonants at intervocalic positions, like 铁耙 [tiba], 品牌 [p<sup>h</sup>mbai], 身旁 [sɛnbaŋ], etc.

#### C. Instruments

The voice recording and analyzing products used in the acoustic recording and processing are as follows.

The device used for the acoustic recording of the participants' voices was Sony Linear PCM Recorder PCM-D100. 44.1kHz/16bit was set on the recorder, and the output file was in “wav” format, which is compatible with Praat software (Gu, 2023).

Processing the recorded voices and measuring the VOT values, vowel lengths, vowel pitches, and vowel intensities were conducted using Praat software version 6.4.61 (Boersma & Weenink, 2025).

The numerical data obtained were further processed with IBM SPSS Version 22.0 (Gu, 2023).

### IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

#### A. Prevocalic Stops in One-Character Chinese Words

In this section, the VOT values of the 9 stop consonants and the vowel length, pitch and intensity of the rhymes following will be analyzed as below.

##### (a). VOT of Stops

The data of the participants' VOT values are given below in Table 1.

TABLE 1  
VOT VALUES OF WORD-INITIAL STOPS IN ONE-CHARACTER CHINESE WORDS (MS)

| Stop               | b d g | p t k | p <sup>h</sup> t <sup>h</sup> k <sup>h</sup> |
|--------------------|-------|-------|----------------------------------------------|
| Mean               | 22.66 | 16.20 | 113.34                                       |
| Standard Deviation | 9.33  | 7.64  | 21.62                                        |
| Sample Number      | 360   | 360   | 360                                          |

The average of VOT values of the voiced stops [b d g] is 22.66 ms, that of the unaspirated voiceless stops [p t k] is 16.20 ms, and that of the aspirated voiceless stops [p<sup>h</sup> t<sup>h</sup> k<sup>h</sup>] is 113.34 ms. This finding shows that in one-character words in Tongdong dialect, the three grades of prevocalic stops are all voiceless stops, with a positive VOT. Classified in VOT values, the stops can only be divided into two types: aspirated voiceless stops [p<sup>h</sup> t<sup>h</sup> k<sup>h</sup>] and unaspirated voiceless stop [b d g p t k]. The aspirated voiceless stops [p<sup>h</sup> t<sup>h</sup> k<sup>h</sup>] have long voicing lags (VOT exceeding around 35ms) while the unaspirated voiceless stops [p t k] and the so-called voiced stops [b d g] have short voicing lags (VOT less than 30 ms) or the plosive is released simultaneously with the start of vocal fold vibration (Borden et al., 1994, pp. 23-33; Gu, 2023, pp. 2910-2917; Kent & Read, 2002, p. 141).

It can be inferred that the voiced stops [b d g] in Tongdong area are actually voiceless stops. Then how can the so-called voiced stops [b d g] and the unaspirated voiceless stops [p t k] distinguish from each other, for the two grades of stops sounds very different?

Figure 1 below is the waveform graphs and the spectrograms for the three prevocalic stops randomly chosen in Tongdong dialect, [ba]爬, [pa]拔, and [p<sup>h</sup>ai]拍.

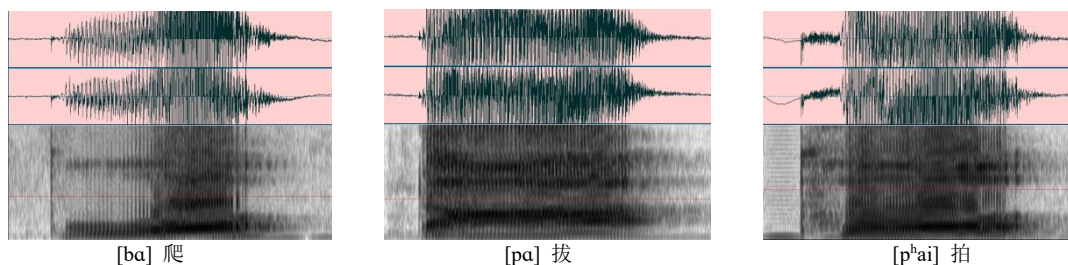


Figure 1. The Waveform Graph and Spectrogram of [ba] 爬, [pa] 拔, and [p<sup>h</sup>ai] 拍

Figure 1 shows that the VOT of the aspirated voiceless stop [p<sup>h</sup>] in 拍 is much longer than that of [b] in 爬 and [p] in 拔, thus can be easily distinguished. For the stops [b] and [p], both of them are unaspirated voiceless stops, with a short VOT. The vowel [a] in [pa] is a normal voiced sound, while the vowel [a] in [ba] shows less intensity, weak formants, and random patterns, all of which are features of a vowel produced with aspiration. This feature is especially obvious from the beginning to the middle of the vowel, which is a clear reflection that when producing [ba], there is an aspirated voiced sound passing the glottis, especially in the first half of the vowel. Listeners are able to percept this voiced aspiration while listening. This distinction in the waveform graph and spectrogram verifies that the prevocalic voiced stop in Tongdong dialect is actually a voiceless stop followed by a voiced aspiration.

#### (b). Length, Pitch and Intensity of the Adjacent Vowel

Though the prevocalic stop is the objective of this study, it is hard to distinguish the different segments within a syllable. In many cases, a consonant can only be said to be a particular way of beginning or ending of a vowel. Thus there is virtually no difference in the sounds during the actual closures of [b d g], and absolutely none at all during the closures of [p t k], for at these moments there is only silence. Each of the stop sounds conveys its quality by its effect on the adjacent vowel (Ladefoged, 1982, p. 182).

Therefore, this study analyzes the length, pitch and intensity of the adjacent vowel to disclose the difference in the different grades of stops. Table 2 below shows the lengths of the adjacent vowels.

TABLE 2  
VOWEL LENGTHS IN ONE-CHARACTER CHINESE WORDS (MS)

| Stop               | b d g  | p t k  | p <sup>h</sup> t <sup>h</sup> k <sup>h</sup> |
|--------------------|--------|--------|----------------------------------------------|
| Mean               | 546.42 | 458.73 | 462.08                                       |
| Standard Deviation | 53.69  | 68.40  | 75.34                                        |
| Sample Number      | 360    | 360    | 360                                          |

As is shown in Table 2, the average lengths of the adjacent vowels after the three grades of stops are 546.42 ms in [b d g], 458.73 ms in [p t k] and 462.08 ms in [p<sup>h</sup> t<sup>h</sup> k<sup>h</sup>]. The average vowel length after [b d g] is longer than the other two groups. A one-way ANOVA reveals that the average vowel length after [b d g] is 87.689\* (sig.=0.000) ms significantly higher than that after [p t k], and 84.344\* (sig.=0.000) ms significantly higher than that after [p<sup>h</sup> t<sup>h</sup> k<sup>h</sup>], while the difference between the average vowel length after [p t k] and that after [p<sup>h</sup> t<sup>h</sup> k<sup>h</sup>] is only 3.344 (sig.=0.939) ms. It can be concluded that in one-character Chinese words, the vowel length after a voiced stop onset is significantly higher than that after a voiceless stop onset, which is in accordance with our auditory impression. In Tongdong dialect, a

one-character Chinese word with a voiced stop onset sounds longer than that with a voiceless stop onset. This feature is in accordance with the vowel length feature in Suzhou dialect (Shi, 1983, pp. 49-83).

Former researches show that the manner of articulation of a consonant is closely related to the pitch of the adjacent vowel. The adjacent vowel after a voiced consonant has a relatively lower pitch than that after a voiceless consonant (Lehiste, 1970). In a tonal language like Chinese, the vowel pitch is affected by the tone type. In order to reduce the influence from the tone type, the vowel pitch on its locus is recorded for each sample, as Table 3 below shows.

TABLE 3  
VOWEL PITCHES IN ONE-CHARACTER CHINESE WORDS (Hz)

| Stop               | b d g  | p t k  | p <sup>h</sup> t <sup>h</sup> k <sup>h</sup> |
|--------------------|--------|--------|----------------------------------------------|
| Mean               | 100.48 | 158.36 | 144.22                                       |
| Standard Deviation | 13.44  | 34.20  | 29.12                                        |
| Sample Number      | 360    | 360    | 360                                          |

As is shown in Table 3, the average pitches of the vowel locus adjacent to the three grades of stops are 100.48 Hz in [b d g], 158.36 Hz in [p t k], and 144.22 Hz in [p<sup>h</sup> t<sup>h</sup> k<sup>h</sup>]. The average vowel pitch after [b d g] is shorter than the other two groups. A one-way ANOVA reveals that the average vowel pitch after [b d g] is 57.878 \* (sig.=0.000) Hz significantly lower than that after [p t k], and 43.744 \* (sig.=0.000) Hz significantly lower than that after [p<sup>h</sup> t<sup>h</sup> k<sup>h</sup>]. Meanwhile, the average vowel pitch after [p t k] is significantly 14.133 \* (sig.=0.002) Hz higher than that after [p<sup>h</sup> t<sup>h</sup> k<sup>h</sup>]. In Tongdong dialect, the vowels after voiced stops [b d g] are relatively lower in pitch, which is in accordance with vowel pitch rules in English referred to above.

Just like the recording of the vowel pitch, the vowel intensity at its locus is recorded for each sample, as Table 4 shows below.

TABLE 4  
VOWEL INTENSITIES IN ONE-CHARACTER CHINESE WORDS (dB)

| Stop               | b d g | p t k | p <sup>h</sup> t <sup>h</sup> k <sup>h</sup> |
|--------------------|-------|-------|----------------------------------------------|
| Mean               | 87.11 | 88.33 | 87.13                                        |
| Standard Deviation | 2.67  | 2.13  | 1.78                                         |
| Sample Number      | 360   | 360   | 360                                          |

As is shown in Table 4, the average intensities of vowel locus adjacent to the three grades of stops are 87.11 dB in [b d g], 88.33 dB in [p t k] and 87.13 dB in [p<sup>h</sup> t<sup>h</sup> k<sup>h</sup>]. Different from the results in the vowel lengths and the vowel pitches, the vowel intensities show very small differences among the three groups. A one-way ANOVA reveals no significant difference among the three averages. The voicing of a stop shows no significant influence on its adjacent vowel's intensity.

The findings in vowel length and pitch are that the vowel length after a voiced stop is significantly longer and the pitch is significantly lower, which are conformant with the findings in Suzhou dialect, an important member in Wu dialects, reported by Shi (1983, pp. 49-83).

#### B. Prevocalic Stops in Two-Character Chinese Words

Prevocalic stops in two-character Chinese words have the same position in a syllable with the prevocalic stops in one-character Chinese words, and thus their acoustic features are almost the same, with only a slight difference. The statistic data are not listed here in detail. The VOT values of the voiced stops [b d g] are positive VOT; the average vowel length after [b d g] is significantly longer than that after [p t k] and [p<sup>h</sup> t<sup>h</sup> k<sup>h</sup>]; the average vowel pitch after [b d g] is significantly lower than that after [p t k] and [p<sup>h</sup> t<sup>h</sup> k<sup>h</sup>]. Nevertheless, the average vowel intensity after [b d g] is significantly lower than that after [p t k] and that after [p<sup>h</sup> t<sup>h</sup> k<sup>h</sup>], which is different from the result in one-character Chinese words. Since in addition to consonant voicing, vowel intensity may be easily affected by factors like place of articulation, manner of articulation, adjacent consonants, strength of speaking, etc., the acoustic features of intervocalic stops should be observed next.

#### C. Intervocalic Stops in Two-Character Chinese Words

In Wu dialects, the acoustic features of the intervocalic stops are different from those of the prevocalic stops. In two-character Chinese words, the stops [b d g] in the second character change from voiceless stops followed by voiced aspirations into unaspirated voiced stops, which means that the voicing begins before the release of the stop. The voiceless stops [p t k p<sup>h</sup> t<sup>h</sup> k<sup>h</sup>] keep voiceless in the intervocalic position (Chao, 2002).

##### (a). VOT of Stops

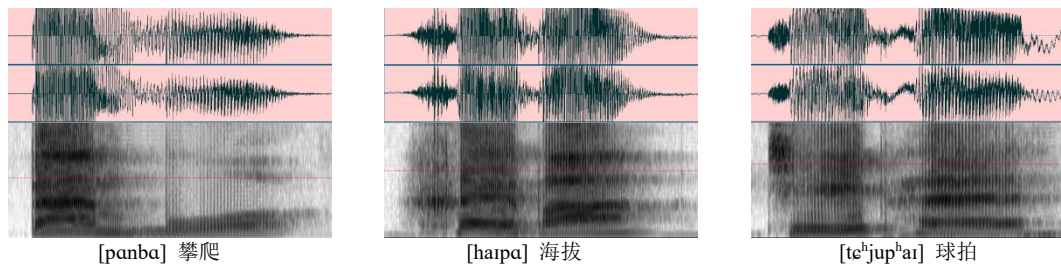


Figure 2. The Waveform Graphs and Spectrograms of [panba] 攀爬, [haipa] 海拔, and [tɕʰjupʰai] 球拍

As is shown in Figure 2, in the spectrogram the voiced stop [b] in an intervocalic position in [panba] 攀爬 shows a voicing bar during the closure before the release, which is connected with the voicing bar of the vowel in the former character [pan] 攀 and that in the later character [ba] 爬. This voicing bar before the release of [b] is the voicing lead (Lisker & Abramson, 1964, p. 389). Meanwhile, the voiceless stop [p] in [haipa] 海拔 and [pʰ] in [tɕʰjupʰai] 球拍 don't show this feature. Instead, both of them show a voicing lag after the release. It can be concluded that in Tongdong dialect, [b d g] are only voiced in an intervocalic position, while in a prevocalic position, they are voiceless stops followed with voiced aspirations.

Another distinctive feature of [ba] in Figure 2 is that the vowel [a] shows a clear trace of aspiration: in the waveform graphs, the sound wave of [a] in [ba] has a lower amplitude than that of [a] in [pa] and [ai] in [pʰai]; in the spectrogram the first half part of [a] in [ba] shows very weak formants with clear random patterns, which don't exist in the spectrogram of [pa] or that of [pʰai]. This feature reflects that though keeping the feature of being voiced from the ancient voiced stops, the intervocalic voiced stop [b] produces a voiced aspiration through the glottis, forming a voiced stop followed by a voiced aspiration.

This finding aligns with the findings reported by Zhong (2012) and Cao (2022). In Wu dialects region, not all the ancient voiced consonants have devoiced into voiceless consonants followed by voiced aspirations. Instead, there still exist voiced consonants followed by voiced aspirations, as in Wenzhou dialect, and classical voiced consonants as well, as in Changshu dialect. The intervocalic voiced stops in Tongdong dialect keep the feature of the ancient voiced stops, but are voiced stops followed by voiced aspirations.

#### (b). Pitch and Intensity of the Adjacent Vowel

The acoustic features of the vowel after an intervocalic stop are conformant with those after a prevocalic stop discussed in Part A. The average vowel length after [b d g] is significantly longer than that after [p t k] and [pʰ tʰ kʰ]; the average vowel pitch after [b d g] is significantly lower than that after [p t k] and [pʰ tʰ kʰ]. Unlike the intensities of the vowels adjacent to prevocalic stops in two-character Chinese words, discussed in Part B, the intensities of the vowels adjacent to intervocalic stops among the three groups show no significant difference, which is the same as the prevocalic stops in one-character Chinese words.

### V. CONCLUSION

The research findings indicate that as a border region in Wu dialects, Tongdong dialect keeps the ancient voiced stop consonants [b d g] in the intervocalic position, and has three grades of stops: voiceless unaspirated, voiceless aspirated, and voiced aspirated, which is a distinctive feature in Wu dialects.

The prevocalic voiced stop has a positive VOT; the voicing begins just after the release of the stop followed by a strong voiced aspiration; the adjacent vowel is significantly longer in length and lower in pitch, which makes the stop sound voiced.

The intervocalic voiced stop has a negative VOT; the voicing begins before the release of the stop, making a voicing lead in the spectrogram and followed by a less strong voiced aspiration; the adjacent vowel is significantly longer in length and lower in pitch.

Located in the border region of Wu dialects, Tongdong dialect is relatively faster in its voiced stops devoicing than other regions. Till now, in Tongdong dialect, there is no typical voiced stop like those in Changshu dialect, but a coexistence of voiced stops with voiced aspirations and voiceless stops with voiced aspirations.

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# Code-Switching Practices in Digital Communication: A Case Study of EFL Learners in Southwest Papua, Indonesia

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**Abstract**—This study investigates the digital code-switching practices of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners at Universitas Muhammadiyah Sorong, Indonesia, across three prominent social media platforms: WhatsApp, Instagram, and Facebook. Using a qualitative case study approach, the research draws on naturally occurring digital interactions and semi-structured interviews with eight purposively selected participants. Through an interactive analytical framework, the study identifies systematic patterns of inter-sentential and intra-sentential code-switching that function as intentional communicative strategies rather than indicators of linguistic inadequacy. The students employ code-switching to convey emotions, construct personal and social identities, enhance narrative expression, and manage audience relationships within digital environments. English commonly indexes prestige, global orientation, and emotional emphasis, whereas Indonesian maintains cultural resonance and interpersonal closeness. These practices reflect a translanguaging process shaped by the affordances of social media platforms and the multilingual ecology of Eastern Indonesia. The study contributes to ongoing discussions on digital multilingualism by emphasizing code-switching as an essential element of digital literacy and intercultural communicative competence.

**Index Terms**—code-switching, digital multilingualism, translanguaging, social media communication

## I. INTRODUCTION

The rapid advancement of digital technologies has significantly transformed communicative behavior across the globe, with pronounced effects in multilingual settings (Wang et al., 2025). A salient characteristic of these online interactions is code-switching, understood as the alternation between languages within a single communicative exchange. For English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners in Indonesia, this linguistic alternation functions not only as a habitual practice but also as a socio-cultural and cognitive resource that reflects their multilingual realities (Lundtofte & Grønning, 2025).

Indonesia is widely recognized for its extensive linguistic diversity, comprising more than 700 local languages coexisting alongside Bahasa Indonesia as the national language and English as an increasingly prominent language in both academic and digital domains (Riyanto et al., 2023). Within such a sociolinguistic landscape, university students frequently alternate between languages, particularly on digital platforms such as WhatsApp, Facebook, and Instagram (Ro, 2025). These platforms facilitate informal, fluid interactions, making them conducive environments for natural and spontaneous occurrences of code-switching.

An expanding body of research highlights the central role of social media in shaping multilingual practices. Chakrani et al. (2025) conceptualize social media as a site of “networked multilingualism,” where language choices are strategically made to align with identity, audience orientation, and interactional goals. Similarly, Gan (2024) observes that youth engagement in online code-switching reflects creativity rather than linguistic deficiency. Empirical studies involving Indonesian learners parallel these broader trends. Pratginestós and Masats (2024) found that EFL learners employed code-switching in WhatsApp group conversations for purposes such as clarification, emphasis, and humor. Comparable findings were reported by Namaziandost et al. (2025), who noted that students alternated languages to

negotiate meaning and sustain group cohesion. Research by Anggraini and Cahyono (2022) on Instagram interactions further demonstrated that code-switching supports expressive and social functions, enabling students to navigate both local and global identities. Elhambakhsh (2025) adds that language alternation remains highly sensitive to context, shaped by interlocutors, topics, and communicative objectives.

Learners at Universitas Muhammadiyah Sorong represent a linguistically and culturally diverse population, including speakers of various Papuan languages, making multilingual interactions part of everyday communication. On WhatsApp, students typically engage in discussions related to coursework, personal matters, or campus activities, while Facebook and Instagram serve as platforms for broader self-expression (Rustan & Ajiegoena, 2023). These digital spaces provide rich opportunities for examining authentic code-switching behavior.

Although previous studies have contributed valuable insights into digital code-switching among Indonesian learners, most have concentrated on Java and other urban regions (Du et al., 2025). Research exploring digital multilingual practices in Eastern Indonesia remains limited, despite the region's complex interplay between local, national, and global languages. This imbalance highlights a critical research gap. Drawing on the translanguaging perspective proposed by Wang and Patterson (2025), multilingual speakers are understood to utilize their full linguistic repertoire flexibly, challenging rigid separations between languages. Complementing this, Fetahi et al. (2025) argue that the low-stakes environment of social media enables linguistic experimentation, providing a fertile context for observing real-time meaning negotiation. Smith et al. (2025) also emphasize that digital code-switching showcases learner agency and intercultural competence.

Addressing this gap, the present study explores the code-switching practices of EFL learners at Universitas Muhammadiyah Sorong across WhatsApp, Facebook, and Instagram. It focuses on the patterns, communicative functions, and sociolinguistic motivations underlying their language alternation in digital spaces (Ibrahim et al., 2024). By centering on student practices in an underrepresented region and employing authentic digital data, the study not only broadens current understandings of multilingualism in online contexts but also offers implications for educators, researchers, and policymakers concerned with language use in the digital era.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

### A. Theoretical Foundation of Code-Switching

Code-switching in digital contexts has emerged as a prominent focus of recent linguistic research, as online interaction increasingly shapes language use across various communities (Gross et al., 2022). Han et al. (2022) note that digital communication alters conversational norms because messages are exchanged rapidly and through multimodal formats that promote linguistic fluidity. Such environments enable users to shift between languages with greater ease, partly due to the reduced expectation to maintain formal, standardized forms on social media (Daoud et al., 2024). As a result, digital platforms serve as productive sites for examining authentic and spontaneous code-switching practices.

Existing research shows that platforms such as WhatsApp, Facebook, and Instagram facilitate hybrid linguistic behavior due to their informal and dialogue-oriented nature (Hiaeshutter & Hawkins, 2022). Users alternate languages to increase communicative efficiency, articulate identity, or align with specific online communities. Digital interactions often incorporate multimodal resources—such as images, emojis, and abbreviations—that intersect with code-switching to create layered semiotic expressions (Song & Xiong, 2023). Consequently, online linguistic behavior becomes an integrated system of linguistic codes, visual signs, and cultural references.

Lappeman et al. (2024) demonstrate that multilingual users employ code-switching to signal solidarity and maintain rapport with interlocutors. Scholars further highlight the affordances of asynchronous digital communication, which allow users to deliberately shape tone, identity, and stance in their messages. Even brief or highly compressed utterances can reflect strategic language choice, underscoring code-switching as a purposeful communicative resource rather than a mere linguistic side effect (Treffers et al., 2022).

Digital environments also facilitate audience-oriented code-switching, where language choice is adjusted based on anticipated readership (Muftah, 2024). Observations indicate that users often expect multilingual audiences and therefore alternate languages to promote inclusivity or highlight shared cultural backgrounds. These practices reflect not only linguistic competence but also awareness of social network dynamics and collective expectations (Sablina, 2023). Accordingly, code-switching becomes a means of negotiating group affiliation and interpersonal alignment.

Further research suggests that digital platforms encourage linguistic experimentation to a degree uncommon in face-to-face communication (Didi, 2020). Users may switch codes to test unfamiliar expressions, imitate peer usage, or connect with global popular culture. Such experimentation is especially widespread among young people, who regard digital spaces as low-stakes environments conducive to play and creativity in language use. This pattern highlights the role of code-switching as a vehicle for innovation and self-expression in online contexts (Yousif, 2025).

Digital literacy has also been identified as a key factor shaping online code-switching patterns (Mustafayeva et al., 2025). Individuals with higher levels of digital competence tend to switch between linguistic forms more seamlessly, often integrating multiple codes within a single message. Rosyidha et al. (2025) contend that digital literacy influences how users conceptualize and manipulate linguistic boundaries during online interaction. Thus, effective participation in digital communication relies on both linguistic proficiency and technological adaptability.

Kakati and Dandotiya (2024) emphasize that local sociolinguistic conditions significantly shape online code-switching practices. In multilingual settings such as Indonesia, digital environments mirror broader community language practices rather than functioning as isolated communicative spaces. Online interactions reflect the intricate dynamics of national, regional, and global languages that characterize local linguistic ecologies (Wang, 2025). This alignment reinforces the need to consider both digital and offline contexts when examining multilingual behavior.

Utegenova et al. (2024) argue that code-switching in digital environments follows discernible patterns shaped by social conventions, technological features, and individual communicative aims. Across the literature, scholars show that digital interaction provides valuable insight into how multilingual users navigate identity, construct meaning, and manage social relationships through language choice (Dux, 2020). This body of work offers an essential foundation for analyzing code-switching among EFL learners in contemporary Indonesian contexts.

### *B. Sociolinguistic Perspectives on Code-Switching in Multilingual Societies, Globalization and Indigenous Languages*

Sociolinguistic scholarship has long identified code-switching as a key characteristic of multilingual settings, illustrating the fluid relationship between language use, identity construction, and social environment (Dean & Porter, 2025). In many multilingual contexts, shifting between languages is viewed not as a deficit but as an indicator of communicative sophistication. Scholars argue that multilingual individuals draw on their full linguistic repertoires to navigate complex social interactions, positioning code-switching as an intentional and socially grounded practice (Althobaiti & Alsaawi, 2025).

A central sociolinguistic perspective considers code-switching an important resource for negotiating identity and social positioning (Martinez & Guinot, 2025). Research suggests that speakers strategically alternate languages to signal specific identity dimensions—such as ethnicity, educational background, or group membership. These linguistic choices communicate nuanced messages about how individuals wish to present themselves within an interaction. In multilingual communities, such shifts may reinforce alignment with certain groups or serve to create social distance (Nistor & Zadobrischi, 2022).

Code-switching is also shaped by community norms and communicative expectations (Hiaeshutter & Hawkins, 2022). In linguistically diverse regions, language choice often reflects established conventions relating to politeness, contextual appropriateness, or solidarity. Researchers have found that speakers frequently switch languages to maintain interpersonal harmony or strengthen social bonds. This underscores the intentional and culturally embedded nature of code-switching, distinguishing it from random linguistic shifts (Alazemi et al., 2023).

Another significant sociolinguistic dimension concerns the role of power in influencing language alternation (Wang, 2024). Nejadghanbar et al. (2024) highlight how dominant and minority languages interact within social hierarchies, shaping when and why speakers choose to switch codes. Language choices may be used to assert authority, display competence, or challenge dominant linguistic norms enforced by institutions. Consequently, code-switching becomes entangled with issues of power, linguistic inequality, and social stratification (Tjaden et al., 2024).

In many multilingual societies, code-switching also serves as a pragmatic mechanism for facilitating communication across diverse linguistic groups (Zhang et al., 2025). Switching languages can enhance mutual understanding, demonstrate respect, or accommodate interlocutors with different linguistic backgrounds. Scholars note that such adaptability fosters cohesion by bridging language gaps. These practices illustrate the responsiveness and flexibility of multilingual speakers in managing communication (Mahalingappa, 2023).

Zhong and Fan (2023) emphasize the cultural dimensions of code-switching, particularly its role in maintaining or reshaping local identity. Through alternating languages, speakers incorporate cultural idioms, humor, and references that resonate with shared heritage (Syam et al., 2023). This blending enriches interaction by drawing on multiple cultural resources, contributing to the continuous reshaping of cultural identity in multilingual contexts.

Sociolinguists also examine the effects of globalization on language alternation, especially in societies undergoing rapid social and technological transformation (Blyth & Thoms, 2021). Increased exposure to global media, transnational communication, and international education encourages the integration of global languages into local linguistic practices. These influences generate hybrid communicative forms that reshape established linguistic norms, reflecting the fluid boundaries of contemporary language use (Brdarević et al., 2024).

Research further indicates that patterns of code-switching differ across generations within multilingual communities (Sahib et al., 2021). Younger speakers may adopt distinct switching behaviors influenced by schooling, peer interaction, and digital media. Utegenova et al. (2024) suggest that such generational variations can signal shifting language ideologies and emerging linguistic identities. Collectively, these perspectives illuminate the complexity of code-switching as a multifaceted sociolinguistic phenomenon.

### *C. Code-Switching Among EFL Learners in Indonesian Contexts*

Research on EFL learners in Indonesia consistently shows that code-switching is an integral part of their communication patterns (Riyanto et al., 2023). Chakrani et al. (2025) report that EFL learners rely on both English and Indonesian to express ideas, manage comprehension, and maintain conversational flow. Scholars note that this reliance stems from Indonesia's deeply multilingual environment, where linguistic diversity shapes everyday communication. Consequently, EFL learners naturally integrate code-switching into their linguistic repertoire.



One of the main reasons EFL learners switch codes is to compensate for limited vocabulary or grammatical uncertainty. When learners struggle to retrieve suitable English expressions, they often shift to Indonesian to maintain message clarity (Gross et al., 2022). This strategic switching allows communication to continue smoothly without interrupting interaction. Researchers interpret this behavior as a pragmatic adaptation rather than a failure in language learning (Rustan & Ajiegoena, 2023).

Zhong and Fan (2023) have also observed that EFL learners switch codes to express cultural concepts that may not translate easily into English. Indonesian cultural references, idioms, or humor can lose meaning when converted into English, leading learners to revert to their first language. This switching helps maintain the richness of communication and ensures that cultural nuance is preserved. Such patterns highlight the interplay between language proficiency and cultural identity.

Classroom studies show that Indonesian EFL learners frequently use code-switching to negotiate meaning during group discussions (Syam et al., 2023). Learners mix languages to clarify instructions, check understanding, or support peers with weaker English skills. These collaborative exchanges demonstrate the social function of code-switching in facilitating cooperative learning. Researchers argue that this practice can enhance participation and reduce anxiety among learners.

Another factor influencing code-switching is the instructional style of teachers in Indonesian EFL classrooms (Sahib et al., 2021). Teachers may switch codes to simplify explanations, reinforce key concepts, or ensure that students grasp difficult grammar points. This pedagogical switching models acceptable bilingual behavior for students and may encourage further switching in peer interaction. Studies suggest that such instructional practices help learners manage cognitive load during complex tasks (Alazemi et al., 2023).

Beyond classroom environments, Indonesian EFL learners engage in code-switching within digital communication, such as messaging, social media, and online forums (Song & Xiong, 2023). These platforms provide informal spaces where learners experiment with English while relying on Indonesian for emotional expression or humor. Scholars note that digital environments reduce linguistic pressure and promote linguistic playfulness among learners. This behavior reflects broader digital communication trends observed worldwide.

Sociolinguistic factors also shape code-switching among Indonesian EFL learners. Learners may switch languages to align themselves with perceived social prestige associated with English or to signal educational background (Sablina, 2023). At the same time, shifts back to Indonesian help maintain solidarity with peers and affirm local identity. These dual motivations illustrate how language choice serves both symbolic and practical functions in Indonesian contexts.

Research indicates that code-switching can support language development if used strategically. When learners alternate between English and Indonesian to compare structures or clarify meanings, the process can deepen their linguistic awareness (Treffers et al., 2022). Educators who encourage reflective use of code-switching can help students develop metalinguistic insight and confidence. This perspective positions code-switching as a valuable learning resource rather than an obstacle to proficiency (Didi, 2020).

### III. METHODOLOGY

This study employed a qualitative case study design to examine the ways in which EFL learners engage in code-switching during digital communication. The qualitative approach was selected for its capacity to capture the complexity of naturally occurring linguistic behavior, while the case study design enabled an in-depth examination of learners' language practices across authentic digital environments, specifically WhatsApp, Facebook, and Instagram. This design facilitated a contextualized understanding of the functions and motivations underlying language alternation in online interactions.

The research population comprised EFL learners at Universitas Muhammadiyah Sorong. Purposive sampling was applied using predefined criteria: participants were required to be active users of particular social media platforms, demonstrate multilingual practices, and consent to providing communication samples, such as screenshots. Eight learners from the 3rd, 5th, and 7th semesters met these criteria. The sample size was considered adequate to achieve data saturation and ensure analytical comprehensiveness without compromising depth.

Data collection was conducted through two primary techniques: documentation of social media communication and semi-structured interviews. Documented data included archived and recent digital interactions from 2023 to 2025, while the formal process of requesting and verifying screenshots occurred between 6 and 13 January 2025. This procedure ensured the usability of earlier digital records as long as they remained accessible. Semi-structured interviews, conducted face-to-face, were used to elicit participants' motivations, functional uses, and perceptions of code-switching. All English excerpts have been linguistically refined for grammatical accuracy while preserving their original communicative intent. The combination of both sources allowed for the integration of contextual digital evidence with deeper interpretive insights.

Data analysis followed a structured qualitative procedure comprising data organization, reduction, categorization, and interpretation. Patterns, themes, and instances of language alternation were identified and presented in descriptive narrative form according to functional and contextual classifications. Coding and thematic development were performed to refine the interpretive process. Additionally, simple descriptive statistics were used to summarize participant

characteristics, including semester level and platform usage, which were presented in tabular form to support the qualitative interpretation.

#### IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

##### A. Code-Switching in WhatsApp

The findings indicate that EFL learners at Universitas Muhammadiyah Sorong routinely engage in code-switching as an integral component of their daily communication. This linguistic practice is particularly prominent in their interactions on the WhatsApp platform. Code-switching was observed both in students' WhatsApp story posts and in their exchanges within group chats. Rather than occurring as a deliberate or consciously controlled act, the language alternation emerged naturally and spontaneously, reflecting the students' adaptation to conversational flow, topic relevance, and interlocutor identity. Social factors and communicative intentions—such as expressing solidarity, emphasizing particular points, or enhancing conversational clarity—were found to play a significant role in shaping these practices. Overall, the results demonstrate that code-switching functions as a practical and socially meaningful communicative strategy through which EFL learners navigate bilingual interaction in digital environments.

TABLE 1  
CODE-SWITCHING IN WHATSAPP

| No | Semester        | Participant | Time       | Code-Switching Excerpt                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
|----|-----------------|-------------|------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1. | 7 <sup>th</sup> | TW          | 20/12/2024 | <b>English:</b> <i>"And to the greatest father in my life, I love you eternally."</i><br><b>Indonesian:</b> "Iseng coba, tiba-tiba air mata netes ga berhenti-berhenti sambil ngetik."                                                                           |
| 2. | 7 <sup>th</sup> | YW          | 29/12/2024 | <b>English:</b> <i>"The ages of 25 to 30 are not easy. You lose friends, make mistakes, fall, and face reality."</i><br><b>Indonesian:</b> "Gapapa kehilangan teman asal jangan kehilangan diri sendiri."                                                        |
| 3. | 7 <sup>th</sup> | IM          | 22/02/2024 | <b>English:</b> <i>"Just a memory I hold quietly, a name I no longer speak, yet one that still lingers in my heart."</i><br><b>Indonesian:</b> "Namun pada akhirnya, dia hanyalah sosok yang akan kukenang dalam kesunyian."                                     |
| 4. | 7 <sup>th</sup> | PY          | 23/11/2024 | <b>English:</b> <i>"As a former student and student council secretary of SMP Quba (2017–2018), I would like to sincerely express my gratitude."</i><br><b>Indonesian:</b> "Saya yakin bahwa saya tidak akan berada di tempat sekarang murni usaha saya sendiri." |
| 5. | 7 <sup>th</sup> | IN          | 15/12/2024 | <b>English:</b> <i>"Debate has become one of the ways to improve critical thinking and problem-solving skills."</i><br><b>Indonesian:</b> "Setidaknya masih ada harapan emas."                                                                                   |
| 6. | 5 <sup>th</sup> | LS          | 22/11/2024 | <b>English:</b> <i>"One of my best and most meaningful experiences of the past year."</i><br><b>Indonesian:</b> "Yuk bisa yuk semakin menyala lagi diriku."                                                                                                      |
| 7. | 3 <sup>rd</sup> | DW          | 26/08/2024 | <b>English:</b> <i>"Hello, I came back to this village again."</i><br><b>Indonesian:</b> "Berbagi ilmu, maju bersama, tidak ada yang tertinggal"                                                                                                                 |
| 8. | 3 <sup>rd</sup> | AA          | 10/12/2024 | <b>English:</b> <i>"The best place I have ever been."</i><br><b>Indonesian:</b> "Khususnya bagian timur selalu punya cerita atau mitos tersendiri di balik nama dan tempatnya."                                                                                  |

Based on the data presented in Table 1, the analysis shows that EFL learners at Universitas Muhammadiyah Sorong frequently employ code-switching in their digital communication, particularly on WhatsApp. This linguistic practice involves alternating between Indonesian and English in both public posts, such as WhatsApp Stories, and semi-private exchanges, such as group chats. The findings suggest that code-switching is not an occasional or peripheral behavior; rather, it constitutes a central component of students' online interactional practices. Language in these contexts serves not only as a means of conveying information but also as a resource for expressing identity, emotions, and personal reflections.

These observations correspond with Gan's (2024) theory of networked multilingualism, which posits that social media platforms promote diverse and flexible language practices, especially among young people in multilingual environments. Through platforms like WhatsApp, students are provided with both technological affordances and sociocultural spaces that support the construction of identity through hybrid linguistic choices. Similarly, Namaziandost et al. (2025) argue that bilingual individuals do not conceptualize their languages as distinct systems; instead, they draw on a unified linguistic repertoire to generate meaning, particularly in informal digital settings. From this perspective, the students' interchangeable use of Indonesian and English represents a natural and strategic process rooted in their complex sociolinguistic realities.

With regard to structural patterns, intra-sentential switching emerged as the most prevalent form, characterized by shifts occurring within a single sentence or clause. The example *"Debate has become one of the ways to improve*

*critical thinking and problem-solving skills, setidaknya masih ada harapan emas?*” illustrates how academic English terminology is interwoven with Indonesian evaluative commentary. Another instance is “*As a former student and student council secretary of SMP Quba (2017–2018), I would like to sincerely express my gratitude. Saya yakin bahwa saya tidak akan berada di tempat sekarang...*”, demonstrating language alternation within a continuous narrative. Inter-sentential switching was also observed, where the shift occurs between sentences, as exemplified in “*Iseng coba, tiba-tiba air mata netes... And to the greatest father in my life, I love you eternally.*” These patterns reflect students’ sensitivity to the emotional and communicative functions each language may serve.

The functional dimensions of code-switching among students are similarly diverse. One prominent function is emotional expression, as seen in “*Just a memory I hold quietly, a name I no longer speak, yet one that still lingers in my heart,*” where English is used to convey nostalgia or sadness, often perceived as more stylistic or symbolic than expressions in the native language. Code-switching also functions as a tool for identity affirmation and self-reflection, illustrated in expressions such as “*...The ages of 25 to 30 are not easy...*” and “*the best place I have ever been,*” which reflect students’ awareness of personal milestones and challenges. In other cases, code-switching is used to highlight academic orientation, as seen in the phrase “*improve critical thinking and problem-solving skills,*” indicating the influence of English-language academic discourse on their communicative behavior.

From a motivational standpoint, several factors contribute to students’ code-switching practices. A key motivation is the desire to produce discourse that is more expressive, aesthetically appealing, and emotionally resonant, with English perceived as adding stylistic refinement or communicative impact. Phrases such as “*my best and most meaningful experiences of the past year*” exemplify this perception. Code-switching also signals academic competence and social identity, enabling students to showcase their bilingual proficiency and position themselves as globally oriented individuals. This corresponds with Pratginestós and Masats’s (2024) emphasis on the affective dimensions of translanguaging, which highlight how bilinguals use language shifts to manage emotional expression and interpersonal relationships.

However, scholarly perspectives on code-switching are not uniformly positive. Smith et al. (2025) caution that the dominant status of English in digital and global communication may reinforce linguistic hierarchies and contribute to the marginalization of local or indigenous languages. In this context, frequent use of English may indicate not only linguistic ability but also the internalization of prestige associated with the language, potentially diminishing regional linguistic identities. Pedagogical concerns have also been raised by researchers such as Fetahi et al. (2025), who argue that while code-switching has communicative and expressive value, excessive reliance on English in informal contexts may hinder optimal development in either the native or target language if not complemented by structured learning practices.

Overall, the evidence indicates that code-switching among these students is not merely a linguistic mechanism but reflects broader social, emotional, and cultural realities of EFL learners in digital environments. Supported by recent theoretical perspectives, this practice is increasingly viewed as a manifestation of linguistic resourcefulness and identity negotiation rather than a sign of confusion or deficiency. For EFL learners at Universitas Muhammadiyah Sorong, code-switching represents a deliberate strategy to articulate personal identity, maintain social connections, and navigate multilingual communicative landscapes. These findings underscore the importance of situating digital language practices within the broader framework of intercultural communicative competence and the evolving multilingual literacies of contemporary youth.

### B. Code-Switching in Instagram

The researcher observed that code-switching is highly prevalent in students’ interactions on Instagram, especially within captions and comments on public Stories. These instances typically involve the combination of Indonesian and English, and at times regional languages, often accompanied by emoticons that serve to convey emotion, humor, or a personalized tone. Such patterns align with what Han et al. (2022) conceptualize as translanguaging, in which bilingual speakers draw fluidly on their entire linguistic repertoire to construct meaning, rather than viewing languages as discrete systems.

Given that Instagram is a visually driven platform centered on images and short videos, it facilitates expressive and timely modes of communication. Students employ it not only to participate in contemporary digital trends but also to cultivate a bilingual or multilingual identity consistent with global online culture. This observation resonates with Lappeman et al.’s (2024) theory of Multilingualism in the Media, which posits that digital platforms significantly shape language practices for purposes of identity construction and social engagement. Moreover, Smith et al. (2025) underscore the affective dimension of code-switching in online environments, highlighting how linguistic choices enable users to articulate emotions and foster interpersonal connections. Accordingly, code-switching on Instagram functions not merely as a linguistic mechanism but also as a social, stylistic, and affective strategy that enriches students’ digital self-presentation.

TABLE 2  
CODE-SWITCHING IN INSTAGRAM

| No | Semester        | Participant | Time       | Code-Switching Excerpt                                                                                                                                                                                                               |
|----|-----------------|-------------|------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1. | 7 <sup>th</sup> | TW          | 05/08/2024 | <b>English:</b> <i>"I am beyond proud that these generations are becoming more and more remarkable through their talents."</i><br><b>Indonesian:</b> "Alhamdulillah banget, diberi kesempatan lagi untuk ngejuriin adik-adik keren." |
| 2. | 7 <sup>th</sup> | YW          | 25/11/2024 | <b>English:</b> <i>"So proud of myself."</i><br><b>Indonesian:</b> "Bertahan sejauh ini dengan segala kepercayaan diri dan ambisi yang kuat untuk meraih mimpi."                                                                     |
| 3. | 7 <sup>th</sup> | IM          | 16/01/2025 | <b>English:</b> <i>"Was it the way my heart raced every time I saw you?"</i><br><b>Indonesian:</b> "Aku tidak tahu dengan pasti apakah ini disebut cinta pertama."                                                                   |
| 4. | 7 <sup>th</sup> | PY          | 25/07/2024 | <b>English:</b> <i>"I will wait for that moment, and let's meet again."</i><br><b>Indonesian:</b> "Bakalan rindu dengan mereka semua."                                                                                               |
| 5. | 7 <sup>th</sup> | IN          | 16/11/2024 | <b>English:</b> <i>"Proud of you, sister. Keep it up—I know you will have a bright future."</i><br><b>Indonesian:</b> "Kalau ini partner saya selama di kampus."                                                                     |
| 6. | 5 <sup>th</sup> | LS          | 15/01/2025 | <b>English:</b> <i>"My best first experience in the last year."</i><br><b>Indonesian:</b> "Yuk bisa yuk semakin menyala lagi diriku"                                                                                                 |
| 7. | 5 <sup>th</sup> | DW          | 14/10/2024 | <b>English:</b> <i>"We are truly grateful and thankful for all the kindness and hospitality we received."</i><br><b>Indonesian:</b> "Semoga kita bisa bertemu lagi di lain waktu."                                                   |

The findings presented in Table 2 indicate that EFL learners at Universitas Muhammadiyah Sorong employ code-switching on Instagram in dynamic and purposeful ways. Rather than occurring incidentally, the observed shifts among Indonesian, English, and occasionally local languages illustrate deliberate and strategic linguistic choices. The most salient pattern identified is inter-sentential code-switching, in which students alternate between languages across complete sentences. This tendency reflects an intentional differentiation of linguistic codes to fulfill distinct communicative functions within a single post. For instance, a student may describe an everyday activity in Indonesian and then shift to English to express pride, affection, or reflection, as in: *"Alhamdulillah banget, diberi kesempatan lagi untuk ngejuriin adik-adik keren. I am beyond proud that these generations are becoming more and more remarkable through their talents."* Here, the English segment amplifies emotional tone and imparts a sense of formality or universality that may not be conveyed as effectively through the local language. A similar effect is evident in the romantic reflection: *"Aku tidak tahu dengan pasti apakah ini disebut cinta pertama. Was it the way my heart raced every time I saw you?"* where English functions as a poetic device to heighten emotional resonance.

A secondary but notable pattern is intra-sentential code-switching, which reflects a more fluid integration of bilingual resources. This occurs when English expressions are embedded within predominantly Indonesian utterances, such as in: *"Kalau ini partner saya selama di kampus, proud of you sister keep it up know you'll have bright future."* In such instances, linguistic blending serves not to distinguish communicative functions but to produce a seamless, expressive statement. Drawing on Rosyidha et al.'s (2025) translanguaging framework, these instances demonstrate not merely code alternation but the mobilization of the speaker's full linguistic repertoire to convey nuanced meanings unattainable through either language alone. This practice also illustrates bilingual students' negotiation of both local and global identities.

The functional dimensions of the students' code-switching practices on Instagram are similarly multifaceted. One prominent function is emotional expression, with English frequently used to articulate intimate, reflective, or affectively charged sentiments. Phrases such as *"so proud of myself"* and *"my best first experience in the last year"* illustrate how English enhances the perceived emotional or symbolic value of personal experiences possibly due to its associations with modernity, global orientation, or perceived sophistication. Identity performance is another significant function, as students construct digital personas that are confident, expressive, and globally attuned. Instagram's emphasis on aesthetics and self-presentation reinforces this role; students do not simply share information but curate a particular image, with code-switching serving as part of that curation. Relational and social bonding further emerges in supportive comments such as *"proud of you sister, keep it up,"* which signal solidarity, encouragement, and communal affirmation. In such cases, code-switching functions as both an expressive and a connective strategy, bridging emotional distance and reinforcing social ties.

The motivations underlying these linguistic choices appear to be shaped by aesthetic, cultural, and affective considerations. Instagram's visual and performative environment encourages users to craft content that is not only communicative but also stylistically appealing and emotionally resonant. Many students perceive English as adding elegance, depth, or sophistication to their posts, reflecting both their linguistic competencies and their orientation toward global youth discourse. This is consistent with Kakati and Dandotiya's (2024) notion of networked multilingualism, wherein users adjust their language practices in response to digital contexts and imagined audiences. Additionally, an academic or intellectual motivation is evident: some students subtly deploy English to index educational attainment or cultural capital, particularly when reflecting on learning experiences or expressing gratitude in formal English. Kakati and Dandotiya's (2024) emphasis on the emotional facets of translanguaging further illuminates

how students employ English to process or articulate feelings that may feel more intimate or authentic in online contexts.

At the same time, a critical perspective is warranted. While code-switching can empower students and validate bilingual identity, Utegenova et al. (2024) caution that the growing dominance of English in digital environments may inadvertently marginalize local languages, particularly when English becomes the preferred medium for expressing intellect, achievement, or positive self-regard. Nevertheless, the data in this study suggest that students are not abandoning their native languages; instead, they use English in complementary and intentional ways.

Overall, the students' code-switching practices on Instagram reveal more than linguistic flexibility—they illuminate how young bilinguals navigate emotion, identity, and social belonging in digital spaces. Through both inter- and intra-sentential switching, students transform Instagram into a site for self-expression, cultural alignment, and relational engagement. These findings reinforce the view that code-switching constitutes a dynamic communicative resource for digitally literate EFL learners, with significance extending beyond linguistic choices to the broader shaping of contemporary youth culture and language use.

### C. Code-Switching in Facebook

Students at Universitas Muhammadiyah Sorong demonstrate an active use of code-switching on the social media platform Facebook as a deliberate strategy to support interpersonal communication within linguistically diverse networks. Code-switching commonly appears in status updates, public posts, and comment threads, where students shift between Bahasa Indonesia and English. This multilingual practice allows them to communicate with greater clarity and inclusivity, particularly when engaging with peers who possess different linguistic backgrounds. The use of both languages not only highlights their bilingual proficiency but also functions as a communicative mechanism that fosters connection and understanding in a digitally mediated, multicultural environment.

TABLE 3  
CODE-SWITCHING IN FACEBOOK

| No | Semester        | Participant | Time       | Code-Switching Excerpt                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
|----|-----------------|-------------|------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1. | 7 <sup>th</sup> | TW          | 10/09/2024 | <b>English:</b> "Fafanlap in Love in UNAMIN Cycle 2024."<br><b>Indonesian:</b> "Biasanya pengabdian dicemplungin sendiri, tapi kali ini dibarengi dosen-dosen andalan."                                                                                   |
| 2. | 7 <sup>th</sup> | YW          | 12/11/2023 | <b>English:</b> "Finally, my dream comes true."<br><b>Indonesian:</b> "Masih terasa mimpi bisa menginjakkan kaki di danau Toba intinya seseorang tidak berhak meremehkan mimpi."                                                                          |
| 3. | 7 <sup>th</sup> | IM          | 31/12/2024 | <b>English:</b> "My biggest fear, my biggest struggle, and also biggest achievement that I have experienced throughout half of my life."<br><b>Indonesian:</b> "Ternyata 2024 tidak seburuk itu, namun bisa dibilang sebaik itu."                         |
| 4. | 7 <sup>th</sup> | PY          | 3/12/2023  | <b>English:</b> "If you like going to places we can't even pronounce, then baby, I'm perfect for you."<br><b>Indonesian:</b> "Jadi ceritanya dibalik foto aesthetic ini yakni dari ajakan para bocil-bocil untuk main ke Tengah laut."                    |
| 5. | 7 <sup>th</sup> | IN          | 21/10/2023 | <b>English:</b> "Thank you for having us an adjudicator; it was an honour and a great opportunity for me truly enjoyed the competition, and all teams were excellent".<br><b>Indonesian:</b> "Berkorban untuk tanah Papua demi mencerdaskan pemudanya."   |
| 6. | 7 <sup>th</sup> | LS          | 15/11/2024 | <b>English:</b> "Every difference was blended into harmony, every challenge faced together. Our laughter; tears, and dreams carved unforgettable memories."<br><b>Indonesian:</b> "Terima kasih kesempatannya yang selalu diberikan di setiap waktu ini." |
| 7. | 7 <sup>th</sup> | DW          | 25/06/2024 | <b>English:</b> "A little glimpse of my life—I still can't believe this happened. Such a beautiful moment for my first journey."<br><b>Indonesian:</b> "Persiapan yang singkat tapi cukup memuaskan."                                                     |
| 8. | 7 <sup>TH</sup> | AA          | 10/12/2024 | <b>English:</b> "The power of now faith is substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen"<br><b>Indonesian:</b> "Terima kasih banyak untuk semua orang yang terlibat atas pencapaian ini."                                               |

The findings presented in Table 3 regarding EFL learners' code-switching practices on Facebook indicate that the phenomenon extends far beyond mere alternation between two languages. Instead, it is embedded within complex social, emotional, and cultural dynamics characteristic of contemporary digital communication. The instances of code-switching observed are not arbitrary, but reflect purposeful and contextually informed linguistic choices that articulate the multilayered identities of students navigating increasingly globalized and digitized environments. This observation

resonates with Zhong and Fan (2023), who argue that code-switching in online spaces is a performative act through which users negotiate power, articulate affect, and construct translocal identities across fluid digital discourses.

From a pattern-based perspective, two principal forms of code-switching emerged in students' Facebook interactions: inter-sentential and intra-sentential switching. Inter-sentential switching occurs when users alternate languages between separate sentences, as illustrated by posts such as: *"Thank you for having me as an adjudicator; it was an honour and a great opportunity for me..."*, followed by *"Berkorban untuk tanah Papua demi mencerdaskan pemudanya."* In this example, the English sentence conveys formality and gratitude, whereas the Indonesian sentence situates the message within a familiar socio-cultural context, demonstrating students' ability to traverse distinct social registers. In contrast, intra-sentential switching occurs within a single sentence, such as: *"My biggest fear; my biggest struggle, .... ternyata 2024 tidak seseram itu."* Here, English is employed to express reflective or emotionally charged discourse, while the shift to Indonesian adds culturally grounded nuance. These patterns illustrate the students' capacity for linguistic flexibility and contextual adaptation, a point reinforced by Utegenova et al. (2024), who conceptualize digital code-switching as an expression of translanguaging competence that enables individuals to creatively mobilize linguistic resources to construct meaning, identity, and solidarity in diverse online settings.

Regarding function, the use of code-switching on Facebook serves more than the transmission of information; it constitutes a multifaceted mechanism for self-expression. One salient function is emotional articulation. Students frequently draw on English to express complex thoughts, spiritual insights, or introspective reflections, as in the post: *"The power of now faith is substance of things hoped..."*, where English imbues the message with a philosophical tone. Another function pertains to the performance of personal achievement or motivation, evident in expressions such as: *"My biggest fear; my biggest struggle, and my biggest achievement..."*, which use English to frame personal narratives within aspirational or globally oriented discourses. Additionally, code-switching enhances the aesthetic and stylistic features of posts. Statements like *"If you like going to places we can't even pronounce..."* reflect humor and lifestyle orientation, positioning English as a marker of cosmopolitan youth culture. These functions align with Lappeman et al. (2024), who argue that code-switching in digital narratives serves as a stylistic resource for constructing online personas shaped by global cultural flows, and with Elhambakhsh (2025), who describes the phenomenon as "aesthetic code-switching" employed to project authenticity, creativity, and alignment with transnational youth identities.

Motivationally, students' language choices appear influenced by both internal aspirations and external social conditions. A key motivation is the performance of a globalized, educated identity. Integrating English into Facebook posts allows students to present themselves as academically capable, culturally aware, and linguistically competent, consistent with Anggraini and Cahyono's (2022) notion of networked multilingualism, where digital platforms enable individuals to negotiate multilingual identities across diverse audiences. Emotional resonance also plays an important role. Following Gan's (2024) translanguaging framework, bilingual speakers use their entire linguistic repertoire as an integrated semiotic resource to produce meaning that is both socially and affectively appropriate. In this sense, switching languages enables students to communicate emotional complexity, identity positioning, and desired self-presentation. This is further supported by Utegenova et al. (2024), who argue that language choice in digital discourse reflects strategic alignment with aspirational identities shaped by global linguistic capital. Similarly, Zhong and Fan (2023) highlight that digital code-switching functions as symbolic capital, enabling users to signal upward mobility and social distinction within peer networks.

The students' behavior is also shaped by socio-cultural and technological affordances. Facebook's multimodal and interactive nature encourages linguistically adaptive communication tailored to different audiences and purposes. The narrative style of Facebook posts, often accompanied by visual elements, facilitates fluid linguistic blending. Language selection is calibrated according to audience design: English is used for broader or more formal audiences, whereas Indonesian is deployed to express intimacy, humor, or shared cultural experience. Mahalingappa (2023) argues that such practices constitute "platformed performances," wherein linguistic, visual, and contextual choices are strategically crafted for dynamic audience configurations. Likewise, Blyth and Thoms (2021) describe this phenomenon as "polylingual languaging," reflecting fluid mobilization of linguistic resources in response to the multimodal demands of digital interaction and audience diversity.

The code-switching practices of EFL learners on Facebook reveal sophisticated, socially attuned, and context-sensitive linguistic behavior. These students function not merely as bilingual speakers, but as digital narrators who craft personal and social narratives through complex interplays of language. Their integration of Indonesian and English is indicative of both linguistic proficiency and strategic communicative intent, allowing them to curate identity, perform social engagement, and negotiate intercultural connection in online spaces. These findings underscore the need to understand code-switching as an essential component of intercultural communication competence and emerging digital literacies. This aligns with Nistor and Zadobrischi (2022), who conceptualize digital multilingualism as a form of translanguaging capital through which young people claim discursive space, express hybrid identities, and participate in global digital cultures. Nonetheless, Wang (2025) cautions that such practices may inadvertently reproduce linguistic hierarchies, privileging English as a symbol of prestige while relegating local languages to informal or subordinate domains, potentially reinforcing symbolic power asymmetries in online communication.

## V. CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that the code-switching practices of EFL learners at Universitas Muhammadiyah Sorong in digital communication are intentional, contextually informed communicative strategies rather than spontaneous or incidental shifts between languages. Students employ code-switching to align their discourse with situational context, communicative intent, and audience characteristics, thereby using it as a resource for identity construction, social connection, and the enhancement of intercultural communication competence within digital environments.

The findings extend language education theory by framing code-switching as both a digital literacy skill and a translanguaging practice that contributes to the development of multilingual communicative competence. From a pedagogical standpoint, the results underscore the importance of incorporating multilingual awareness and strategic code-switching practices into EFL instruction to reflect authentic digital communication patterns. At the policy level, the study highlights the need to promote balanced multilingual practices to ensure that the increasing use of English does not undermine the vitality and functional domains of local languages.

Future research could investigate cross-platform variations in code-switching behavior, broaden participant representation, and adopt longitudinal designs to trace evolving multilingual practices over time. Overall, this study successfully meets its research objectives by identifying the forms, functions, and sociocultural implications of digital code-switching, while also contributing to theoretical, pedagogical, and policy-oriented discussions in the field of language education.

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# Apology as Public Mediation: An Analysis of Three Crisis Cases in Kazakhstan

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**Abstract**—The article examines official apologies issued by representatives of state institutions (in the context of the political and social crisis in Kazakhstan) as a public act of mediation. Establishing direct and effective communication with the public is the primary tool of public mediation for authorities, aimed at reducing social tension and increasing confidence, particularly trust in the institution of power. The aim of the study is to identify and describe the linguistic criteria for the effectiveness of official apologies by institutions of power. The theoretical basis for the research is grounded in speech act theory and the concept of mediated communication. Particular attention is paid to analysing the lexical-semantic, pragmatic, and discursive characteristics of formal apologies. The texts of public speeches and official statements by representatives of state institutions were used as empirical material during various crisis situations. A comparative analysis allows us to identify the main linguistic criteria for effective aspects of apologies, such as open acceptance of responsibility, sincerity and empathy, promises of compensation, and orientation towards collective values and social cooperation. The research findings show that, as part of public mediation, a formal apology not only serves as a communication that reinforces the legitimacy of authority and fosters open dialogue with citizens, but also fulfils a socio-political function. The conclusions drawn will serve as a basis for further study of discourse in crisis situations and the development of practical recommendations for the effective use of apologies in institutional communications.

**Index Terms**—official apology, institution of authority, public mediation, speech act theory, Kazakhstan

## I. INTRODUCTION

There is no shadow of doubt that, in the age of modern digital technology, information is exchanged at a rapid pace. Something that happens in just one small district can instantly spread nationwide and spark a huge public outcry. It is impossible to predict the population's reaction. Obviously, depending on the event's relevance, various difficulties arise. In such cases, the authorities constantly interact with the majority not only to govern but also to maintain their authority (legitimacy) and gain the people's trust. All these actions are carried out through language. One of the most important functions assigned to language is the regulation of social relations. One of the main mechanisms for maintaining authority

and trust in the country, when situations arise that call into question the public's trust in the authorities, is to offer a formal apology. However, apologies do not achieve the goal of 'restoring social cohesion'; some apologies may even be completely rejected (Tavuchis, 1991). People may also perceive some apologies as 'insincere and merely conditional,' which will exacerbate the situation (e.g., failure to pay moral compensation) (Boyer, 2010). When this happens, researchers come to the question: 'What linguistic tools are best to use when apologising?'

In this research paper, the attempt at a formal apology in a public social environment is examined from the perspective of linguistic mediation. During a social crisis, institutions of authority act as mediators who try to synchronise their actions with public expectations, rather than as one side involved in the conflict. Dendrinis (2006) answers the question 'Who is a mediator?' as follows:

First, he is a social worker. There, he observes the course of communication in a social environment; second, he acts to assist the communication process, sometimes influencing its outcome.

Secondly, two or more interacting parties at public events act as a facilitator if they encounter difficulties in their relations or if there are contradictions between them.

Thirdly, a negotiator who acts as an agent in situations requiring reconciliation, mediation, or compromise (pp. 12-13). All three services presented here are characteristic of an institution of power. Consequently, representatives of political and social power institutions are regarded as mediators. The act of apology by representatives of this institution is transformed from an act of admission of guilt into a complex communicative act aimed at explaining what happened, negotiating, reaching a mutual compromise, and coming up with something new that will appeal to the people. According to another definition provided by researchers to the mediator, a mediator is a neutral person who transfers information from one source to another (Xirofotou, 2025, p. 1). Within this definition, an authoritative institution that apologizes can be considered a particular type of mediator.

The relevance of studying the language of official apologies by government institutions from a sociolinguistic perspective is determined by two main factors. Firstly, in the modern era, when digitalisation is in full swing, public activity is growing, and the government interacts directly with the population. Secondly, to evaluate such statements, it is necessary to develop clear, well-established linguistic standards of great interest to a range of scientific fields, such as political science, sociology, public relations, and linguistics.

The main scientific linguistic novelty of studying the language of official apologies by institutions of power lies in the fact that the act of an official apology, in addition to being considered from the point of view of discursive linguistic analysis and mediation theory, allows for a systematic analysis of the structure and effectiveness of institutions of power based on an intuitive assessment of apology texts. The study was based on real cases of compromise that occurred in Kazakhstan over the past five years (2020-2025).

The aim of studying the language of official apologies by institutions of power is to identify and describe linguistic criteria (linguistic features) that allow us to assess the effectiveness of official apologies by political institutions in the Republic of Kazakhstan. An apology is considered an act of successful mediation, a compromise with the majority in situations following incidents.

In order to achieve this goal, the following tasks are set:

- To justify the consideration of an official apology as an act of linguistic mediation between the authorities and the people.
- Develop an analytical model (checklist) of linguistic criteria for the effectiveness of an apology, including parameters such as the structure of the speech act, narrative strategies, and working with the addressee.
- Use the model developed for comparative linguistic analysis of apologies publicly requested on behalf of Kazakhstan's institutions of power during a number of social crises (e.g., the COVID-19 pandemic and the tragic events of January 2022).

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

The study of public apologies by authorities is examined within the framework of speech act theory (Austin, Searle, Sbisà) and mediation laws (Kovach, Baraldi, Dendrinis). Public apologies, when socially controversial situations arise in everyday public life, play not only a role in moral acceptance of the situation but also in the restoration of reputation and trust that have been publicly damaged. Such an act will have a mediating linguistic effect, preventing tension among people, restoring the government's authority, and regaining the people's trust. The topic is relevant because of the social and mediating role of language in the mutual compromise between authorities and the population in the face of social contradictions arising in everyday life.

### *Public apologies - a socially communicative genre*

The study of apology is based on speech act theory. Speech act theory, in addition to the exchange of information, is also grounded in pragmatics, which emphasises how language is used for specific purposes (Sadock, 2006). Speech acts can be conveyed in various linguistic and communicative ways. A simple opinion expressed by someone implies a hidden meaning that requires certain information or a linguistic strategy related to the subject or situation of the speech in question. According to speech act theory, all linguistic utterances imply an action. Research within this theory focuses on how speech acts are used in different situations. Speech act theory aims to analyse whether utterances have different effects

depending on the type of speech and the conversational context (Sbisà, 2009). Speech acts have different effects on conversation, so it is very important to study in detail how they are used in interactive situations.

Speech act theory considers: a) the speech act as a multi-level construct and identifies the illocutionary level (communicative goal, intention, speaker's attitude) as the main object of study; b) takes into account the speaker's goals to explain the processes of speech interaction; c) identifies the relationship between intention and other extralinguistic factors in accordance with the conditions and circumstances of the speech act – the psychological state of the speaker, their interests, social status, their perceptions of the communication situation, including the listener (their knowledge, interests, social status); d) identifies the main forms of reflection of the speaker's illocutionary goal in the linguistic structure of the sentence used (Suleimenova et al., 2008, p. 213).

The smallest unit of speech act theory is the speech act. According to this theory, every spoken word has an 'illocutionary meaning' (Sbisà, 2009). In general, pragmatists divide speech acts into locutionary, illocutionary, and perlocutionary acts. Austin (1962) argues that there are differences among these three levels of speech acts. Any speech act is considered a locative act. A speech act uttered with some intention is an illocutionary act. When the listener understands the speaker's intentions and responds positively, the perlocutionary act has been performed.

Searle (1976) classifies illocutionary acts into five groups (pp. 10-13):

1. Representatives, whose purpose is to inform about what is happening in the world. These include news, forecasts, and descriptions.
2. Directives direct the addressee to take action. These include requests, desires, prohibitions, orders, invitations, and so on.
3. Commissives manifest themselves in the speaker's commitment to do something. For example, there are commissives with oaths, speeches, pledges, etc.
4. Expressives are aimed at expressing the speaker's own feelings, emotions, and inner state depending on certain circumstances. For example, saying thank you, feeling sorry, rejoicing, apologising, expressing gratitude, etc.
5. Declarative utterances differ from the four types above. During this speech act, words are used not simply to convey information or describe a situation, but to perform a specific action or create a new situation. For example, words are used in situations such as appointing someone to a position, admitting someone to a party, or awarding a title.

French linguists offer their own classifications of illocutionary acts. Benveniste notes that there are three main types of speech: assertive (the direct expression of one's feelings), interrogative (words that serve as the basis for a question), and imperative (a demand or command). Gardin adds another type of speech to these three: exclamatory (admiration).

"Any phrase is based on one of these services, such as providing information to the listener, asking them a question, giving them an order, or making a promise," says Boissen, adding that speech acts will be informative, interrogative, and directive (Kerbrat-Orecchioni, 2005).

Searle (1976) argues that there are certain conditions for speech acts to be successful. They are:

- both the addressee and the addresser must be fluent in the language in which communication takes place;
- both must act consciously;
- no one should coerce or intimidate the speaker;
- the listener and speaker should not have physical impairments such as hearing loss, aphasia, or laryngitis;
- neither should appear to be acting in a play, nor should they joke.

Austin (1962) and Searle (1976) interpret apologising as an illocutionary act aimed at restoring disturbed social peace. Noting that illocutionary acts differ from one another, Searle (1976) argues that forgiveness is uttered because of a psychological state. He believes that the phrase "I apologise" is not just a word, but a linguistic tool whose main function is to express the speaker's regret. A person utters this word automatically, without paying attention to their true feelings. Consequently, according to Searle's theory, forgiveness is not asked for to change the world or achieve any results.

Austin (1962) interprets the act of apologising as an action which, firstly, is a linguistic attempt, secondly, an action whose success/failure depends on conventionality and authenticity, and thirdly, may not achieve its goal (perlocutionary effect), even if it was successful as an illocutionary act (a case where the addressee did not accept the apology). According to Austin's (1962) theory, for an act of apology to be successful, several postulates must be observed:

- A conventional procedure, i.e., certain people must apologise in certain circumstances using certain words;
- The procedure must be carried out correctly, and all participants in the procedure must perform it correctly and completely;
- Sincerity, speech, and the psychological state of the person apologising must be consistent. Psychological state here means that the person apologising regrets what they have done. If the psychological state does not align with these indicators, forgiveness is considered insincere and therefore unsuccessful.

The act of forgiveness is considered a perlocutionary effect of apology (as is the goal of general forgiveness – to receive forgiveness). Lazare assesses the act of forgiveness as "generosity that frees the apologisee from guilt and shame." *Pardon* is usually interpreted as an arbitrary cognitive-emotional process, often without a connection to legal exemption from punishment (Lazare, 2004).

Examining the act of apology within the framework of speech act theory allows us to define its specificity as a special communicative action aimed at restoring the disturbed social balance and trust between the speaker and the listener. Unlike other types of illocutionary acts, apologies combine elements of admission of guilt, expression of sympathy, and

desire for reconciliation. Thanks to this, the act of apology can be called an effective tool for social linguistic mediation. This approach serves as the basis for further analysis of the official act of apology by authorities, from the perspective of linguistic effectiveness criteria.

#### *Social and communicative aspects of linguistic mediation*

Mediation originally emerged as an alternative form of dispute resolution (Alternative Dispute Resolution – ADR). There are many forms of ADR used both within and outside the judicial system. All of them encourage individuals and groups to develop alternative ways to resolve conflicts and problems outside the court. Mediation, widely used in crowds, is sometimes called the ‘mother of ADR’. Mediation allows the parties to put forward ideas for reaching an agreement and discuss issues with a view to resolving the conflict that has arisen (Kovach, 1994).

In recent years, mediation has been studied in more depth in the scientific literature and has begun to be viewed as a special type of discourse that uses certain strategies to achieve a primary communicative goal (Chikrizova, 2024, p. 896). The goal of mediation is to facilitate interaction between two parties involved in a conflict and to bring in a third neutral person to steer it in a positive direction (Baraldi, 2017). According to Pöchhacker (2008), language mediation is a communication system that should not be confused with other forms of communication. Indeed, language mediation is a special type of communication that differs from ordinary dialogue or discussion. While standard communication aims to convey one's point of view and defend one's opinion, the main goal of mediation-based communication is to organise and regulate relationships between other people, rather than to convey information. Acting as a ‘communication architect,’ the mediator creates a safe space for parties who did not understand each other and were in conflict. Consequently, language mediation is considered a purposeful communication process aimed at managing other communication processes, rather than simply conversation.

From this perspective, the mediator has inherent communicative power. This is because they have the right to interpret, filter, and rethink the meaning of the expressed thought. However, the mediator cannot impose their decision on a particular party by abusing this power. The mediator pursues a goal that will lead both parties to mutual understanding and compromise (Dendrinis, 2006). The mediator also serves as a manager, encouraging the parties to cooperate in resolving the dispute (Kinderknekht, 2024). The success of mediation as a communicative act is measured not by the victory of one party but by the alignment of the conflicting parties' views on the world and the emergence of a common language.

Kazakh culture has a history of using alternative methods to resolve social conflicts. Nomadic Kazakh tribes, elected representatives of steppe democracy, appealed to the Biler court. The “Biler institution” emerged in early times and underwent several stages of development. Sh. Ualikhanov wrote about who is awarded the title of Bi: In the Kazakh steppe, the honorary title of bi was not awarded by the people through any kind of election or approval by the ruling authorities, but only to Kazakhs who had a deep knowledge of judicial procedure and were skilled in the art of public speaking. A person who wanted to become a Bi spoke before the people in some kind of oratory competition, demonstrating his knowledge and eloquence." One of the main goals of the Bi, elected by each region and clan community of the Kazakh steppe, is to reconcile disputing parties, initiate unity, and promote peaceful coexistence between countries. The Biler court in Kazakh culture does not fall within its jurisdiction; that is, it is impartial to the affairs of other villages and tribes and does not exert external influence.

The Council of Sultans and the famous bilers under the khan in nomadic culture dealt with matters of state importance and disputes between the zhuz (tribal unions) and tribes. Therefore, the court of bilers played an important role in shaping Kazakh society and is now part of the Kazakh people's heritage. Therefore, although mediation today is similar to the institution of bilers, there are differences between them (Kenzhebekova et al., 2023, p. 88):

| <b>The institution of Bile (judges)</b>                                                                              | <b>Modern mediation</b>                                                                                                                                                             |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1. Biler (judges) conduct (resolve) disputes in a public form of open court                                          | 1. In the modern mediation process, disputes are considered both openly and anonymously (in accordance with the agreement of the parties).                                          |
| 2. Biler (judges) render arbitration (verdict) based on the counterarguments of the parties disputing certain issues | 2. Mediators in modern life, acquiring professional skills, contribute to mutual compromise between the two parties and the termination of mutual agreement and a unified decision. |

In traditional Kazakh culture, according to the principle of ‘Oner aldy kyzyl til’ (Өнер алды – қызыл тіл) (which literally translates as eloquence and the art of speech - an indicator of skill and knowledge), the art of speech is highly valued. As they say, the art of language is like a disease, and it is also an indicator of the potential of language. "Science has many linguistic functions. One of these functions is language's mediating role. Language mediation directly depends on the linguistic competence of the language user, on the essence of the linguistic personality. In traditional Kazakh culture, linguistic personalities included eloquent speakers, clan elders, and village elders. They understood the value of words and highly valued the unity of the country. In turn, the heads of state held peacemaking positions, defending the art of oratory equally, protecting the interests of both sides. This phenomenon is characteristic only of the Kazakh people, who are subject to the law of the steppe. Without relying on laws, lengthy documents consisting of various articles, they simply put an end to the confrontation. The principle of ‘Bas kespek bolsa da, til kespek zhok’ (Бас кеспек болса да, тіл

кеспек жок) (the meaning of the proverb is that even if they can take a person's life, they still cannot forbid him to speak. That is, a person always has the right to express their opinion). This proverb served as a principle and a measure of steppe democracy. The fact that representatives of ethnic groups stopped at the words of the proverb explained the value of the word, and that value rested on an understanding of its own significance.

The evolution of the concept of mediation from a legal mechanism for dispute resolution to a multifaceted socio-communicative phenomenon reflects its universal nature in modern society. Considering mediation within the framework of communication allows us to recognise it not only as a means of achieving consensus but also as an important discursive resource that helps maintain trust, mutual understanding, and social harmony. This will serve as a theoretical basis for analysing mediation in the language of public apologies by institutions of authority. In accordance with this, models of sociolinguistic analysis of the manifestation of social and everyday life situations in the republic over the past 5 years in linguistic communication and the public environment will be presented.

### III. METHODOLOGY

The methodological basis of the study is its interdisciplinary nature, which draws on approaches from linguistics, pragmatics, and mediation theory. Official apology texts from representatives of Kazakhstan's political institutions (the president, ministers, mayor, etc.) made in the context of social crises (emergency situations, the COVID-19 pandemic) were selected as empirical material.

Speech act theory was used as the main method (Austin, Searle), which allows us to consider an official apology as an illocutionary act with a specific pragmatic function. Methods of pragmalinguistic analysis (justification, admission of guilt, sympathy, compromise) are also used to identify speech strategies.

To assess the effectiveness of apologetic actions, a checklist of linguistic criteria was compiled, containing the following parameters:

- Acknowledgement of the occurrence of a negative event;
- Expression of regret;
- The audience to whom the apology is addressed;
- The level of personal responsibility assumed;
- The form of apology;
- Compensation/actions;
- Emotionality (sincerity) of speech;
- Level of effectiveness (evaluation).

To determine the most effective and ineffective aspects of public mediation according to the criteria presented above, the texts of official apologies issued by government officials were compared. Only the verbal aspect of apologies (text) is analysed in the research; non-verbal means (intonation, facial expressions, gestures) are not included. This is guided by the conditions for assessing effectiveness and the validity of linguistic parameters. The scientific methodology for the qualitative analysis of speech acts by institutions of authority in the context of an attempt at a public official apology is presented.

### IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Specific cases that occurred in Kazakhstan over the past five years (2020-2025) were taken as the basis for analysis.

#### *Case №1.*

The global coronavirus was first reported in China in December 2019. On 30 January 2020, the World Health Organisation declared the outbreak a public health emergency of international concern, and on 11 March, a coronavirus pandemic was declared worldwide. A pandemic is a large-scale epidemic that affects an entire country, several neighbouring countries, and continents (Dva goda pandemii COVID-19: xronologiya sobytij, 2022). The COVID-19 pandemic in Kazakhstan began on 13 March 2020, when infected people were identified in the cities of Astana and Almaty. By 3 April, COVID-19 had already spread throughout the country.

It is known that the competent health authorities of Kazakhstan were not prepared for such an epidemic, which occurred unexpectedly, and the death toll increased due to difficulties such as a shortage of medicines and a lack of adequate medical equipment. In this regard, Murat Bakhtiyarovich, a statesman of Kazakhstan and member of the Senate of the Parliament of Kazakhstan, apologised to the people at a Senate meeting:

*There are enough accumulated problems. Worn-out healthcare buildings, medical equipment, a lack of medical centres, first-aid posts, rural clinics and qualified doctors in rural areas. Doctors and mid-level specialists have low salaries. The six universities in the country that train doctors do not train specialists in infectious diseases, virologists, etc.*

*It cannot be said that there have been positive changes in the healthcare system over the past ten years, despite the adoption of two major 'Healthy Kazakhstan' programmes and the allocation of trillions of funds to them. Many of these funds were wasted on systemic errors. We found ourselves under a wave of public criticism and condemnation and were unable to save the lives*

*of many of our citizens. We once again apologise to the people. Now we must do everything we can to ensure that such a tragic situation never happens again. All this was openly communicated to the minister. There is currently a two-month supply of medicines. We just need to control their cost. Ventilators are already being manufactured domestically. New infectious disease hospitals will be put into operation in all regions.*

*Murat Bakhtiaruly, statesman of Kazakhstan,  
member of the Senate of the Parliament of the Republic of Kazakhstan  
(Halyqtan taǵy da keşirim sūraımyz, 2020)*

The information in the text is directed at two audiences:

- 1) the people (with the aim of reducing tension and anger in society, i.e., the goal is mediatory);
- 2) The highest authorities (through the phrase ‘all this was said to the minister,’ the author indirectly points out to the authorities the need for a quick solution to the problem).

The mechanisms of the theory of communicative speech acts are presented in the text:

| Excerpt from the text                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           | Type of speech act          | Illocutionary force                                                                                                               | Perlocutionary effect (Impact on the listener)                                                                                                                                                       |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <i>There are enough accumulated problems. Worn-out healthcare buildings, medical equipment, a lack of medical centres, first-aid posts, rural clinics and qualified doctors in rural areas. Doctors and mid-level specialists have low salaries. The six universities in the country that train doctors do not train specialists in infectious diseases, virologists, etc.</i>                                                                                  | representative              | The text describes the actual situation and specific problems. The shortcomings within the system are criticized.                 | It creates an impression of authenticity for the public, as real-life information is presented. It prepares the ground for mentioning criticism and shortcomings in the following parts of the text. |
| <i>It cannot be said that there have been positive changes in the healthcare system over the past ten years, despite the adoption of two major ‘Healthy Kazakhstan’ programmes and the allocation of trillions of funds to them. Many of these funds were wasted on systemic errors. We found ourselves under a wave of public criticism and condemnation and were unable to save the lives of many of our citizens. We once again apologise to the people.</i> | representative + expressive | The text openly acknowledges the mistake made by the authorities. The speaker expresses regret and apologizes to the public.      | Openly admitting the problem builds public trust. A mediating effect is visible, aimed at reducing public anger and tension.                                                                         |
| <i>Now we must do everything we can to ensure that such a tragic situation never happens again. All this was openly communicated to the minister. There is currently a two-month supply of medicines. We just need to control their cost. Ventilators are already being manufactured domestically. New infectious disease hospitals will be put into operation in all regions.</i>                                                                              | Commissive                  | The author of the text promises positive changes in the future. This act indicates an intention to confirm words through actions. | It gives society hope and strengthens trust                                                                                                                                                          |

In the text, representativeness is manifested through the presentation of specific facts, problems, proposed solutions, and a description of the situation. The expressive function is manifested through a request for forgiveness from the people and an acknowledgement of mistakes. With the help of commissives, the author of the text promises that everything will be right in the future and assumes responsibility for rectifying the situation. The sequence of actions is as follows: first, acknowledgement of the problem → sharing of responsibility → request for forgiveness → promise to ‘solve this problem’ → instilling hope. Through these actions, language serves as a tool for requesting forgiveness from society and for mediating influence.

The request for forgiveness reflects society's moral values. If there is no request for forgiveness, there is a risk of violating mutual social values. Some mistakes can only be corrected by asking for forgiveness. Forgiveness contributes to social harmony. Tavuchis (1991) identifies the main components of the concept of forgiveness: (a) acknowledgement of a rule violation, (b) acknowledgement of guilt and acceptance of responsibility for the mistake made, (c) sincere regret

for the damage caused, and a request for forgiveness (pp. 9, 12, 20-22). All of these components are present in the above text.

In addition, this text is an example of monological mediative communication. The speaker takes into account the interests of both sides (the authorities and the people). The author of the text acknowledges the authorities' mistakes, asks for forgiveness from the people, and employs a strategy of de-escalation. Besemer notes that 'craftsmen have their tools, which they use for various purposes, and mediators must also master their tools' (Besemer, 2004, p. 154). Among these tools, he mentions 'figurative language and metaphors.' The text uses metaphors, such as 'accumulated problems' (comparing the problem to a burden), as well as emotionally expressive words: 'public criticism and curses,' 'tragic situation'.

From this point of view, the text is not simply an act of recognition and a request for forgiveness, but a complex communicative act aimed at correctly understanding the relationship between the authorities and citizens, that is, a true act of linguistic mediation.

#### *Case №2.*

The events of January 2022 (the 'Bloody January' tragedy) were protests in Kazakhstan caused by a sharp rise in the price of liquefied gas. These events, which began on 2 January, became the largest and most violent social conflict in Kazakhstan's 30-year history of independence. The protests began in Zhanaozen and then spread to other cities across the country. People took to the streets of Almaty, Aktobe, Aktau, Atyrau, Karaganda, Astana (Nur-Sultan), Shymkent, Kokshetau, Oral, and other cities, demanding not only economic changes but also social and political reforms. The initially peaceful protests subsequently escalated into armed clashes and looting (mainly in Almaty). The riots, which began on 5 January, were officially classified as a coup d'état (Qazaqstan biligi "memlekettik tönkeriske talpynys" jaily aita bastady, 2022).

During the riots in the city of Taldykorgan, the mayor of the Almaty region, Kanat Bozymbayev, speaking to the people, uttered obscene words under the influence of emotion. At that moment, he apologised to those present for his behaviour. Later, in comments to journalists, he said the following:

*I did not want to say these words in front of the crowd, but I was there for about an hour and a half. The people standing there demanded, Mayor, say this, do that, do this.' When I started to respond, a few provocateurs shouted at the others, preventing me from speaking calmly... Then I got angry and said a harsh word to one person, emotionally... But after 30-60 seconds, I took the microphone and said to the people: "I gave in to my emotions and said a harsh word, I apologise". The crowd in the square forgave me 100%. It was a normal meeting with the people. I myself heard harsh words directed at me there. So there is no need to make a big deal out of it".*

*Kanat Bozymbayev, Akim of the Almaty Region (regarding the events of January 2022, now Deputy Prime Minister of the Republic of Kazakhstan)  
(Newmediagroup, 2022)*

According to the elected representative's explanation, the people in the square completely forgave him. However, it is unknown whether they actually forgave him, as the full version of the video is not available on social media. The video provided at the link (Esen, 2024) does not show the final part of the events.

Another case of an obscene word being uttered in front of the public was recorded on 23 February 2024. During an extraordinary session of the Almaty Maslikhat, deputy and ecologist Timur Eleusizov had difficulty reading his speech and used several inappropriate words (Almatyda boqtağan deputat halyqtan keşirim sūrady, 2024).

He later apologised to the public on his Instagram page:

*"Today, at the Maslikhat (council) session, I was unable to control my emotions. The situation was awkward. I am, like you, an ordinary person. I apologise to the people of Kazakhstan for my inappropriate behaviour. I would like to express my gratitude to everyone who trusts me and believes in goodness. I am glad that I felt that I was not alone."*

*Timur Eleusizov,  
ecologist-activist, deputy  
(ZAKON.KZ, 2024)*

Boyer considers actions taken at the request of individuals such as K. Bozymbayev and T. Eleusizov to be dependent on the individual needs of the person. In his opinion, internal needs may include the following:

1. Restoring personal moral and social balance;
2. The need to ask for forgiveness in connection with a personal point of view or professional activity;
3. Receiving forgiveness and resolving a conflict situation (Boyer, 2010).



All of these needs are evident in the actions of the two individuals mentioned above when they ask for forgiveness. Asking for forgiveness cannot change or erase a negative action, but it can mitigate its consequences and help restore mutual relations. Tavuchis (1991) describes this situation as the ‘non-surgical effect’ of forgiveness. Asking for forgiveness means that the subject has no reason to justify or explain their harmful action. If the act of asking for forgiveness is effective, it has healing properties (pp. 50-62).

Thus, K. Bozymbayev and T. Eleusizov tried to mitigate the consequences of events through their requests for forgiveness. Unpleasant emotional actions are a phenomenon inherent in all people. A person's ability to control their emotions is a psychological action. The adjustment, explanation, and coordination of emotional responses to the situation, the achievement of compromise with society, and the entry into general linguistic communication demonstrate compliance with moral and ethical norms and the level of a person's intellectual potential.

The theory and linguistic mechanisms of speech acts in these two cases can be analysed as follows:

| Criterion              | K.Bozymbayev's apology act                                                                              | T. Eleusizov's apology act                                                                                                      |
|------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Addressee              | Specific audience- people gathered at the Taldykorgan city square during the January events             | Wide audience — the entire population of Kazakhstan                                                                             |
| Locutionary act        | Reports that he said a harsh word and gave in to emotions                                               | Reports that he was unable to control his emotions and committed an indecent act                                                |
| Illocutionary act      | Asks for forgiveness from the people on the square                                                      | Apologizes to the entire population of Kazakhstan                                                                               |
| Perlocutionary effect  | The gathered people fully forgave him (according to his words)                                          | Gains the trust and support of the people, hopes to restore his authority                                                       |
| Communicative strategy | Self-justification (“gave in to emotions”) + mitigation of blame+ request for forgiveness               | Self-justification (‘I am, like you, an ordinary person’) + seeking support from the people + asking for forgiveness            |
| Type of speech act     | Representative (reports the situation on the square) + expressive (asks for forgiveness for his action) | Representative (reports indecent behavior at a maslikhat (council) session) + expressive (asks for forgiveness for his actions) |

From a mediation perspective, both texts are considered communicative actions aimed at alleviating tension in the situation and restoring social cohesion. Both authors of the text speak carelessly and annoy people. Nevertheless, he immediately takes control of the situation, apologizes, and tries to establish dialogue with the population. These actions are due to the fact that Chernyshenko notes that "mediation has its own cognitive, communicative and pragmatic strategies. Since the main communicative task of mediation discourse is to achieve an alternative solution, these strategies are considered to be the driving force behind the reconciliation of the parties" (Chernyshenko, 2014, p. 110).

#### Case №3.

The fire in the Abai region was a significant natural disaster that occurred in the Semey Forest State Nature Reserve following two lightning strikes. The incident occurred on 8 June 2023 at 12:03 p.m. in the 66th quarter of the Batpaevsky forestry, 25 km from the city of Semey. The large-scale fire was completely extinguished on 13 July at 1:00 p.m. As a result of the incident in the Abai region, 14 people died.

In connection with the tragic event, the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan, Kassym-Jomart Tokayev, publicly apologised to the families of the victims:

*"I am responsible to you. As head of state, I apologise for what has happened. I understand how difficult this situation is. You have lost your breadwinners, heads of families, your closest relatives. Unfortunately, such tragic events happen in life. There are no excuses for this. I repeat: moral and material assistance will be provided. Children will be placed in kindergartens and higher education institutions — everything will be done. I am, of course, with you. You are citizens of our country. Each affected family will be assigned individual assistance. I promise you: a special fund will be created under the President, and personal support will be provided to those affected.*

*Kassym-Jomart Tokayev,  
President of the Republic of Kazakhstan (Toqaeв öрттен qaza tapqandardyñ otbasynan keşirim  
sürady, 2023)*

The text can be analysed within the framework of speech act theory according to the following scheme:

| Excerpt from the text                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    | Type of speech act | Illocutionary force                                                                                             | The perlocutionary effect (influencing the listener)                                                                                                         |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <i>'I am responsible to you. As head of state, I apologise for what has happened. I understand how difficult this situation is. You have lost your breadwinners, heads of families, your closest relatives. Unfortunately, such tragic events happen in life. There are no excuses for this.'</i>                                                        | Expressive         | An official request for forgiveness and an expression of empathy                                                | To inspire trust and strengthen the people's faith in the government. Sharing the grief of the people, establishing an emotional connection on a human level |
| <i>'Moral and material assistance will be provided. Children will be placed in nurseries and higher education institutions — everything will be taken care of. Each affected family will be assigned individual assistance. I promise you: a special fund will be created under the President. Personal support will be provided to those affected.'</i> | Commissive         | The President promised to provide social and financial assistance in the future, and has assumed the obligation | Strengthening the hope of the people, building trust, preventing popular discontent, strengthening faith in the future and state institutions                |

From the text of the President of Kazakhstan's apology, it can be seen that five of the six potentially important elements of an apology described by Blatz et al. (2009) are present. These include:

1. Regret (Unfortunately, such tragic events happen in life.)
2. Acceptance of responsibility (*I am responsible to you. I promise you that a special fund will be created under the President. Personal support will be provided to those affected.*)
3. Recognition of the adverse consequences of the event (I understand how difficult this situation is.)
4. Acknowledgment of the damage caused (*You have lost your breadwinners, heads of families, and closest relatives.*)
5. A promise that the situation will not be repeated (X)
6. An offer of compensation (*Moral and material assistance will be provided. Children will be placed in kindergartens and higher education institutions — everything will be done. Each affected family will be assigned individual assistance.*)

One characteristic feature of Boyer's concept of apology is the payment of compensation, which, in his view, improves victims' emotional state (Boyer, 2010). However, this does not guarantee an improvement in the mood of most people who have experienced the tragedy, but it is a perlocutionary factor that influences the chronotope and content of the act of apology. In addition, the personal presence of the head of state, not at a distance but directly at the scene of the event among the victims, is considered a key factor, which significantly mitigates the mediating situation, promotes reconciliation and understanding in society, and encourages the acceptance of responsibility.

Lederach (1997) notes that 'the role of mediator is most often performed by a prominent figure who has authority in society' (p. 44). K. Tokayev's personal visit to the scene without sending assistants is a vivid confirmation of this. The President of Kazakhstan meets face-to-face with the families of the victims. Mediators have many methods of conflict resolution at their disposal, including active listening and individual conversation (Besemer, 2004, pp. 20-21). It is these tactics that enable the problem to be solved through direct communication, an important strategy for resolving the situation.

The text above is an example of mediation discourse aimed at preventing social conflicts in public life and restoring social trust. First and foremost, the President of Kazakhstan acknowledges his responsibility to the people and asks for forgiveness (*'I am responsible to you,' 'As head of state, I apologise for what has happened'*), thereby taking the first step towards mediation. This element corresponds to one of the principles of mediation — the constructive resolution of any problem (Besemer, 2004). In addition, the text clearly contains linguistic units expressing empathetic support (*'I understand how difficult this situation is,' 'You have lost your breadwinners, heads of families, your closest relatives'*). This linguistic strategy reduces the psychological distance between the parties by sharing the addressee's grief and creates favourable conditions for dialogue with the people.

#### *Comparing the effectiveness and ineffectiveness of official apologies based on linguistic criteria*

A sociolinguistic analysis of official apologies issued by government officials in various situations that have occurred in the republic reveals a number of linguistic features that directly influence the public's perception and effectiveness of these apologies. Despite differences in the communication strategies of apologising government officials, all texts demonstrate certain invariant features (acknowledgement of guilt and expression of regret).

For a more accurate comparison of these parameters, it is advisable to present them in a structured form. In this regard, the table below provides a comparative analysis of the effectiveness and ineffectiveness of official apologies according to linguistic criteria, systematising the main elements of apologies and highlighting their strengths and weaknesses from the perspective of speech act theory.

TABLE 1  
COMPARATIVE TABLE OF THE EFFECTIVENESS/INEFFECTIVENESS OF FORMAL APOLOGIES BASED ON LINGUISTIC CRITERIA

| Linguistic criteria                                   | Actions of individuals when apologising                                                                          | Actions of individuals when apologising                         | Actions to apologise on behalf of a group                                              | Actions to apologise on behalf of a group                                                                           |
|-------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Linguistic criteria                                   | K. Bozumbayev                                                                                                    | T. Yeleusizov                                                   | M. Bakhtiyarovich                                                                      | K. Tokayev                                                                                                          |
| Acknowledgement of the occurrence of a negative event | – States that he used ‘harsh words’ under the influence of emotions; partially acknowledges his actions          | – Openly acknowledges: ‘I committed an inappropriate act’       | – Partially acknowledges                                                               | – With the phrase ‘I am responsible for you,’ he takes full responsibility upon himself                             |
| Expression of regret                                  | Expresses the regret but refers to the unstable situation in the square, claiming he was forced to speak harshly | Openly expresses regret                                         | Has a sense of regret, formally expressed                                              | Expresses genuine human regret saying: “I understand it was a very serious situation” “...no excuse can justify it” |
| Audience to whom apology is addressed                 | Specific audience: city residents gathered in the square                                                         | The people of Kazakhstan                                        | The people of Kazakhstan                                                               | The affected families and the entire nation (a national day of mourning is declared)                                |
| Level of responsibility is taken                      | Blames provocateurs for his actions, tries to justify his own fault                                              | Highlights human factor by saying “I am an ordinary person too” | Mentions that ventilators will be available and hospitals will be opened in the future | As President, assumes full responsibility                                                                           |
| Form of apology                                       | Oral, spontaneous                                                                                                | Statement on social media                                       | Statement made at an official meeting                                                  | Official speech in front of the public                                                                              |
| Compensation/actions                                  | No specific actions mentioned                                                                                    | Thanks the people who trust him                                 | Offers precise actions with the aim: “such incidents will not happen again”            | Provides specific promises of material and moral support                                                            |
| Emotionality of speech                                | Medium, neutral, self-justifying                                                                                 | Medium, sincerity is noticeable                                 | High, designed to impact the people                                                    | High, focus on words expressing regret                                                                              |
| Effectiveness (evaluation)                            | Medium: the act of apologizing partially reduces tension, but justification dominates                            | High, sincerity strongly enhances the apology                   | Above average: concrete steps to resolve the issue are presented                       | Very high: apology+ empathy+ concrete actions= increases public trust                                               |

The apologies issued by K. Bozymbayeva and T. Eleusizova fall into the category of individual apologies aimed at restoring personal reputation and harmonising relations with society. According to the checklist of linguistic criteria for effectiveness, both examples include an explicit acknowledgement of the mistake, making the apologies more sincere. T. Eleusizov's speech is characterised by more pronounced empathy (‘I am just as ordinary a person as you are’), while K. Bozymbayev's apology is dominated by elements of self-justification. Both acts can be considered effective at a basic level, but T. Eleusizov's empathy and focus on the addressee are higher. Therefore, his apology appears more convincing and has greater mediative potential.

The apologies made by K. Tokayev and M. Bakhtiyaruly fall into the category of collective official apologies, as they are made on behalf of state institutions and society as a whole. According to the checklist of linguistic criteria for effectiveness, both texts contain elements of acknowledgement of responsibility and expression of regret, which meet the basic requirements for a successful apology. K. Tokayev's apology is characterised by a higher level of empathy (‘*I am responsible for you*’, ‘*I am, of course, with you*’ / *presence at the scene of the incident alongside the victims*), which enhances the mediating effect and demonstrates solidarity with citizens. In M. Bakhtiyaruly's apology, the emphasis is on problems in the system and collective responsibility, which reflects the institutional nature of the statement but reduces the emotional impact. Thus, both acts perform a public-mediating function, but K. Tokayev's statement, combining official status with a high level of empathy, increases the sincerity of linguistic mediation and proves more effective.

Thus, a comparative analysis of official apologies shows that the effectiveness of the authorities' speech acts depends not only on the content of the message but also on its linguistic mediating potential. Society considers the most convincing and sincere apologies to be those that combine an acknowledgement of responsibility, empathy for the victims, and concrete actions or specific promises to remedy the situation. At the same time, formal and generalised apologies cause distrust and limit the influence of linguistic mediation. These conclusions demonstrate that the language of official apologies should be viewed as a dynamic tool of public communication capable of directly influencing the restoration of social justice and reducing the potential for conflict.

## V. CONCLUSION

The research conducted within the framework of this article has revealed the peculiarities of the language of official apologies by government institutions, which can be considered a special form of public mediation in the context of social crises in Kazakhstan. As sociolinguistic analysis has shown, apologies in official discourse not only serve to acknowledge guilt and express regret, but also serve as a means of restoring trust, stabilising social tensions, and establishing dialogue between the authorities and society.

Based on speech act theory, the perlocutionary effect of the act of apology was demonstrated, the effectiveness of which depends on a number of linguistic criteria (narrative strategies, addresser-addressee orientation, etc.). A comparative analysis of cases has revealed that this action is effective only when several conditions are met: clear

acknowledgement of responsibility, expression of empathy and regret, specification of concrete compensatory measures, and direct address to the affected recipients.

Empirical data have confirmed that two types of apologies can be distinguished in Kazakh political communication: individual apologies (e.g., apologies by individual politicians for unethical behaviour) and collective-institutional apologies (in times of social crisis, on behalf of the state or state bodies). While individual apologies aim to restore a person's reputation, image, and trust, collective-institutional apologies have a significant mediating effect, strengthening social unity, preventing the escalation of conflict, and preventing further aggravation of crises.

The study showed that a formal apology can be considered a form of public linguistic mediation between state institutions and society. Such an act not only acknowledges mistakes or shortcomings but also helps restore trust, reduce social tension, and establish dialogue in times of crisis.

To assess the effectiveness of official apologies, an analytical tool in the form of a checklist was proposed, including parameters of speech acts (structure, strategy, interaction with the addressee, etc.). The developed model allows for the systematisation of linguistic features of successful mediative discourse and serves as a criterion for analysing public statements by government officials.

Applying this tool to specific cases (the COVID-19 pandemic, the January 2022 events in Kazakhstan) enabled the identification of differences in communication strategies and their effectiveness. A comparative analysis showed that language's mediating potential in such situations plays a decisive role in maintaining social harmony and can serve as a basis for further research in political and institutional communication.

Thus, the language of official apology can be seen as an important resource for public mediation, where the effectiveness of communication depends on the sequence of speech acts, such as acknowledgement, expression of regret, and promise of action. The results obtained allow us to assert that a linguistically and pragmatically correct apology can serve as a social mechanism for overcoming emergencies, reducing the level of conflict, and promoting dialogue between the authorities and society'.

Further research plans include expanding the corpus of empirical materials, comparing the practice of official apologies in Kazakhstan with international practice, and developing a more comprehensive model for assessing their effectiveness from a mediative perspective.

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# Online Discourse and Cultural Reproduction: The Impact of Social Media Tags on Shaping Identity and Ideology

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**Abstract**—Digital tags function as important linguistic markers that enhance cultural cohesion and signal ideological perspectives within digital spaces. Although social research on cultural reproduction has examined how conventions and codes persist across generations, few studies have explored the specific discursive mechanisms through which such norms are transmitted or transformed in online contexts. This study adopts a pragmatic approach, drawing on concepts from indexicality, digital discourse, and pragmatics. The dataset consists of 160 English-language social media posts containing 361 hashtags. The analysis focuses on indexicality, framing, pragmatic functions, and presupposition. The findings show that hashtags are used to express identities, ideologies, and shared cultural awareness. They also position users within broader cultural discourses, frequently constructing contrasts between traditional values and modernity. Moreover, hashtags facilitate both the reinforcement and the critique of conventional values, sometimes through mockery or sarcasm, demonstrating their dual role in reproducing and challenging social norms. Overall, the study concludes that hashtags are pragmatically rich linguistic units that contribute to the maintenance of cultural norms in digital discourse and play a central role in shaping social identity and transmitting culture in online communication.

**Index Terms**—digital pragmatics, ideological positioning, symbolic communication, identity performance, cultural negotiation

## I. INTRODUCTION

Cultural reproduction, commonly perceived as the continuous preservation and transmission of principles, beliefs, and perspectives across generations (Archer, 1993; Blaskó, 2003; Alexander & Jenks, 1994; Jæger & Breen, 2013), has long occupied a fundamental place in sociological inquiry. Both traditional and contemporary theorists underscore that no society can persist without mechanisms that link and integrate past and present, tradition and transformation. Conventionally, these mechanisms were primarily associated with social institutions such as the family, religion, and education (Corson, 1995; Samarin, 1994).

In today's era of accelerated digitalization and the integration and convergence of social media, however, a significant question emerges: how can contemporary digital discourse foster cultural reproduction, and what role does language play in this process? This study proposes that language functions as a central resource in the pragmatic reproduction of culture, particularly within digital contexts where brevity, subtlety, and visibility are crucial. Among the most salient linguistic instruments in this context are metadata tags. These are compact, indexical markers that enable language users to position themselves ideologically and to affiliate utterances with cultural identities (Fox, 1994; Lugo, 1990; Shields, 2012; Terry, 2016). Furthermore, hashtags function as tools of social inclusion and judgment, condensing cultural meanings into

transferable and reproducible forms (Christie, 1998; Kashima & Yeung, 2010; Squier, 1998; El Kotni, 2017; Song et al., 2013; Marchie, 2012).

In this sense, hashtags operate as instruments for transmitting principles and ideas across generational and social boundaries. The present article examines how metadata tags, or hashtags, contribute to the active construction of cultural continuity, ideology, and identity, grounding its analysis in theories of social reproduction. It situates hashtags within the domain of pragmatics, with particular attention to their roles in indexical alignment, stance-taking (i.e., evaluative positioning), implicature, and presupposition. To uncover the linguistic mechanisms through which cultural values are encoded in online contexts, the study analyzes a corpus of hashtags associated with themes of tradition, ideology, and identity in digital discourse. By examining how condensed digital structures reflect boundaries of belonging and moral alignment, the paper aims to advance sociological understandings of cultural reproduction as well as pragmatic approaches to meaning in context.

Although previous studies have shown that digital interaction fosters public debate (Michael et al., 2014; Brenner, 2014), relatively little is known about the specific linguistic mechanisms through which social media discourse sustains cultural norms. While metadata tags have been widely examined as resources for identity performance and information retrieval (Li & Xie, 2017; Kim & Oh, 2023; Lamsehat & Patria, 2024; Lozano, 2013), their pragmatic role in mediating cultural transmission has received limited attention. Many existing studies treat hashtags either as isolated sociolinguistic symbols or as structural metadata, often overlooking their multifaceted pragmatic functions. Consequently, the processes through which hashtags reproduce or contest cultural values in digital contexts remain underexplored.

To address this gap, the present study treats hashtags as fully operational linguistic-pragmatic devices that encode presupposition, alignment, and indexical positioning within a compact textual format, rather than as mere labels or descriptors. It examines culturally marked hashtags in discourses surrounding tradition, identity, and generational change, aiming to demonstrate how they function as dense carriers of cultural meaning and ideological positioning. Accordingly, this study pursues two main objectives: first, to identify the pragmatic roles hashtags play in cultural reproduction; and second, to examine how these roles facilitate the discursive construction of identity, continuity, and contestation in digital environments. The central research question asks how hashtags operate as linguistic-pragmatic devices for reproducing cultural norms in contemporary online discourse. In addressing this question, the study offers insights into the ways everyday language practices mediate the symbolic mechanisms through which culture is sustained in the digital age.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

According to Alexander and Jenks (1994) and Shields (2012), the notion of cultural reproduction has long been a critical theme in societal thought, considered an operation that permits societies to preserve continuity, sustainability, shared identity, and social connectedness. It accounts for the cultural transfer of values and practices across various generations. Earlier research studies underscored the role of social structures in sustaining cultural perpetuation. More recent debates, however, highlight the significance of language and communication as the key vehicles through which cultural models are reshaped.

Classical sociologists tended to conceptualize cultural reproduction as the transfer of static patterns across generations. The framework of “meaning-values-norms” suggests that reproduction is less about behavioral imitation and more about the internalization of symbolic meanings. Yet, how these meanings are linguistically conveyed remained largely underdeveloped in early theoretical accounts (Alexander & Jenks, 1994; Archer, 1993; Shields, 2012).

Squier (1998) and Terry (2016) offered a more fluid interpretation by critiquing the assumption that cultural values are fixed entities. They set forth the notion of “cultural orientations,” referring to deeper cognitive and pragmatic frameworks that continue to form social behaviors even when social values are challenged. This approach transferred the focus from normative consensus toward recognizing reproduction as a contested operation involving negotiation, asymmetry, and conflicts.

In contemporary settings, especially in globalized and post-industrial communities, the correlation between tradition and innovation becomes considerably complex. Blaskó (2003) and Christie (1998) differentiated between the “core” and “periphery” of tradition, emphasizing its adaptability. Nonetheless, the precise role of language in these reconstructive processes has often been left implicit.

A decisive shift from structuralist to communicative interpretations is seen in the work of Alexander and Jenks (1994), Archer (1993), and Blaskó (2003). Cultural reproduction is not a neutral transfer of knowledge but the reinforcement of symbolic potential through institutionalized practices, with language serving as the primary vehicle (Christie, 1998; Fox, 1994; Kashima & Yeung, 2010; Lugo, 1990; Shields, 2012). The concept of *habitus* illustrates how communicative experiences shape enduring dispositions that reproduce social hierarchies. Within educational institutions, dominant cultural forms gain legitimacy as they are embedded in linguistic practices unevenly distributed across social groups.

Expanding on this, Lugo (1990), Shields (2012), Squier (1998), Terry (2016), and Willis (1981) distinguished between elaborated and restricted codes as linguistic repertoires linked to class-based communication patterns. Restricted codes, more prevalent among working-class communities, are characterized by contextual dependence and repetition, whereas elaborated codes, associated with middle-class discourse and formal education, favor explicitness and syntactic complexity. This framework showed how unequal access to linguistic resources contributes to differential participation

in cultural reproduction. However, critics argue that such models risk reifying speech norms and overlook individuals' capacity to shift codes and challenge dominant linguistic patterns (Alexander & Jenks, 1994; Archer, 1993).

The application of these notions to digital discourse has revealed both continuity and new dynamics. Research shows that online discursive labels such as hashtags, memes, and comment threads condense cultural meanings, express individual stances, and boost group identities with striking brevity and affective potential (Christie, 1998; Fox, 1994; Kashima & Yeung, 2010). Hashtags, in particular, have evolved from simple indexing tools to multifunctional linguistic vehicles that allow evaluation, alignment, and resistance within digital discourse (Squier, 1998; Terry, 2016; Willis, 1981).

Structurally, hashtags are shaped by the hash symbol # followed by an unbroken range of characters (Eriyanto, 2020; Highfield, 2018; Highfield & Leaver, 2014). While their shape seems to be simple, their pragmatic functions are considerably sophisticated. They act as "searchable talk," serving both as metadata labels and as metadiscursive commentary (Zappavigna, 2015; Androutsopoulos, 2014). Pragmatically, hashtags operate as condensed utterances that presuppose shared cultural knowledge and function similarly to performatives in Austin's (1962) sense. For example, #blessed can simultaneously demonstrate, assess, and signal identity (Klinker, 2016; Laucuka, 2018; Mohammad & Kiritchenko, 2014; Park & Park, 2017). Their multifunctionality and versatility of roles align with the model of language functions. It is due to the fact that they can be expressive, interactional, referential, or poetic depending on context.

Academics and theorists also underscore the indexical dimension of hashtags, demonstrating how they situate users in relation to ideological, emotional, or group affiliations (Mohammad & Kiritchenko, 2014; Park & Park, 2017; Scott, 2018). In activism, hashtags such as #BoycottNestlé or #QuickFashionKills have moved beyond topic markers to perform discursive acts of protest or solidarity (Scott, 2018). This reflects the concept of indexical order, where linguistic signs convey not only reference but also layers of social meaning.

Because hashtags simultaneously categorize content, signal community belonging, express stances, and frame interpretations (Eriyanto, 2020; Highfield, 2018; Highfield & Leaver, 2014; Klinker, 2016), they can be described as "performative signposts" of cultural meaning. Their power lies in replicability, which allows utterances to enter larger socio-cultural conversations. From a pragmatic perspective, they function as presuppositions, stance-taking devices, and identity markers (#prideinmeamerican, sadtruth), while also engaging in indexical mapping of users into imagined communities (Highfield, 2018; Laucuka, 2018; Mohammad & Kiritchenko, 2014).

Significantly, hashtags function as contested spaces where cultural norms are confirmed, reinterpreted, or satirized. For instance, #traditions may transfer positive connotations in one community but be deployed ironically in another digital environment. It shows that cultural perpetuation is a continuous interactional process shaped by pragmatic debates and discussions. As a result, hashtags can be considered hybrid linguistic units. They are syntactic, pragmatic, and sociolinguistic units at once, whose semantic contents emerge dynamically through usage. Their study underscores how everyday linguistic practices, especially in digital environments, drive both the continuity and transformation of cultural values. Pragmatic choices such as framing, lexical selection, and stance-taking thus become substantial mechanisms of cultural reproduction (Eriyanto, 2020; Highfield, 2018; Highfield & Leaver, 2014; Klinker, 2016; Laucuka, 2018; Mohammad & Kiritchenko, 2014; Park & Park, 2017; Scott, 2018; Haddad & Khalil, 2025; Al-Shboul, 2025; Goswami & Shougrakpam, 2025).

Scott (2015) examined hashtags as pragmatic instruments in Twitter discourse, emphasizing their function in inference and conversational style. Employing a relevance-theoretic framework, the study performed qualitative discourse analysis on a corpus of tweets featuring creative and contextual hashtags. The analysis showed that hashtags do more than just label topics. They also help readers make the right inferences, frame interpretations, and add style to interactions. For example, humorous or critical hashtags were found to express stance, highlight implicit semantic content, and facilitate audience engagement in online discussions. The results indicate that hashtags are critical pragmatic vehicles, enhancing communication by providing cues that help audiences to extract both explicit and implicit messages.

Pérez-Hernández (2018) examined the function of hashtags in storytelling, emphasizing their use by institutions to integrate ideology and values into their digital narratives. The research examined more than 700 hashtags from four prominent beverage brands, gathered from Twitter in 2017. The researcher classified hashtags in terms of form and function using both quantitative and qualitative methodologies. The results indicated that hashtags function beyond mere organizational roles. They function as potent pragmatic vehicles that aid in the framing and dissemination of the narratives. They represent values like happiness, energy, youth, or solidarity, which help people build their identities. Hashtags let brands bring people into shared ideological spaces by combining emotional, performative, and interactive elements. This strengthens consumer loyalty and cultural participation. The study stresses the strategic and pragmatic part played by hashtags in contemporary advertising discourse and their impact on consumer ideologies.

Irshad (2022) examined hashtags in offline settings, particularly in advertisements and printed media, to assess their pragmatic significance beyond digital contexts. Using a qualitative content investigation method, the study analyzed a set of printed ads that employed hashtags. The investigation showed that offline hashtags work typically the same as inferential tools by bringing up common cultural assumptions and leading readers to short explanations. Advertisers utilized hashtags to draw attention to slogans and get people engaged by making it seem like they were conversing about the brand online. The results demonstrate that hashtags, even outside of digital environments, serve pragmatic functions via connecting explicit textual contents with implicit ideological significances.



Larionova and Demkina (2021) analyzed hashtags in Spanish political discourse, specifically in governmental communication during the COVID-19 crisis. Their dataset included hashtags disseminated on official government websites, which underwent interdisciplinary investigation, combining cognitive, pragmalinguistic, semantic, contextual, and discourse methodologies. The study demonstrated that hashtags serve as linguo-cognitive tools. They are autonomous discursive vehicles that form political narratives, direct interpretation, and affect public perception and evaluation. Hashtags were sorted into groups in terms of their types, such as event-based, metaphorical, and imperative. The findings showed that political hashtags often reflect emotionality and syntactic simplification, which make them more persuasive and manipulative. For example, imperative hashtags like #QuédateEnCasa drive people to be together, follow the rules, or be one. Hashtags work as political messaging instruments by turning notions into short, easy-to-remember phrases. They boost government priorities and shape the way people think as a group. The study concludes that hashtags are critical pragmatic tools in modern ideological communication. Finally, critical discourse perspectives show that the ability to formulate cultural meaning through language is unevenly distributed.

### III. RESEARCH METHODS

#### A. Research Problem and Questions

Digital discourse, particularly through hashtags, plays an increasingly central role in shaping, reproducing, and contesting cultural norms. Despite prior studies on social media and identity, little is known about the specific pragmatic mechanisms through which hashtags sustain or challenge cultural values in online environments. This study addresses this gap by investigating the ways hashtags function as linguistic-pragmatic devices in cultural reproduction. The research is guided by the following questions:

1. How are hashtags employed as pragmatic tools to convey cultural values, identity, and ideology in digital discourse?
2. What linguistic mechanisms (e.g., stance-taking, alignment, presupposition) underlie the use of hashtags in reinforcing or contesting cultural norms?
3. How do hashtags mediate social positioning and intergenerational, ideological, or community-based distinctions within online interactions?

#### B. Research Design

The present research article embraces a qualitative, discourse-analytic orientation with a pragmatic focus. It explores the ways hashtags serve as pragmatic tools to reinforce cultural norms within online interaction. Since the central concern lies in analyzing the interplay between language use and cultural reproduction, the methodological framework utilizes digital discourse analysis (Frolova et al., 2020; Jiang, 2019; Li et al., 2018; Li, 2022; Müller & Stegmeier, 2018; Recuber, 2016, 2017), linguistic pragmatics (Bühler, 1986; Noveck et al., 2002; Senft, 2007), and indexicality theory (Mulligan & Smith, 1986; Nunberg, 1992; Oshima, 2006). Research design is exploratory in nature, aiming to define recurrent functional roles and cultural directions embedded in hashtag practices.

#### C. Data Collection

The dataset included social media posts where hashtags serve essentially as interactive and affiliative labels within discourse. The period from 2019 to 2024 is chosen as it is marked by active discussions surrounding cultural identity, value transmission, and online activism. To ensure comparability, only English-language posts were taken into consideration in this research article. The dataset was compiled using a purposive and theoretically informed sampling strategy designed to capture culturally oriented hashtag use in naturalistic digital contexts. Posts were collected primarily from publicly accessible platforms, including Twitter/X and Instagram, as these platforms make extensive use of hashtags as communicative tools. Data retrieval was conducted through manual collection supplemented by platform search functions rather than automated scraping tools in order to focus on contextual interpretation and to comply with platform terms of service. Searches were guided by a set of predefined keywords and thematic hashtags related to tradition, identity, and cultural values (e.g., #familyfirst, #culturalheritage, #honortradition, #GenZ), which were identified through preliminary exploratory searches. Only publicly available posts in English with sufficient accompanying contextual information were included. No private accounts or personal identifying information were accessed, and all data were anonymized to ensure ethical use. Since the study relied exclusively on publicly posted content, formal participant consent was not required; nevertheless, ethical guidelines for digital discourse research were strictly observed to protect user privacy and confidentiality.

#### D. Analytical Procedures

Initially, each post was examined both textually and visually, and then posts were inductively coded for the pragmatic function of the hashtag, such as stance-taking, alignment, or presupposition. The cultural values are recorded, and the positional stances of the writers (affirmative, ironic, nostalgic, or oppositional) are examined. Subsequently, within the framework of the indexicality theory (Noveck et al., 2002; Mulligan & Smith, 1986; Nunberg, 1992; Oshima, 2006), the researcher examined the hashtags for their contextual presuppositions (shared cultural background assumed in communication) and their deictic associations to identity and ideology. The final stage applied frame and alignment

analysis, Nunberg's (1992) concept of frame, and Recuber's (2016) framework of identity positioning. Hashtags were analyzed as framing devices that shape discourse and assign social roles, such as contrasting generational positions (older vs. younger) or ideological stances (traditionalist vs. progressive).

To enhance the reliability and transparency of the qualitative analysis, coding was not conducted solely by the author. An additional researcher with expertise in digital discourse pragmatics independently coded a randomly selected 20% subset of the dataset using the same analytical framework. Inter-coder agreement was then calculated through comparison of coding categories and thematic assignments, yielding a high level of consistency. Instances of disagreement were discussed collaboratively and resolved through iterative review and refinement of category definitions. The finalized coding scheme was subsequently applied to the remaining data, ensuring greater rigor, consistency, and replicability in the analytical process.

#### IV. RESEARCH RESULTS

A total number of 160 English posts were examined in this study, generating 361 hashtags. Generally, each post comprises approximately 2.26 tags, reflecting the prevalent use of multiple metadata tags to convey meaning, categorize content, or establish identity in online discourse. These hashtags were analyzed systematically for their contextual functions, presuppositional meanings, indexical traits, and framing strategies. The study's findings are reported depending on the analytical approach detailed in the methodology section.

##### A. Pragmatic Functions of Hashtags

The analysis revealed that hashtags have a range of contextual purposes, with many posts employing multiple functions simultaneously. Pragmatic functions were categorized primarily as stance-taking, categorization, and alignment/affiliation, with overlapping uses commonly observed within individual posts. Attitude marking emerged as the most frequent role, identified in 120 out of 160 posts (75%). These hashtags communicated explicit or implicit positions regarding cultural, social, and generational themes. For instance, hashtags such as #HomeEthics, #prideinme, and #Zoomers usually expressed approval, reinforcement, or personal endorsement of certain societal norms or generational standpoints. This observation that social media users often utilize the metadata tags to express their opinions, effectively performing an attitudinal function that aligns them with similar communities while distinguishing them from others.

In 75 posts (46.9%), hashtags function as ideological markers that cluster content under broader categories. For instance, #CulturalHeritage and #RootedInCulture helped to categorize posts within debates related to heritage, social identity, and cultural norms. Classification enables both content organization and retrievability on social media platforms, allowing users to mark the type of discourse they are engaging in and simultaneously linking their posts to wider interactions or communities. Affiliation was reported in 64 posts (40%), with hashtags revealing connection to specific worldviews or ideological stances. Examples such as #ReconnectWithRoots and #DevotedCitizen reflected an identification with traditionalist or nationalist stances, signaling unity with particular communities and shared values. Alignment and affiliation functions often overlapped with evaluative positioning, reflecting the multifaceted role of hashtags in constructing both personal and collective identities online.

Interestingly, many hashtags exhibited polyfunctionality, fulfilling multiple roles simultaneously. For example, #HomeEthics not only showed an attitudinal stance but also indexed traditional cultural identity. Such multilayered hashtags illustrate the complexity of online interaction, in which a single linguistic marker can simultaneously operate at attitudinal, categorical, and affiliative levels.

##### B. Presupposition and Indexicality

In 128 English posts (80%), hashtags presupposed common cultural content, signaling assumptions about the audience's familiarity with certain norms, beliefs, or moral frameworks. Common presuppositions included:

- [1] - The occurrences of enduring cultural legacy or tradition, as in hashtags like #Ourheritage(s) and #Long-standing ideals. These tags imply an assumption that audiences recognize the significance of historical progression and cultural protection.
- [2] - Binary distinctions between authentic and corrupted values, observed in hashtags such as #realvalues and #currentpandemonium. Such presuppositions generate implicit moral contrasts, formulating cultural or social debates in terms of right versus wrong, authentic versus fake, or traditional versus modern.
- [3] - Implicit evaluative judgments, embedded in hashtags like #nationalway or #uprightness, which imply moral positions without explicitly showing them. These presuppositions motivate audiences to accept certain value judgments as shared verities.

The indexicality analysis revealed that hashtags acted as indicators of social, generational, and ideological identity. In 101 posts (63.1%), hashtags indexed adherence to traditionalism or conservative perspectives. Conversely, 37 posts (23.1%) featured hashtags marking irony, critique, or detachment from these positions. For instance, some tag users recontextualized conventional value labels to criticize or satirize established values and traditions, demonstrating how hashtags can generate subtle social commentary or resistance while maintaining a kind of engagement with broader cultural discourses. Indexical markers also served to reinforce in-group and out-group distinctions. Users using

traditionalist hashtags often implicitly constructed themselves as members of a morally or culturally “correct” community, while those using ironic or subversive hashtags situated themselves in opposition, negotiating identity and social alignment through digital discourse.

### C. Framing and Alignment Strategies

Hashtags also played a substantial role in formulating online discourse, shaping the interpretive environment, and positioning the user relative to broader social narratives. Framing strategies observed in the dataset included binary contrasts, construction of social roles, and ironic or critical framing. Binary oppositions were common, often implied through the use of juxtaposed or contrasting hashtags. For example, #HomeEthics might be paired with #CompleteLiberty to create implicit contrasts between traditionalist and liberal social perspectives. These contrasts functioned to define interpretive boundaries, guiding audiences toward particular understandings while signaling the user’s alignment within specific cultural debates.

Construction of social roles and identities was evident in multiple posts, portraying archetypes such as the responsible conservative versus the wayward modernist, or the devoted citizen versus the indifferent globalist. Hashtags served as concise labels that both reflected and reinforced these social constructions, allowing users to communicate complex identity positions through minimal textual input. Sarcastic and parodic frames appeared in 24 English posts (15%), where hashtags linked to conservatism or traditionalism were employed in critical or humorous settings. This type of framing demonstrates the flexibility of hashtags as tools for negotiating meaning, allowing users to simultaneously reference established values while distancing themselves from them or questioning their relevance.

Additionally, hashtag clustering was observed as a reinforcement strategy. Posts with higher ideological density often featured groups of related hashtags, such as #origins, #respect, and #originality, which amplified the framing effect by layering similar value signals. On average, each post contained 2.26 metadata tags, with the densest clusters appearing in the thematic content addressing societal, generational, or normative themes. Generally, the findings show that hashtags operate on multiple communicative interactional levels: they organize content, mark stance and identity, presuppose common knowledge, and formulate a frame for discourse. The interplay of pragmatic function, underlying meaning, referentiality, and framing demonstrates the nuance of social media users in employing these brief textual tags to negotiate meaning, reflect identity, and engage with wider cultural narratives. Hashtags thus function as powerful semiotic devices, providing insight into contemporary social norms, generational attitudes, and cultural alignment in digital discourse.

TABLE 1  
OVERVIEW OF HASHTAG ANALYSIS IN 160 SOCIAL MEDIA POSTS

| Category                        | Subcategory / Function                     | Number of Posts | Percentage (%) | Example Hashtags                                  |
|---------------------------------|--------------------------------------------|-----------------|----------------|---------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Total posts and hashtags</b> | -                                          | 160             | 100            | -                                                 |
|                                 | Total hashtags                             | 361             | -              | -                                                 |
|                                 | Average hashtags per post                  | 2.26            | -              | -                                                 |
| <b>Pragmatic Functions</b>      | Stance-taking                              | 120             | 75             | #HomeEthics, #prideinme, #Zoomers                 |
|                                 | Categorization                             | 75              | 46.9           | #CulturalHeritage, #RootedInCulture               |
|                                 | Alignment/Affiliation                      | 64              | 40             | #ReconnectWithRoots, #DevotedCitizen              |
| <b>Presupposition</b>           | Cultural heritage/tradition                | 128             | 80             | #Ourheritage(s), #Long-standing ideals            |
|                                 | Authentic vs. corrupted values             | 128             | 80             | #realvalues, #currentpandemonium                  |
|                                 | Implicit moral evaluation                  | 128             | 80             | #nationalway, #uprightness                        |
| <b>Indexicality</b>             | Alignment with traditionalist/conservative | 101             | 63.1           | #HomeEthics, #DevotedCitizen                      |
|                                 | Irony / critique / detachment              | 37              | 23.1           | #currentpandemonium, #CompleteLiberty             |
| <b>Framing Strategies</b>       | Binary oppositions                         | -               | -              | #HomeEthics vs #CompleteLiberty                   |
|                                 | Construction of social roles/identities    | -               | -              | #responsibletraditionalist vs #misguidedmodernist |
|                                 | Ironic/parodic framing                     | 24              | 15             | #nationalway (used ironically)                    |
|                                 | Hashtag clustering                         | -               | -              | #origins, #respect, #originality                  |

## V. DISCUSSION

The major aim of this study was to investigate the pragmatic role played by hashtags in the circulation of cultural norms within digital discourse. Drawing on insights and perspectives from cultural sociology and pragmatics, the analysis revealed how tradition-oriented hashtags facilitate the transmission, support, and renegotiation of traditions, identities, and worldviews in online settings. The findings reveal several dimensions and factors of this process, demonstrating that hashtags act as condensed pragmatic vehicles that encode ideological positions and index cultural affiliations.

Results confirm that hashtags fulfill key pragmatic functions previously identified in the literature, with stance-taking emerging as the dominant function (appearing in 75.6% of the analyzed posts). This finding aligns with the work of Corson (1995) and Samarin (1994), who note that alignment and identity are continuously shaped through interactional markers such as stance indicators. Instances like #homeethics and #Zoomers position the speaker within identifiable cultural frameworks, serving as indexical indicators (Archer, 1993; Blaskó, 2003; Alexander & Jenks, 1994; Jæger & Breen, 2013) that activate common emotional and ideological frames. This supports the claim that cultural reproduction is embedded in interactional practices, while also clarifying the given linguistic mechanisms—presupposition, alignment, and framing—that enhance such reproduction in digital environments (Eriyanto, 2020; Highfield, 2018; Highfield & Leaver, 2014).

The presuppositional role of hashtags reinforces Klinker's (2016) pragmatic model. Phrases such as #ReconnectWithRoots or #DevotedCitizen presuppose shared cultural knowledge without explicitly elaborating on its content. Their effect lies in evoking collective memory and reinforcing symbolic continuity with the past. In this way, cultural values are reproduced through implicit meaning-making, reflecting what Levinson termed the “immaterial” components of culture.

A key finding of this study is the mediating role of hashtags in negotiating between tradition and innovation, a tension noted by Laucuka (2018) and Mohammad and Kiritchenko (2014). Rather than simply reproducing inherited norms, hashtags reveal both affirmations and critiques of tradition. Ironical or oppositional tags highlight how digital communication functions as a space for reinterpreting cultural values, echoing Park and Park's (2017) argument that tradition itself is a construct continually reshaped. Binary oppositions in hashtags (e.g., #homeethics versus #CompleteLiberty) exemplify what Laucuka (2018) and Scott (2018) described as frames of conflicts that reflect social and national verities. These conflicts often mirror generational divisions, showing that hashtags act as crucial indexical indicators by categorizing hashtags' users into culturally recognizable positions. Such findings confirm Mulligan and Smith's (1986) claim that creativity builds upon selectively reimagined aspects of cultural progression.

In accordance with Nunberg's (1992) and Oshima's (2006) notion of symbolic impact, the findings reveal that hashtags help reproduce cultural legitimacy, not only in formal institutions but also in everyday digital spaces. Some values are reinforced, while others are marginalized or satirized, reflecting Scott's (2018) argument about linguistic codes as mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion. Despite their apparent accessibility, hashtags need cultural literacy to be fully grasped, meaning they can simultaneously include some users while excluding others. Beyond their primary parts of stance-taking, presupposition, and framing, hashtags also reflect pragmatic layering, where one tag enacts several communicative functions at once. For instance, #realvalues and #Zoomers presuppose ideological frameworks while simultaneously signaling affiliation. This multifunctionality underscores the strategic compactness of hashtags, which combine referential, evaluative, and performative meanings. The study also highlights the chronotopic function of hashtags (Alexander & Jenks, 1994), where tags like #ReconnectWithRoots or #CulturalHeritage construct temporal-spatial contrasts, often opposing a glorified past with a declining present. This resonates with Bakhtin's chronotope concept (Samarin, 1994), illustrating how hashtags organize discourse around collective memory and identity.

Ironical hashtags, such as #justtraditionthings, add another layer of pragmatic complexity. By inverting expected meanings, they destabilize cultural values while inviting readers to engage in meta-commentary. This reflects Kashima and Yeung's (2010) account of irony as implicature-based and presupposition-conflict driven. Such ironic uses show that hashtags can both reproduce and critique cultural narratives simultaneously. Another important observation is the semiotic prominence of hashtags. Far from being supplementary, they often frame the meaning of entire posts, functioning like contextualization cues (Christie, 1998). Their placement, usually at the end of posts, gives them summarizing power, shaping interpretation and evaluative stance.

Hashtag clusters also emerged as significant. Sets of related tags (e.g., #origins, #originality, #respect) create pragmatic reinforcement and value intensification. This reflects multimodal pragmatic research (Squier, 1998), showing how repetition and lexical patterning amplify ideological meaning through pragmatic saturation. The intertextual function of hashtags was equally notable. A tag such as #homeethics resonates not only within the immediate post but also across wider political, religious, and media discourses, functioning as what Michael et al. (2014) termed “orders of discourse.” This positions hashtags as interdiscursive entry points into broader cultural debates (Shields, 2012; Haddad & Khalil, 2025; Al-Shboul, 2025; Goswami & Shougrakpam, 2025).

Additionally, hashtags perform deictic functions comparable to linguistic pointing. Tags like #nowmeansnow and #thisgen locate discourse in sociocultural timeframes, but unlike traditional deixis, their anchoring relies on shared cultural and political knowledge. This highlights the role of hashtags in distributed pragmatic anchoring across digitally mediated interactions. Moralizing hashtags such as #uprightness, #nationalway, and #realvalues further illustrate their function as ethical indices. These tags not only describe but also prescribe norms, paralleling Searle's (1979) view of speech acts as both descriptive and directive. They thus act as micro-acts of norm enforcement, delineating acceptable versus deviant values.

The ritualized function of hashtags was also evident. Tags affirming collective identity (e.g., #DevotedCitizen, #Ourheritage(s)) resemble ritualized speech acts, echoing Kashima and Yeung's (2010) perspectives on ritual as symbolic cohesion. Repetition across posts functions as performative acts of belonging and ideological participation. Finally, hashtags operate within what can be termed algorithmic pragmatics. Users strategically employ them to influence

visibility and reach, addressing both human audiences and platform algorithms simultaneously. This aligns with El Kotni's (2017) work on the algorithmic imaginary, highlighting how users adapt to platform logic while embedding cultural meanings.

Overall, this study reveals that hashtags demonstrate a range of context-based features: multifunctionality, referentiality, irony, moralizing, standardization, and algorithmic reflexivity. These qualities establish hashtags as central vehicles for cultural reproduction and negotiation in digital settings and discourse where subtlety, brevity, and symbolic density are substantial. They are not peripheral add-ons but integral pragmatic resources that formulate the intersection of language, ideology, and identity. The study concludes that hashtags, in their compressed linguistic forms, function as cultural mirrors of reflexivity, confirming or contesting traditions and identities. They exemplify how language actively constructs reality via context-sensitive practices, simultaneously performing referential, evaluative, and performative functions.

## VI. CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

This research aimed at exploring the role of hashtags as contextual linguistic devices in sustaining and reshaping cultural traditions within digital interactions. Rather than dealing with hashtags as incidental indicators, the study conceptualized them as compressed carriers of semantic content, identity, and ideology. By conducting a qualitative-pragmatic analysis of 160 English-language social media posts containing 361 hashtags, the findings manifested that hashtags are not neutral devices; they actively contribute to the reinforcement, negotiation, and contestation of cultural norms.

The results demonstrate that hashtags possess considerable pragmatic potential. They function as resources for stance-taking, affiliation, and cultural categorization, while simultaneously presupposing common knowledge and marking group belonging. Their role extends well beyond simple topic tagging, since they reinforce and anchor online expressions within broader cultural narratives. In this way, hashtags enable cultural continuity by referencing traditions and identities and recontextualizing them within contemporary mediated discourse. The recurrence of oppositional norms, generational identifiers, and ironic usages reflects their dual role in both reinforcing and questioning dominant values—supporting earlier sociological claims that traditions are constantly formulated rather than passively inherited.

Notably, this study broadens conventional approaches to cultural reproduction by stressing the central role of language, particularly contextualized meaning, in the dissemination of values. It demonstrates that online discourse is not merely superficial interaction, but it is a critical sphere where symbolic bases of social cohesion are expressed. Hashtags exemplify how cultural frontiers and moral structures are encoded and circulated in mediated discourses. This high visibility and linguistic brevity contribute to their effectiveness. Thus, this research contributes to the growing field of digital pragmatics by offering clues about how meaning is produced and replicated through succinct, repeatable linguistic forms. It underscores the notion that everyday linguistic activities are substantial to social life, particularly in digital environments where identity and values are continuously negotiated. While this study was limited to English posts and a specific set of value-based tags, the findings open new tracks for further research across other languages, cultures, and timeframes.

In conclusion, hashtags should be perceived as powerful instruments of cultural communication. They operate as pragmatic acts of positioning that sustain, reformulate, or challenge the cultural imagination. Far from being mere technical devices or markers of digital fluency, hashtags function as significant carriers of norms and identities in online discourse.

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# Representation of Thainess to the Eyes of the West in Lapcharoensap's *Sightseeing* as Thai American Literature

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**Abstract**—Thai American literature, despite enriching the field's heterogeneity, remains an understudied branch of Asian American literature. This study investigates *Sightseeing*, a collection of short stories by Rattawut Lapcharoensap, as a representative of Thai American texts, focusing on how Thainess is represented to Western readers. Through the framework of Asian American criticism, this literary work moves beyond the themes of exclusion and the attempt for assimilation to connecting America to Asia. The textual analysis reveals that the author represents Thainess in three critical aspects, including tourism, prostitution, and corruption, which are social realities shaping contemporary Thailand. These aspects of Thainess indicate that Thailand is not merely an exotic tourist paradise, but it is also a site of sexual exploitation and systemic injustice. The portrayal of sex tourism and domestic prostitution reveals the commodification of Thai female bodies as a result of neo-colonial contact, while the depiction of corruption suggests that bribery is normalized in Thai society, exposing structural inequality and injustice. These two negative aspects of Thainess are juxtaposed with the romanticized image of the country perceived by Westerners as a tourist paradise. This Thainess is integral to the author's transnational identity as a Thai American writer, whose writing is shaped by the context of his home country. While foregrounding Thainess and diversifying the voices in the broad field, this book also challenges the dominance of East Asian American literature.

**Index Terms**—Thai American literature, Thainess, Asian American literature, Thai American identity

## I. INTRODUCTION

Thai American literature constitutes a relatively small yet significant subset of Asian American literature. Although positioned as a minority body of writing within the United States, Asian American literature has made substantial contributions to the broader American literary canon by illuminating the lived experiences of Asian immigrants and their descendants. This field of literature was established in the late 1960s, although there were few Asian American writings, mostly produced by Chinese and Japanese American authors at the time (Cheung, 1997). Apart from the Chinese and the Japanese, there were also other groups, such as the Filipinos, Koreans, and writers from South Asia and the Middle East, who immigrated to America for various reasons, such as escaping from war and political persecution, and seeking economic opportunities. Still, the number of their literary works remains smaller than that of Chinese and Japanese writers, who are typically grouped under East Asian American literature. Currently, Asian American literature is composed of a more diverse group of writers in terms of their ethnic origins. Although Asian American writers come from diverse ethnic origins, the purpose of their writing is similar: to share their experiences, whether in their home countries or the new world. As Babri (2024) argues, Asian American voices have become increasingly diverse over time, presenting narratives that more fully capture the complexities of the immigrant experiences. At present, readers encounter more works by writers from South Asia, Southeast Asia, and the Middle East. This aligns with Lowe (1996), who contends that Asian American literature is a field that is still growing, constituted by the voices of various Asian ethnic groups. The ethnic diversity, as Lowe further explains, refutes the idea of Asian homogeneity or the way Americans lump all Asians together as only one group with no differences. In fact, Asian Americans are diverse ethnically and culturally, as can be seen in their history and literature.

The expansion of Asian American literature has been accompanied by a thematic evolution that reflects authors' experiences as well as the socio-historical contexts of each period. In the first stage, according to Cheung (1997), the themes center around seeking inclusion and claiming America, since Asian immigrants are excluded from the American sphere, suffering from racial oppression as the other on this land. The authors attempt to portray their desire to be seen as fully American and accepted as part of the nation. Currently, the themes have shifted to the display of their interest in exploring Asian histories and identities (Fan, 2024). Along these themes, the issues of class, gender and sexuality, ethnicity, and family and generational conflicts are also intertwined.

Thai American literature is a relatively new subset of Asian American literature. Drawing on Cheung (1997), the field remains small and marginalized, lacking both extensive academic study and dedicated experts. The first Thai American work to emerge in the canon is *Confessions of a Mail Order Bride* (1989) by Wanwadee Larsen. In this semi-autobiography, Larsen chronicles her journey as a young Thai woman adjusting to life in the United States after

marrying an American professor. After this book, it took many years for other works to appear, such as S.P. Somtow's *Jasmine Nights* (1994) and his other works, as well as Ira Sukrungruang's *Talk Thai* (2010). An important characteristic shared among these writings is the presentation of Thailand, the authors' home country. Many dimensions of this country, whether they are the landscape, people, culture, or ways of life, are presented in the stories. That is to say, these literary works provide readers with a background on Thai Americans, which is crucial for understanding this Asian group. Like other Asian American writings, Thai American writings depict the life of their people in the new world and their home country. For example, in a study of Somtow's *Jasmine Nights*, Praphan (2019) argues that stories of the homeland (Thailand) are integral to the author's memory and Asian American identity.

*Sightseeing* is the first book by Rattawut Lapcharoensap, a Thai American writer who was born in Chicago but grew up in Bangkok. He returned to the United States for his college education at Cornell University and the University of Michigan, where he earned a degree in creative writing. This book is a collection of seven short stories, published in 2005, depicting Thailand in many dimensions. In the year of its publication, it won the Asian American Literary Award and was nominated for the Guardian First Book Award and the New York Public Library Young Lions Fiction Award. Moreover, in 2006, it won the "5 Under 35 Award" by the National Book Foundation, celebrating five phenomenal writers under the age of 35. Growing up in the Thai context, he brought Thainess with him to the United States, reflected in his writing. This study aims to investigate *Sightseeing*, focusing on how important traits of Thainess are represented to the Western audience, as this book is published in the United States. The term "Thainess" in this study refers to the characteristics of Thai people, culture, images, ways of life, and identity. In other words, this study explores how stories of the homeland constitute this literary work, which represents Thai American literature. By doing so, scholarship on Thai American literature will be expanded and more visible. Furthermore, this study will promote the heterogeneity of Asian American literature constituted by diverse groups of people.

## II. ASIAN AMERICAN LITERATURE

Since Thai American literature is a subset of Asian American literature, to investigate this literary work, it is crucial to understand the background of its broader field. Asian American literature refers to literature created by American writers of Asian descent. This group of writers comprises the first generation of Asian immigrants and their subsequent generations. Significant Asian immigration to the United States occurred in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, during which a large number of Chinese, Japanese, Korean, and Filipino immigrants were brought to labor in sugar plantations in different parts of the country. In addition, the Gold Rush in California also brought a high number of Asians with the belief in economic prosperity to America. As stated by Lowe (1996), who employs a Marxist lens to critique Asian immigration in the United States, an important motivation behind the importation of Asians to America was that they were cheap labor for the capitalist economy. According to Chan (1991), after the abolishment of slavery in 1833, Asian laborers became a major international workforce. The Chinese, in particular, left their home country because of population pressure, economic change, political upheaval, religious persecution, and natural disasters. Following the Chinese, other ethnic groups, such as the Filipino, the Korean, and the Japanese, also immigrated to the United States for similar reasons.

In the United States, Asian immigrants faced racial oppression and exclusion in many forms, such as labor exploitation, a lack of legal rights and American citizenship, and discrimination. Based on Lowe (1996), "the American nation has been built on the exploitation and political exclusion of immigrants" (p. 14). Asians, in particular, were barred from citizenship during the early stages of immigration, as can be seen through a series of laws to exclude them from this right, such as the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1822, the Immigration Act of 1917, and the Immigration Act of 1924 (Lowe, 1996; National Archives, n.d.). These Acts indicated that the American government sought only the economic value of Asian immigrants but denied their human value regarding their legal rights. In addition, they, especially the Chinese, were also labeled as the "Yellow Peril," which threatened white Americans who feared that they would invade their land, destroy their economy, and harm their society in various ways. As argued by Song (2015), the Yellow Peril (yellow refers to the Asian race) stemmed from colonial ideology in which the Orient—both the areas and the people—is something mysterious, something to fear, and something to control. At the time of Asian migration to the United States, this ideology remained deeply embedded in American society, contributing to the systematic alienation and exclusion of Asians. Moreover, according to Palumbo-Liu (1999), an important reason behind this exclusion is the Americans' obsession with their superior white blood and intention to maintain their pure white community, excluding other races from the body of the nation. In the same vein, during the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, people in the United States were treated based on their races; white people as the privileged class and other minority groups, including Asians, as the second class (Omi & Winant, 1994). Due to the pain of bitter exclusion, as Okihiro (2014) puts it, "Minorities, especially Asian Americans, have in the past sought inclusion within the American community" (p. 24). The history of racial exclusion and marginalization has become a foundation shaping Asian American literature, which serves as a cultural response to the oppression they encounter and a powerful assertion of their existence in the United States.

Since Asian American literature is created by Asian immigrants, it is also classified as an immigrant narrative. As stated by Song (2015), this narrative genre depicts the lives of immigrants, focusing on their experiences and struggles in the new world. It features stories of their arrival, struggle, and adjustment. Based on the experiences of Asian

immigrants discussed above, Asian American literature in its early stages centers around seeking inclusion, which aligns with the characteristics of the immigrant narrative. As stated by Cheung (1997), most Asian American literary works during this era reflect the authors' aspiration to be accepted and included in the body of the American nation. In other words, they try to claim that they are also American and at the same time protest against any form of exploitation, oppression, and exclusion. This can be seen in literary works by Chinese, Japanese, Korean, and Filipino American authors. For example, Carlos Bulosan's *America Is in the Heart* (1973) depicts the life of Filipino immigrants who suffer greatly from labor exploitation and tolerate racial oppression in the United States. Overall, the themes of Asian American literature in this age are mostly about oppression, exploitation, exclusion, and the yearning for inclusion.

In the later stages of Asian American literature, there has been a shift in its themes and content. According to Cheung (1997), this literary genre presents a new theme of connecting America to Asia. Under this theme, the authors present their homelands in Asia, providing the background of their people, including historical accounts, culture, ways of life, and identity. This is because the situation of Asian Americans was better than that in the previous era. They gained American citizenship and were more (if not fully) accepted by white Americans. Moreover, they were even assigned a positive image as a model minority, since they were more successful economically and professionally than other minority groups. Therefore, those authors are not obsessed with seeking inclusion and claiming America like those in the previous era. As a representative work, Amy Tan's *The Joy Luck Club* (1989) is considered a great achievement of Asian American literature. Employing the style of talk stories, this novel depicts the relationships and conflicts between Chinese mothers and their American-born daughters, while also offering readers insights into Chinese cultural and social backgrounds. Apart from this novel, Helie Lee's *Still Life with Rice* (1997) is also a good example of Asian American novels providing Asian contexts. Based on her grandmother's memories, Lee paints a picture of a Korean woman who escapes from the Korean War and finally resettles in the United States. These two authors, as well as other writers of the same era, significantly incorporate Asian contexts into their writings. In addition, studying Maxine Hong Kingston's *The Woman Warrior*, Patel (2025) argues:

In order to establish her voice within a space that does not include such marginalized voices, Kingston utilizes elements of fiction and myth that illuminate her experiences. In her exploration of both Chinese and American values, Kingston achieves a narrative that illuminates the tension between the responsibility one has towards their culture and community and the obligations one fulfills for themselves. (para. 10)

This study also indicates that the exploration of cultural heritage and the presentation of the homeland's narratives have become important elements of Asian American literature. In addition to Kingston's *The Woman Warrior*, readers can also see a similar way of voice establishment employed in Tan's *The Joy Luck Club* to explore the Chinese and American values and connect China to America, as mentioned earlier.

Thai American literature, rooted in Southeast Asia, is a relatively small branch of Asian American literature, compared to its counterparts, such as Chinese and Japanese literature. Since Thai American literature is new in the Asian American canon, there is no expert or scholar whose expertise is in this area (Cheung, 1997). According to Lowe (1996), Southeast Asian American literature contributes a new voice to Asian American literature, providing stories of war, communist persecution, and the refugees' journeys to the new world. As stated by Chan (1991), after the fall of Saigon and the end of the Vietnam War in 1975, a great number of refugees from not only Vietnam but also Cambodia and Laos escaped from the communist persecution to their neighboring countries before being transferred to the First World countries. Due to its critical role in the Vietnam War, the United States became the primary destination for refugees from those countries.

Regarding literature, Vietnamese American writers are the most significant group of Southeast Asian American literature, with higher visibility in the canon than other groups from the same region. Based on Truong (1997), Vietnamese American literature is shaped by war and its aftermath, depicting the brutality of war, the refugee diaspora, and trauma endured by the survivors relocated to American soil. Apart from the Vietnamese, there are other refugee groups whose writings also address similar issues. For example, in a study by Praphan (2024), which investigates memoirs of Hmong refugees from Laos collected in *Hmong Means Free* by Chan (1994), the writing of this group of people is contextualized by their diaspora and trauma. Those memoirs are considered trauma narratives serving as collective memories of Hmong Americans. In the same study, *Golden Bones*, an autobiography by Siv (2008), is also found to be a trauma narrative and collective memory of Cambodian Americans. For Thai American literature, there are a few studies on this small area. Praphan (2019), for example, analyzes the impact of American imperialism on Thai society in S. P. Somtow's *Jasmine Nights*, arguing that Thailand's role as a U.S. military base has led to multidimensional transformations as a consequence of American involvement in the Vietnam War (1954–1975).

The broader Asian American literary field has moved beyond the initial Chinese and Japanese dominance to include a wider array of voices from South Asia, Southeast Asia, and the Middle East (Babri, 2024; Lowe, 1996). Therefore, the emergence of Thai American literature, despite being a tiny branch, becomes particularly significant. Although there is limited scholarship and a small number of foundational works, the exploration of "Thainess" in this study of Lapcharoensap's *Sightseeing* is not only an expansion of the Asian American canon but also an essential process to assert the heterogeneity of Asian American experiences and identities.

### III. *SIGHTSEEING* AS A REPRESENTATION OF THAINESS IN ASIAN AMERICAN LITERATURE

Lapcharoensap's cross-cultural upbringing gives him a unique voice manifesting his transnational literary discourse focusing on diasporic experience, cultural perception, and Asian American identity. In addition, as shown in *Sightseeing*, he reflects the contact between the East and the West in Thailand, highlighting neo-colonial privilege in the form of tourism, presented in a humorous tone. In addition, this book highlights economic disparity, which renders the marginalized groups invisible in society, causing injustice, inequality, and exploitation in Thailand (Chansit & Rattanamathuwong, 2022). Unlike the aforementioned issue, which is presented in a humorous tone, Lapcharoensap employs a serious tone to depict the class disparity in Thailand. Apart from these two issues, a significant characteristic of this literary work is the representation of Thainess as part of Lapcharoensap's cross-cultural identity, which reveals his perception of his home country. Such Thainess is portrayed in different aspects as follows.

The first trait of Thainess portrayed in *Sightseeing* is Thailand's image as a global tourist destination. According to *U.S. News*, two destinations in Thailand—Chiang Mai and Phuket—are ranked sixth and tenth, respectively, among the best places to visit in Asia in 2026 (Tersch, 2025). In fact, Thailand's international image has long been closely associated with tourism. Growing up in Thailand, Lapcharoensap is familiar with this image and tourists from different parts of the world seeking memorable holidays in this country, so it is part of his perception of his homeland, appearing in his writing. As depicted in "Farangs," the first short story in *Sightseeing*, Thailand is a destination for tourists from different countries. Set on a famous island in the country, this story features the life of the narrator, a young boy in love with a *farang* girl. The Thai term "farang" refers to white Westerners, derived from the name "Frank." Historically, during the Ayutthaya period of Siam (now Thailand), the Siamese adopted this term to refer to the Portuguese, who had arrived in the country in significant numbers. Since then, the term *farang* has been used up to the present time (Kittiaras, 2010). A son of a motel owner, the narrator encounters *farangs* from different parts of the world daily:

June: the Germans come to the Island—football cleats, big T-shirt, thick tongues—speaking like spitting. July, the Italians, the French, the British, the Americans. The Italians like pad thai, its affinity with spaghetti. [...] The French like plump girls, rambutans, disco music, baring their breasts. Americans are the fattest, the stingiest of the bunch. [...] They're also the worst drunks. Never get too close to a drunk American. August brings the Japanese. Stay close to them. Never underestimate the power of the yen. Everything's cheap with imperial monies [sic] in hand and they're too polite to bargain. (Lapcharoensap, 2005, p. 1)

The excerpt indicates that the tourists on the island are not only Westerners but also Japanese. In fact, most international tourists are from Asian countries. According to the Association of Thai Travel Agents (2026), in 2025, the Chinese were the biggest tourist group with the number of 605,974, followed by the Indians (306,974). The biggest group of *farang* tourists was the Russian (163,334). Other groups, such as the Vietnamese, the Korean, and the Japanese, also contribute high numbers of foreign tourists to Thailand's tourism. These numbers indicate that Thailand is a hub of international tourists in this region.

Although Thailand is celebrated as a tourist destination, to many *farangs*, it is a site for sexual purposes. While the tourists in general visit Thailand for its beautiful landscapes and culture, a considerable number also focus on Thai women. This dynamic is portrayed through the perspective of the narrator's mother, who attends to male *farangs* at her motel and comes to realize that the two exoticized aspects of Thailand that most appeal to them are women and elephants:

"Pussy and elephants. That's all these people want." She always says this in August, at the season's peak, when she's tired of farangs running all over the Island, tired of finding used condoms in the motel's rooms [...] "You give them history, temples, pagodas, traditional dance, floating markets, seafood curry, tapioca desserts, silk-weaving cooperatives, but all they really want is to ride some hulking gray beast like a bunch of wildmen and to pant over girls and to lie there half-dead getting skin cancer on the beach during the time in between". (Lapcharoensap, 2005, p. 2)

The mother's view of the male *farangs* reveals that their real purpose in visiting Thailand is to enjoy Thai women. In fact, Thailand is also known among foreign tourists as a land of sex tourism: "Thailand hosts one of the largest prostitution markets in the world, per capita. [...] Thailand is known internationally as a major sex tourism site" (Weitzer, 2023, p. 1). This situation can be analyzed as a form of neo-colonial contact between the East and the West, as the West sees the former as a place for exotic sex not available in the Western world (Said, 1978). Although Thailand was never colonized by any Western countries, during the Vietnam War, many U.S. military bases were set up in different parts of the country. In addition, based on Baker and Phongpaichit (2005), it was established as the R & R place (Rest and Recreation) for American soldiers to take a break from the battle in Vietnam. Many nightclubs, bars, and brothels were open to serve the demand of American soldiers.

The above discussion indicates that, alongside the image of the country as a tourist destination, prostitution is another significant trait of Thainess represented in *Sightseeing*. In addition to the mother's view on the male *farangs*, who aim to exploit Thai female bodies, this matter of human trafficking at a local level also appears in "The Café Lovely," another story in the collection. This story is set in a contemporary slum neighborhood in Bangkok, revealing the desire of the narrator, a teenage boy, to experience nightlife, which brings him to witness a deeply-rooted problem of prostitution in Thailand. A fatherless boy with only his older brother as company, he pleads to visit a night cafe with his

brother, only to find out that it is, in fact, a brothel. Imagining this cafe as a regular fun place for boys to hang out, he is stunned to see what is in front of him:

A couple of girls in miniskirts and tank tops and heavy makeup danced and swayed with two balding, middle-aged local men [...] their large hands gripping the girls' slender waists. In a dark corner, more girls were seated at a table, laughing. They sounded like a flock of excited birds. I'd never seen so many girls in my life. (Lapcharoensap, 2005, pp. 36-37)

The picture of many sexy girls waiting to serve their customers makes the boy realize that this place is a brothel. In the previous story, the sex consumers are primarily *farangs*, but for the brothel in this story, local men are regular visitors. This distinction indicates that prostitution in Thailand is not limited to foreign demand, but it also serves local customers. According to Baker and Phongpaichit (2005), capitalism is an important cause of this problem, as it turns people to be materialistic, resulting in poverty. With no choices, many girls are forced to become prostitutes not only to survive, but also to support their families. It is even more poignant to see in the story that underage prostitution also exists in Thai society, as the narrator describes a girl he sees at the cafe:

She couldn't have been more than sixteen years old—younger than my brother—but it seemed clear to me now that she was the one holding him, directing his course, leading him. I wondered how many men she had held up tonight, how many more she would hold in the thousands of nights before her. (Lapcharoensap, 2005, pp. 45-46)

The depiction of this girl suggests that the circle of prostitution in Thailand is large, encompassing women of a wide range of ages, with authority neglect. The place where she works also implies that prostitution is operated not only at a brothel, but at a cafe as well. As Weitzer (2023) argues, in Thailand, this sex business is also available at other places such as massage shops, bars, karaoke restaurants, hotels, or even beauty salons. In addition, according to Favre (2020), although prostitution is prohibited by law in Thailand, sexual services are widely available in practice, including those involving children. The two stories, "Farangs" and "The Café Lovely," reveal that there is a close relationship between tourism and prostitution. Thailand is a popular destination among travelers worldwide. Its long-standing appeal stems not only from its natural beauty but also from the availability of commercial sex services sought by individuals often referred to as sex tourists (Favre, 2020). In other words, international tourism partially contributes to the promotion of prostitution, and together these two phenomena have come to constitute prominent markers of Thainess in the eyes of the global community. Although prostitution in "The Café Lovely" aims at the local customers, it is rooted in sex tourism, which normalizes this sexual exploitation by making people think that it is acceptable to trade bodies for money. The portrayal of this dimension of Thainess in *Sightseeing* suggests that prostitution significantly forms part of Lapcharoensap's perception of his home country.

Another significant aspect of Thainess represented in *Sightseeing*, beyond its construction as a tourist destination and its association with prostitution, is corruption. Corruption is a serious problem in this society, happening in different forms and in various sectors. Based on the statistics by Transparency International (n.d.), the Corruption Perceptions Index of Thailand is 34/100 as of 2024, ranked 107 out of 180 countries. These statistics indicate that the rate of corruption in this country is extremely high, especially when compared to Singapore, another country in Southeast Asia, gaining 84/100 and ranked 3 out of 180. Corruption in Thailand is operated through different means, such as patronage politics, power abuse, bribery, and cheating, all of which are viewed as common practices in the country, while the government fails to deploy effective measures to eradicate them.

Corruption in Thailand is depicted in "Draft Day," a story narrated by a young man who is summoned to participate in a military draft. Based on the Thai constitution, all Thai men aged 21 are required to participate in this military conscription process, where they can either volunteer for a reduced service term or submit to a public lottery draft to determine if they must serve. In the lottery, the participants will pick a card from an urn containing red and black cards. A man who picks a red card must join the military training for two years, while a black card means no obligation to serve. The annual selection period typically occurs in April. Typically, many Thai men and their parents fear conscription into the military because of the long period of rigorous training and the potential risk of armed conflict. Consequently, many individuals employ all possible means, including praying and making offerings to gods or sacred beings, in an effort to avoid military conscription. In many cases, bribery as a form of corruption is practiced by some families to ensure that their sons will be safe from this process.

In the story, the narrator and his friend Wichu are required by law to participate in the conscription lottery. Both are so anxious about their fate that they turn to alcohol for comfort the night before. However, Wichu is unaware of the plan of bribery arranged to help the narrator avoid military service, while the other participants—including Wichu himself—must rely on luck to determine their fate. This arrangement indicates that bribery as a form of corruption is practiced by some Thai people to benefit themselves. Living in the Thai context, Lapcharoensap sees that this practice is an important part of Thainess, and it seems that it is common for people to do it, as he portrays it through the narrator's situation:

I didn't tell him everything had already been arranged for me. I didn't tell him that my father's boss's older brother—a retired navy lieutenant—had recently received two crates of Johnny Walker Blue and a certificate for his wife to a famous goldsmith... I didn't tell Wichu that the lieutenant, in turn, had called my father to thank him. He told my father that he'd recommended me to the draft board as an upstanding young citizen, so

upstanding I didn't need the benefits of marching drills and mess hall duty and combat training to improve my character in any way. (Lapcharoensap, 2005, p. 56)

Conducted through connections between people, this bribery destroys the justice system in Thailand, as it divides people into the privileged and the underprivileged. It is a reciprocal act between the briber and the bribe-taker, who view this act as acceptable. Based on a study by Ariyabuddhiphongs and Hongladarom (2014), to Thai people, bribery is somewhat acceptable because they view paying bribes as a reciprocal exchange, and the analysis shows that this sense of obligation connects acceptance to bribe-payment. In general, people complain about bribery but do not take serious steps to report it through the legal system.

In addition to the bribery conducted by the narrator's family, Lapcharoensap points out in another incident that people simply criticize this corruption but fail to take serious action. In front of many people, one lottery participant is removed from the line while awaiting his turn to draw a card from the urn. This preferential treatment implies that his family has bribed officials to avoid conscription. Although other participants closely witness this incident, they do not protest or report it to the authorities; instead, they merely voice resentment toward the system: "Fucking corruption, somebody says. Cowards, says another. Just another day in the Kingdom of Thailand" (Lapcharoensap, 2005, p. 66). These statements suggest that despite their anger with this corruption, they ultimately come to accept it as a normalized and routine aspect of Thai society. At the end of the draft day, the narrator returns home safely, while Wichu is unlucky as he draws a red card, thus having to join the army. His mother has neither the money to offer bribes nor connections with military officials, so he must rely entirely on luck—and he has none. Through literary representation, Lapcharoensap articulates this dark aspect of Thainess, with his writing operating as a cultural tool to protest against structural injustice embedded in Thai society.

#### IV. CONCLUSION

Through the framework of Asian American literature, this study discovers that *Sightseeing* articulates Thainess in different aspects for Western audiences. By placing Lapcharoensap's work within the development of Asian American literature—from early immigrant stories about exclusion to later transnational writings that reconnect America with Asia—the study also shows how *Sightseeing* helps expand and diversify the Asian American canon. Since Thai American literature is a relatively understudied field, this analysis renders it more visible, challenging the dominance of East Asian American literature, which has a longer history, and reaffirming the heterogeneity of the canon.

The close readings of the selected stories indicate that Lapcharoensap represents Thainess in different dimensions, particularly tourism, prostitution, and corruption. Thailand is portrayed not only as an exotic destination for international tourists but also as a country shaped by unequal power relations, neo-colonial encounters, and global capitalism. The depiction of sex tourism and prostitution indicates that Thai bodies are commodified for both foreigners and locals. Meanwhile, the portrayal of corruption reveals how injustice and inequality are normalized in this country. These representations, as social realities, are juxtaposed with the romanticized Western imagination of Thailand as a tourist paradise. However, Lapcharoensap does not entirely condemn these unjust systems; instead, he reflects his critical perspectives on the country as an insider and a Thai American writer whose identity is constituted by such a transnational background. *Sightseeing* is employed as a means to reveal structural problems in Thai society, which are uncomfortable, unavoidable truths about the country, and at the same time to assert the presence of the Thai voice within Asian American literature. In the same vein as Cheung (1997), this literary work connects America to Asia by presenting stories of the homeland, which represent Thainess as the cultural specificity of Thai American identity. Furthermore, the theme of this book also aligns with Fan (2024) in that it explores the histories, cultures, and identities of the author's home country. By foregrounding Thailand's social realities alongside its global image, *Sightseeing* expands the boundaries of Asian American literature and reasserts its heterogeneity, constituted by diverse histories, cultures, and lived experiences.

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# Kennings in English and Arabic: A Comparative Study

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**Abstract**—This study presents a comparative analysis of kennings in English and Arabic. It compares the structural, functional, and cultural aspects of kennings in English literature and kennings-like constructs in Arabic, particularly the metonymy of a modified object. Although such a figurative substitution is used to enhance poetic language in both languages, their forms and objectives are different. In contrast to Arabic kennings, which prioritize social refinement and Qur'anic eloquence, English kennings are recursive, two-part compounds with deep roots in mythical and oral memory traditions. Both cultures' historical emergence of these terms suggests distinct literary inspirations. Old Norse and Anglo-Saxon literature's poetic tradition is the source of English kennings, which are frequently used to enhance narrative through abstraction and multi-layered meaning. The present study attempts to shed light on the metonymical wordplay employed by English and Arabic to promote cognitive playfulness. Such use of language necessitates active interpretation by the readers, depending not only on their linguistic but also cultural knowledge, for decoding several hidden meanings. The study demonstrates that kennings are culture-bound expressions shaped by sociocultural norms. The main objective of this study is to advance language studies by demonstrating how kennings and metonymy reflect cultural thinking patterns and by offering a framework for examining figurative language across diverse linguistic traditions. The findings show that although English and Arabic kennings share indirect figurative expression and similar poetic functions, they differ sharply in structure, substitution patterns, and cultural-religious foundations.

**Index Terms**—comparison, culture, figurative substitution, kennings, metonymy

## I. INTRODUCTION

Language is a reflection of a culture's imagination, worldview, and poetic sensibility, and it is also a means of communication. Kennings are a particularly vivid and evocative form among the various stylistic methods that enhance poetic language (Bestilleiro Álvarez, 2016). Kennings, as a poetic device, were first employed in Old Norse and Old English literature to substitute a more direct noun (Krause, 1930). For instance, "whale-road" might signify sea (Heaney, 2000, p. 3). In addition to demonstrating linguistic creativity, kennings also highlight cultural values and symbolic connections embedded in the community from which they originate (Lombardi, 2023).

Although kennings are most frequently associated with early Germanic poetry, particularly in English works such as *Beowulf*, comparable expressions are also present in Arabic and other linguistic and literary traditions. Arabic poetry, with a rich history dating back to the pre-Islamic period, is also rich in imagery and creativity. It frequently uses figurative terms that work similarly to kennings (Tamim'dari, 2002).

The purpose of the study is to compare the structure, function, and thematic relevance of kennings in English and Arabic within their respective traditions. The research aims to demonstrate how these different language and cultural systems make use of such poetic devices to improve their poetic expression by examining similarities and differences. By doing this, this study hopes to advance readers' awareness of the use of poetic methods, especially those in English and Arabic, as well as of the innate human tendency toward figurative language.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Etymologically, the term of kennings was brought to English in the nineteenth century from medieval Icelandic poetic treatises, notably "the Prose Edda" by Snorri Sturluson. It comes from the Old Norse word *kenna*, having the meaning of "know", "recognize", "perceive", "feel", "show", "teach", and so on. It can be found in expressions like "*kenna við*", which means to name after; to express one thing in terms of another (Baer, 2013, p. 28).

Kennings are one of the distinguishing features of Skaldic diction. According to Kemp Malone, as cited in Gardner (1972), this poetic device is one of the "stereotypes" that define Old Germanic poetic diction.

Sturluson (1987) defines kennings as poetic periphrases or descriptive terms crafted so that, when referring to Odin, Thor, Tyr, or any other Æsir or elves (Gods in Norse mythology), their names are accompanied by a reference to another



deity or an aspect of their deeds. In this construction, the designation applies to the figure who aligns with the entire phrase rather than the one explicitly named.

Meissner (1921) proposes an approach to apply the term of kennings for dealing with Skaldic diction. He states that kennings are any two-membered nouns that serve as substitutes. Meissner emphasizes that kennings are viewed as replacements and have universal, typical, and changeable characters.

While demonstrating the analogy between kennings and riddles, Lindow (1975) provided a more recent definition of kennings as nominal compounds that are expandable in multiple ways. Lindow also reminds us that this poetic form must have been written for a highly intelligent audience capable of unraveling and comprehending its complexities.

Frank (1978) describes kennings as appellations, which are synonyms that use more “elevated” expressions than those commonly used to describe a person or object. This style was one of the poetic techniques frequently employed in Skaldic poetry.

Lombardi (2023) describes kennings in the light of their innovative and symbolic nature as they are often drawn from natural elements, mythology, or cultural imagery, and using personification or analogy (e.g., trees as warriors, ships as animals) to convey specific qualities such as strength, mobility, or power. They reflect a highly creative and structured linguistic practice, in which objects or concepts are described by associating them with beings or entities that embody their desired attributes.

Fidjestøl (1974; as cited in Holland, 2005, pp. 128-129) suggests a descriptive account of kennings divided into six parts:

1. “*Circumlocution*”: Kennings can be used in place of regular nouns.
2. “*Two components*”: A kenning consists of a determinant and a base word, where the determinant is in the genitive or as part of a compound, and the base word is in the appropriate grammatical case.
3. “*Semantic incongruity*”: The meaning of the replacement noun is not explicitly expressed by either the determinant or the base word.
4. “*Domain limitation*”: Although there are numerous concepts that kennings can potentially express, the majority only fit into a small group of about twenty.
5. “*Kennings variation*”: The determinant and the base word are both members of open word classes, which permit change.
6. *Rekit*: It is possible to create extended metaphorical frameworks by substituting another kenning for the determinant itself.

In Arabic literature, kennings are utilized as a poetic technique in the descriptive structure of Arabic prose. According to Tamīm'dārī (2002), in *Kalila and Demna*, the use of kennings reflects the broader influence of classical Arabic literary aesthetics, in which figurative language, allegory, and indirect expression play a significant role in enhancing the depth and elegance of the text.

Arabic rhetoricians generally regard kennings as a form of metonymy. Wahba (1968) and Hadidi (2001) assert that kennings in Arabic are considered a form of metonymy, specifically a modified object. In *Al-Bayan Journal* (1978) kennings are defined as a special kind of *iṭnāb* (*elaboration*), in which the described item is depicted by its qualities rather than by name. Ship, for example, may be called “steed of the sea”. This poetic device is consistent with the more general idea of metonymy, which is the use of related features to make indirect reference.

Several classical scholars emphasize the inferential nature of metonymy. Al-Sakakī (1987) notes that metonymy conveys meaning by inference rather than by a clear statement and reveals only when necessary. He states that metonymy and indirectness do not impact the mind as clearly as explicitness and openness do. He considers metonymy one of the rhetorical styles required by certain situations. Similarly, Al-Jurjanī (1992) expands the concept of metonymy to include replacing the real term with another expression that carries a similar meaning, rather than using the original term. An illustrative example of metonymy can be seen in the expression نَوْمُ الضَّحَى (na'um aldhuha), which refers to a person who oversleeps or a late sleeper. In classical Arabic, it often serves as a metonymy for a woman who lives a life of luxury and comfort, as she has the leisure to oversleep without the need to engage in early work or labor.

Ibn Al-Athir (1939) defines metonymy as an expression that carries two meanings and may be understood either figuratively or literally. In a similar vein, Al-'Alawi (1980) defines metonymy as expressions that possess both literal and figurative meanings, yet do not contain any explicit indicators or metaphorical vehicles. Al-'Alawi (1980) further explains that the purpose of this restriction is to avoid combining metonymy with other figures of speech. This two- meanings structure means that the expression itself is semantically plausible in its literal sense, but the context pushes the listener to understand the deeper, figurative meaning. The absence of an explicit indicator is what distinguishes it from other figures.

From a comparative perspective, Bauer (2010) draws a parallel between kennings in Old Norse poetry and metonymical structures in early Arabic poetry, viewing both as stylistic devices rooted in indirect reference and semantic substitution. or more specifically, Bauer (2010) draws a parallel between kennings in Old Norse poetry and metonymical structures in early Arabic poetry, viewing both as stylistic devices rooted in indirect reference and semantic substitution. In pre-Abbasid Arabic poetry, objects of focus—such as camels, swords, or onagers—were not referred to by their common names. Instead, poets employed modified metonymy, entirely replacing standard terms with expressions that conveyed a defining

characteristic or habitual action of the object. This indirect, evocative use of language reflects a stylistic approach akin to kennings in Old Norse poetry.

### III. METHODOLOGY

This study examines kennings in English and Arabic literary traditions using a qualitative, descriptive-comparative methodology. It identifies the structural, functional, and cultural aspects of kennings in English poetry, mainly from Old English and Old Norse sources like *Beowulf*, and contrasts them with metonymical expressions in classical Arabic poetry and rhetoric, specifically, the metonymy of a modified object, which is the main goal of this study. In addition to contemporary scholarly interpretations, information was gathered from a variety of literary works, Qur'anic examples, and rhetorical treatises written by scholars such as Al-Jurjānī and Al-Sakakī.

The analysis comprises three phases: structural (examining forms such as compound and genitive constructions), functional (exploring aesthetic and cognitive roles), and cultural (examining the mythological and sociocultural foundations of figurative expressions).

To examine how both languages use indirect expressions to convey abstract concepts, comparative examples are chosen based on thematic similarities, particularly images associated with battle. Based on these methodological considerations, the present study seeks to answer the following research questions:

1. How do the morpho-syntactic constraints of Old English kennings, specifically their fixed, compound nature, contrast with the syntactic fluidity of Arabic metonymy (metonymy of a modified object) in the construction of figurative meaning?
2. In what ways do these figures of speech fulfill divergent aesthetic functions—serving narrative abstraction in the English tradition versus social refinement and moral eloquence in the Arabic rhetorical tradition—while acting as parallel devices for cognitive engagement?
3. To what extent do the distinct historical origins—Northern European mythological oral traditions versus Arabic rhetorical and philosophical foundations—dictate the thematic domains and referents used in the battle imagery of each language?

To answer these questions, the study methodically examines a few English and Arabic examples using the three analytical stages outlined above. Together, these phases allow for a thorough comparison of the two languages and show how each linguistic system uses indirect expression to create meaning.

### IV. DISCUSSION

The present section provides a detailed analysis of the figurative expressions collected for this study from English and Arabic literary sources. It examines their structural patterns, Characteristics and functions, especially within the semantic field of battle.

#### A. English Kennings

##### (a). The Structure of English Kennings

According to Meissner (1921), kennings in English are typically two-element substitutive periphrases made up of a base-word (B) and a determinant (D) in a genitival syntactic relationship; this binary structure replaces the referent (R) of the kenning. This definition is based on structural and systemic considerations rather than semantic or cognitive ones.

e.g.: “Bone-house” (Heaney, 2000, p. 168)

Base Word (B): house → denoting a container or structure.

Determinant (D): bone → describing the substance or distinguishing feature of the structure.

bone (B) + house (D) = body (R)

Ross (2007) examines Meissner's description of kennings' structure, explaining that kennings can take two primary forms: compound words or genitive phrases. A compound kenning, such as “*sea steed*” (a ship), consists of a base word and a determinant, where the first element (the determinant) is a noun used without suffixes. In contrast, a genitive kenning, such as “*wave's horse*” (a ship), features a determinant in the genitive case that either precedes or follows the base word, sometimes with another word in between.

Faulkes (1997) further notes that not all kennings rely on genitives. In some cases, the first element of a compound word functions as a determinant, effectively replacing a genitive. This allows for greater structural flexibility, contributing to the variety and richness of kenning formation.

When the scopos (the early Germanic poets) first began using kennings, they were relatively simple, typically consisting of two words that expressed a single concept. These “simple kennings” include terms like “*hildenaedre*” (the “battle-serpent” for arrow), “*merehengest*” (the “horse of the sea” for ship), and “*solarborð*” (the “sky”) (p. 17).

##### (b). The Characteristics of English Kennings

One of the most intriguing aspects of kennings is their ability to expand through recursion or embedding. This process allows the output of one kenning formation to serve as the input for another, leading to increasingly intricate expressions. The fundamental kenning structure (B+D=R) can be recursively applied to produce extended kennings, sometimes

referred to as "rekit" (Patria, 2020, p. 26). For example, if "whale-road" represents the sea and "sea-stallion" refers to a ship, a recursive kenning such as "stallion of the whale-road" emerges, compounding meaning and poetic complexity (Simpson, 1979, p. 1).

Another defining characteristic of kennings is their tendency to merge multiple elements into a single, elaborate expression. As noted by Lindow (1975), kennings are multiply expanding nominal compounds that often incorporate a ludic element. This complexity was intended for an audience well-versed in the poetic tradition, capable of decoding the verse's layered meanings.

In addition to recursion and merging, lexical variation plays an important role in the kenning system. This characteristic, also known as "paradigmatic substitution," allows poets to swap lexical components within a set framework called the "kenning-pattern" or "kenning-type" (Patria, 2020, p. 26). This variation is often achieved through the use of "heiti" (poetic synonyms), which substitute for standard terms while maintaining the kenning's formal structure (p. 26).

#### (c). *Functions of English Kennings*

Beyond decoration, English kennings are closely related to dominant themes, introducing irony or parody, and creating associative links within compositions. Their unique ability to enrich, obscure, and elevate poetry ensures their lasting significance in literary history. For instance, in *Beowulf*, kennings contribute to the poem's vivid imagery, making complex ideas more accessible and engaging. By painting rich, dynamic pictures, they help the audience visualize the story while also carrying deeper symbolic meanings that enhance the thematic depth of the narrative (Alisoy, 2025).

Kennings, originally used as synonyms in Old Norse poetry, played an important role in facilitating alliterative verse. Since alliteration required at least two words to begin with the same sound, poets needed alternative expressions for certain words, leading to the development of kennings. Over time, these figurative expressions became an integral part of poetic diction, enriching both style and meaning (Simpson, 1979).

Davis-Secord (2016) illustrates that kennings as compound words have a significant effect on the relationship among syntax, style, and culture. Kennings engage fundamental grammatical and semantic processes by combining two words, while also serving as a distinctive stylistic feature of Old English literature. Their function extends beyond mere ornamentation, generating meaning in culturally specific ways. Sturluson (1987), in *Snorra Edda*, identifies two main functions of kennings: expanding poetic vocabulary and enabling obscure or elevated speech. This stylistic complexity reflects the aesthetic nature of poetic language, as Skalds viewed their compositions as carefully crafted gifts. Additionally, the riddling nature of kennings engaged intellectual curiosity, reinforcing the link between poetry and wisdom (Sturluson, 1987).

The memory value of kennings in oral cultures is further contextualized by Ong's (1982) views on orality. According to Ong, these "outsize" numbers and pictures were intentionally created to be memorable, helping preserve collective knowledge. In a time when memory was the main source of cultural and historical tales, this "mnemonic serviceability" was crucial. Alisoy (2025) highlights how kennings serve to glorify heroic figures, while their deeper symbolic meanings also fulfill important social and honorific roles. Kennings were commonly used to praise rulers, warriors, and gods, enhancing heroic ideals and social hierarchy. Bestilleiro Álvarez (2016) also argues that an important function of kennings is in constructing heroic identities, especially in the epic poem *Beowulf*, where they are used to highlight the bravery and leadership of the main protagonist. The king, for example, is called "beaga bryttan", or the "dispenser of treasure" in modern English, indicating his role as a kind leader who rewards his soldiers while maintaining his prestigious standing in society. Titles such as "Geatish hero" highlight *Beowulf*'s noble lineage and loyalty, central virtues of Anglo-Saxon society (Alisoy, 2025).

#### (d). *Battle Kennings in English Literature*

Kennings are typically used to refer to concrete objects and are drawn from a limited set of traditional themes, such as gods, men, women, war, the sea, ships, the earth, fire, ice, swords, shields, etc. In this section, however, we deal exclusively with kennings related to battle.

Abram (2019) discusses sword kennings in Old English literature, for example: "the adders of battle", the mighty war snake, and the serpent of strife. Similarly, Brunning (2015) explores the imagery in sword kennings, such as the swinger or the serpent of wounds, showing how these puzzling expressions convey both their symbolic connotations and their physical characteristics. Swords are compared by Kennings to things like ice, suggesting coldness and hardness; light or lightning, suggesting brightness and sharpness; and serpents, emphasizing their sleek, patterned look. These representations capture the weapon's aesthetic qualities and its cultural importance in Viking culture (p. 66). In a similar vein, Mitchell and Robinson (1998, p. 26) highlight examples of sword-related kennings in *Beowulf*, such as "war-friend" and "battle-light".

In her analysis of kennings in Skaldic poetry, particularly with *dróttkvætt* poems, Patria (2020) explores a wide array of kennings that convey the imagery and experience of battle. She discusses kennings such as "talk of swords", "meeting for weapons", "storm of the sword", and "strong wind of arrows", which figuratively represent combat as a means of communication between weapons and frame battle as natural weather phenomena. Patria also emphasizes kennings that describe warriors through using references to the natural world, for example, "battle-wolves" (p. 55) and "battle-birches" (pp. 207-209). These analogies link the human fighter to the wild and resilient powers of nature in addition to representing martial skill. Furthermore, she investigates kennings for blood that evoke the idea of blood as a beverage drunk amid the

fervor of war, the battlefield as being covered in the blood of the dead, for instance, “battle -draught” (p. 165) and “carrion-pool” (p. 92). She further explores object-based and spatial kennings. She adds, the kennings “the sky of the rim” (p. 210) and “war-cloud” (p. 210) allude to the shield, presenting it as a protective component that looms over the warrior like the sky does over the earth.

## B. Arabic Kennings

### (a). The Structure of Arabic Kennings

According to classical Arabic scholars, Arabic kennings correspond directly to the rhetorical mechanism of metonymy. Linguistically, Arabic metonymy is an indirect reference to an object or idea, by mentioning something that implies it, rather than stating it explicitly. It can also mean giving a man a title or nickname, often by using a reference such as “Abu” (Father of) followed by a significant word, thus bestowing a name that symbolizes something about him (Ibn Manẓur, 2010). Although Arabic rhetoric discusses various forms of metonymy, only one type of metonymy, especially the metonymy of a modified, is structurally and functionally similar to English kennings.

Abdul-Raof (2006) classifies metonymy into three major types: metonymy of an attribute, metonymy of a modified, and metonymy of affinity. Among these, the metonymy of a modified is the most relevant to the present study because it replaces the referent entirely with an attributive or descriptive expression. In a manner analogous to the substitutive structure of the English kennings.

In metonymy of a modified, an attribute and description are stated without disclosing the entity being described. The metonymic word or phrase in this type needs a context to be recognized. A clear example occurs in the following verse from the Glorious Qur'an:

"وَحَمَلْنَاهُ عَلَى ذَاتِ أَلْوَاحٍ وَدُسُرٍ" Surat al-Qamar (54:13)  
*And we carried him upon a sailing ship.*

In this verse, a ship is metonymically represented by “الواح ودسر” (alwah wa dusar), which means the planks and nails (Al Hayyani, 2014). By referencing one of the basic concepts that can frequently co-occur with it, the relationship between the object described and the planks and nails, which is the ship, can be linked to the bearer of this attribute (p. 313). Based on this example, the kenning of ship functions as a form of metonymy, employing indirect descriptions that underline fundamental attributes or associated imagery. This aligns with Mohammed and Al-Qazaz’s (2024) study, which highlights the need for analyzing intertextual elements like religious references while taking into account the cultural background of the intended audience.

Al-Hashimi (2019) further explains that metonymy of a modified may rely on either a single identifying attribute or a group of attributes, as in the saying of Ibrahim (2018):

"وَبُنَاةُ الْأَهْرَامِ فِي سَالِفِ الدَّهْرِ رَكْفُونِي الْكَلَامَ عِنْدَ النَّحْدِيِّ"

*The builders of the pyramids in past ages have spared me the need for speaking during a challenge* (translation by the authors).

Ibrahim’s statement “بناة الاهرام” (bunat alahramat), which means builders of the pyramids, is a metonymy for the ancient Egyptians, who built the famous pyramids. The poet uses a single characteristic that exemplifies those who possess it.

A structurally layered description resembling extended kennings is produced by combining multiple qualities to collectively conjure the referent (Al Hashimi, 2019). As in:

"حَيٌّ مُسْتَوِي الْقَامَةِ يَمْشِي عَلَى رَجُلَيْنِ عَرِيضُ الْأَطْفَارِ."

*A man who is shaped with balance and intention.* (translation by the authors).

In Arabic, other forms of metonymy—like metonymy of an attribute or metonymy of affinity—remain rhetorically significant, but they differ structurally from kennings in that they usually maintain the referent or rely on relational inference rather than total substitution. Because of this, they are not primarily included in the current comparative study.

### (b). The Characteristics and Functions of Arabic Kennings

Arabic kennings, which are represented by the metonymy of a modified, possess specific attributes that serve as defining characteristics and stylistic functions, as noted by Al-Mubarrad (1956). Economical use of words is one of the aesthetic functions of kennings. To represent the intended idea, a single word or a statement is employed rather than one or more sentences. According to Farid (1998), the phrase naqi althwb (نقي الثوب), in the following example, represents a type of kenning and has a variety of non-allegorical meanings, including virtue, chastity, purity, and abstinence from sin (p. 51).

"فلان نقي الثوب" (Farid, 1998, p. 51)

*A man in a clean dress.* (translation by the authors)

Kennings are used to convey socially or culturally unacceptable concepts in a refined and acceptable manner. This rhetorical device is extensively employed in the Qur'an and classical Arabic literature. For instance, due to their profound sense of honor, they would metonymically refer to a woman using terms such as the egg or the sheep (Al-Hashimi, 2019). Furthermore, one of the key functions of metonymy, according to Ibn Abi al-Iṣḥā‘ (1963), is to express an unpleasant or indecent meaning through a more delicate or indirect phrase. By employing metonymy, poets and writers convey their intended message while maintaining politeness and sensitivity. The term (biyḍ almtābikh (بيض المطايخ), meaning white

kitchens, as used in the example below, is a metonymy for the quality of frugality. The poet suggests that people eat dry bread and do not cook or wash in order to condemn them.

"بيض المطابخ لا تشكو إمائهم طبخ القدور ولا غسل المناديل" (Al-Hashimi, 2019, p. 350)

*The kitchens of the noble are clean, their maidservants never complain of cooking the pots or washing the napkins.*  
(translation by the authors).

### (c). Battle Kennings in Arabic Literature

In Arabic literature, descriptions of battle are not just factual accounts of violence or military encounters. Rather, they are intricately woven into a rich tapestry of rhetorical devices that transform the experience of warfare into a symbolic, almost mythic, realm (Aldekhan & O'Neill, 2024). According to the analysis of metonymical examples, metonymy's literal meaning typically shifts from its intended usage, making the literal interpretation ineffective in conveying the intended meaning. According to Arab scholars, establishing a metonymical reference has significant advantages and inherent value that goes beyond a straightforward statement (Aldekhan & O'Neill, 2024).

Examples of metonymic substitutes that invoke the wider semantic area of battle include the phrase يوم الهياج (yawm al-Hiyaj) the day of tumult. This altered expression conveys the mood, ferocity, and ethical aspects of fighting without explicitly referring to it. Consider the following lines by Ibn al-Khaṭīb (1989, p. 87):

"أصلبها نار السيف فأصبحت بردا على كبد الهدى وسلاما  
وقدمت في يوم الهياج بفتية لم تدر إلا البطش والإقدام"

*You burned it with the fire of your swords, and it turned into coolness and tranquility in the heart of guidance. You advanced on the day of the upheaval, and together with young guys who knew nothing but bravery and striking.*  
(translation by the authors)

And among the other evidence is the saying of Amr ibn Ma'dikarib al-Zubaydi:

"الضاربين بكل أبيض مخذم والطاعنين مجامع الأضغان" (Al-Taftazani, 1899, p. 248)

*Those who strike with every sharp white sword and pierce the gathering places of grudges.* (translation by the authors)

The expression ابيض مخذم (abyaḍ mkhdhdm), sharp white sword, refers to a gleaming, well-forged sword (often described as "white" in Arabic poetry due to its polished blade). It emphasizes the warriors' skill and strength in battle (Al-Taftazani, 1899, p. 248).

Another example is the saying of Al-Ma'arri:

"سليل النار ذق ورق حتى كان أباه أوزته السلا" (Al-Safadi, 2013, p. 196)

*The descendant of fire struck and shattered as if his father had bestowed him the tuberculous.* (translation by the authors)

The phrase سليل النار (slylu alnāri), the descendant of fire, is a metonym of a modified object, where "سليل النار" refers not to a literal descendant of fire but to a sword.

Classical Arabic poetry uses the phrase بيض الصفائح (Bayḍ al-ṣafa'ih), white blades, as in the saying of the Arab poet Abo Tammam:

"بيض الصفائح لا سود الصحائف في متونهن جلاء الشك والريب" (Al-Shantemari, 2004, p. 130)

*White blades, with clear records in their bodies, lie the clearance of doubt and suspicion.* (translation by the authors)

The phrase "بيض الصفائح" (white blades, i.e., swords) conveys meanings of assurance, lightness, goodness, benefit, and good news. Similarly, (Al-Andalusi, 1886) uses the phrase (shihab Harb), meteor of war, as in the line:

"لله أي شهاب حرب واقدا" (<https://www.aldiwan.net/poem69064.html>)

*By God, what a blazing meteor of war.* (translation by the authors)

Here, the sword is shown as a flaming meteor, evoking the same sensation of martial devastation and brilliant brightness.

Blood metonymy is a sophisticated and multidimensional device that may serve as a shorthand for honor, retribution, sacrifice, lineage, and the community's capacity for regeneration. Because of the strong social, emotional, and ceremonial links that poets establish through these metonymic applications, blood is a prominent and enduring image in the Arabic poetic imagination (Stetkevych, 1986). For example, the term الطلاء (alṭila'), the paint, is used to refer to blood spilled on the battlefield, as if it were a layer of red covering the area or the body (Lababidi, 1893). The shield has frequently been referred to by Arab poets using metonymy, as seen in Al-Ma'arri's writings. For instance, the term "القميص" (al-Qamīs), the shirt, can be used figuratively in Arabic poetry to refer to armor or a combat outfit (Al-Bakri, 2017, p. 145).

"رهننت قميصي عنده وهو فضلة من المزن يُعلى ماؤها برما"

*I mortgaged him my armor, which is a residue of the clouds, its water exalted by ashes.* (translation by the authors)

It is now possible to compare kennings in English and Arabic to demonstrate the points of similarity and difference, as explained in Table 1:

TABLE 1  
COMPARATIVE SUMMARY OF ENGLISH KENNINGS AND ARABIC METONYMY

| No. | Similarity                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                | Difference                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |
|-----|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1   | <b>Figurative and Indirect Language</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   | <b>Structural Form</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |
|     | Both English and Arabic kennings serve as a form of indirect expression which replaces literal terms with figurative or associative references. The process of interpreting these expressions requires mental analysis and reconstruction because the suggested meaning is the listener's responsibility. | English kennings are fixed, two - part compounds which consist of a base word and a determinate, whereas Arabic kennings (metonymy of a modified) are more flexible and can be a single word or a phrase, for example "بيض الصفائح" (white blades) for a sword.                                                                   |
| 2   | <b>Semantic Domain</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    | <b>Lexical Substitution</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
|     | The two languages share the same semantic domain of battle, including weapons, warriors, shield and blood.                                                                                                                                                                                                | English kennings require noun compounds or genitive phrases. On the other hand, Arabic metonymies can be adjectival, verbal, or gestural, and they are more flexible, implied and contextual.                                                                                                                                     |
| 3   | <b>Poetic and Mnemonic Function</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       | <b>Primary Reference</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |
|     | In oral traditions, both are used as mnemonic techniques, creating vivid imagery to help with remembering. They improve poetic diction and give language a more artistic and culturally relevant quality.                                                                                                 | English kennings are substituted for concrete objects, such as sword and shield. In contrast, Arabic kennings refer to abstract concepts and often rely on cultural associations, conveying implied attributes. For example, the phrase "يوم الهياج" (the day of tumult).                                                         |
| 4   | <b>Heroic and Mythological Relationships</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              | <b>Cultural and Religious Context</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |
|     | English kennings frequently allude to nature, gods, and valiant actions (for example, "battle- wolves" for warriors). Arabic metonymy relates to cultural values (for example, the phrases "بيض الصفائح" (white blades) and "سليل النار" (the descendant of fire) for a sword).                           | English kennings strongly tied to pagan and Christian mythology. In contrast, Arabic kennings often linked to Islamic values function as euphemisms for sacred and taboo topics. Concerning battle kennings, English focuses on physical combat; on the other hand, Arabic emphasizes the spiritual and moral aspects of warfare. |
| 5   | <b>Creativity and Context</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             | <b>Natural Imagery</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |
|     | Both promote creativity, cultural context, and communicative depth while strengthening language with new dimensions of meaning.                                                                                                                                                                           | English kennings are strongly linked to weather metonymies, for instance "the storm of swords", while Arabic kennings are related to celestial imagery, for example "شهاب حرب" (meteor of war).                                                                                                                                   |

## V. CONCLUSION

This study investigates the structural, functional, and cultural aspects of English kennings and Arabic metonymy. Significant insights into how two different language traditions use indirect expression to transmit meaning within the semantic domain of battle have been obtained from the qualitative descriptive-comparative research.

Based on the comparative data presented, three key conclusions have emerged:

1. Both English and Arabic differ in structure (Morphology vs. Syntax): The analysis reveals a basic language difference: The fixed, two-part compound structure (Base + Determinant) that characterizes Germanic languages (such as battle-sweat) provides the basis for English kennings. Arabic metonymy, on the other hand, depends on syntactic flexibility and uses a variety of context-dependent phrasal constructs, such as genitive, verbal, and adjectival. Arabic metonymy is a discursive technique, whereas English kenning is a lexical unit.
2. Both English kennings and Arabic metonymy operate as "riddles" that improve aesthetic perception through active decoding, so engaging the listener intellectually. However, they serve different societal purposes: metonymy conforms to social refinement and politeness by avoiding the explicit mention of forbidden issues, whereas kennings reduce repetition in oral storytelling.
3. Battle imagery is influenced by cultural determinism; Arabic tradition stresses heavenly and spiritual themes from the desert environment, presenting combat as a moral or spiritual conflict, whereas English tradition focuses on physical and environmental features from a severe Northern climate.

These findings lead to the following recommendations for further study and educational implementation:

1. Pedagogical Application: To improve cultural competency and teach students to interpret culturally embedded terminology beyond their literal definitions, translation programs should use comparative figurative analysis.
2. Expansion of Scope: To find more extensive societal similarities between the two faiths, future studies should use this comparison paradigm to other semantic areas, such as death, charity, or women.
3. Cognitive Analysis: To bridge the gap between historical philology and contemporary linguistics, future research should examine how ancient figures of speech fit with contemporary cognitive mappings by applying Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT) to these classical texts.

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# The Linguosynergetic Model of the Concept “Qut”

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**Abstract**—This article develops a linguosynergetic model of the concept “Qut” drawing on historical-cultural sources and the methodological principles of synergetics. The analysis reconstructs the concept’s diachronic semantic trajectory across four major stages: (i) an archaic mythological interpretation characterized by semantic diffuseness; (ii) a Turkic-period rationalization in which “Qut” becomes embedded in political philosophy and state ideology; (iii) an Islamic-era reconfiguration that introduces a religious-spiritual bifurcation of meanings; and (iv) a Kazakh-stage axiological expansion in which “Qut” is linked to prosperity, social harmony, and the unity of people and land. To describe these transformations, the study applies key synergetic notions—nonlinearity, self-organization, attractor formation, and shifts to new semantic levels under external socio-cultural pressures. “Qut” is therefore interpreted as a semiospheric and culturally adaptive structure that preserves a stable semantic ядро while continuously generating new peripheral meanings in response to changing historical contexts. In Turkic political discourse, “Qut” functions as a marker of legitimate authority and state stability; in Islamic tradition, it operates as a spiritual attractor associated with divine light and sustenance; and in the Kazakh worldview it acquires a pronounced value dimension connected with wellbeing, land-peace, communal concord, and national cohesion. Contemporary expressions such as *qutty qadam* (“auspicious step”) and *qutty meken* (“auspicious place”) illustrate the concept’s productive integration into modern linguistic practice. The findings show that “Qut” constitutes a multilayer, dynamically self-organizing cultural-conceptual system with a stable attractor, and they support the use of linguosynergetics as a methodological framework for investigating Kazakh linguistic consciousness.

**Index Terms**—linguosynergetics, “Qut”, Kazakh worldview, cultural semantics, conceptual dynamics

## I. INTRODUCTION

Current linguistic research increasingly focuses on how language encodes culture, worldview, cognition, and systems of value. Within the anthropocentric paradigm, language is understood not only as a means of communication but also as a repository of historical memory and a carrier of cultural meanings that shape collective identity.

Against this background, linguosynergetics offers a productive framework for analyzing linguistic phenomena as open, non-linear, and self-organizing systems. Rather than treating meanings as fixed, this approach models semantic structures as dynamic formations that evolve through interaction with historical, social, and cultural environments. In this sense, linguosynergetics complements cognitive linguistics and linguocultural studies by providing tools to describe the emergence, stabilization, and transformation of meanings within complex conceptual systems.

The concept “Qut”, central to Turkic and Kazakh cultural semantics, is particularly suitable for such analysis. In Turkic thought, “Qut” mediates relationships between humans and nature, society and Tengri, authority and moral-spiritual order. Over time it has retained an archetypal core while acquiring historically specific semantic layers, which

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makes it an illustrative case for modeling conceptual self-organization.

This study proceeds from three guiding principles:

- a) Diachronic dynamism: the meanings associated with “Qut” shift across epochs and communicative contexts;
- b) Polysemy: the concept encompasses multiple interrelated senses rather than a single definition;
- c) Systemicity: “Qut” functions as a complex conceptual configuration integrating mythological, religious, philosophical, sociopolitical, ethical, and psychological components.

Accordingly, the concept can be described on several interpretive levels:

- a) Cognitive: “Qut” is associated with goodness, wellbeing, prosperity, and success;
- b) Mythological-cultural: it is conceptualized as divine blessing, spiritual force, or vital energy;
- c) Semantic-discursive: its meaning is context-dependent and realized through a range of textual and pragmatic uses.

In early Turkic tradition, “Qut” is linked to divine favor and the legitimacy of authority, often associated with Tengri and spiritual forces. In later historical contexts, it may index an individual’s social standing, moral worth, and harmony with communal norms. In modern Kazakh usage, it is frequently connected with happiness, abundance, fortune, and inner strength, as reflected in stable collocations and evaluative formulas. These shifts demonstrate that “Qut” is not a static lexical meaning but a historically evolving cultural concept.

The aim of this article is to identify the linguosynergetic properties of the concept “Qut”, model the evolution of its semantic structure, and describe its cultural-linguistic dynamics. The objectives are:

- to reconstruct the semantic evolution of “Qut” across key historical stages;
- to identify synergetic patterns underlying semantic change;
- to explain processes of self-organization, semantic redistribution, and conceptual renewal;
- to clarify the role of “Qut” as a cultural code in the contemporary Kazakh worldview.

From a linguosynergetic perspective, “Qut” may be treated as a self-developing and culturally informative system that accumulates new semantic layers while maintaining a relatively stable core. Under the influence of changing socio-cultural conditions, the concept generates renewed semantic fields without losing its conceptual integrity.

This study makes several contributions to linguocultural and cognitive research. First, it proposes a comprehensive linguosynergetic model of the concept “Qut”, tracing its semantic development through the stages of chaos, self-organization, bifurcation, attractor formation, and dynamic balance. Second, the article integrates diverse historical and discursive sources—ancient Turkic monuments, Islamic philosophical texts, zhyrau poetry, and contemporary Kazakh usage—within a single analytical framework. Third, the research demonstrates how a culturally significant concept functions as a long-term semantic attractor, preserving its core meaning while adapting to changing social and cultural contexts. The proposed model may be applied to the study of other culturally embedded concepts in Turkic and broader linguocultural traditions.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

The emergence of linguosynergetics is associated with the introduction of H. Haken’s theory of synergetics into scientific research at the end of the twentieth century. The integration of synergetics and linguistics has proven to be highly productive, as the adoption of a synergetic methodological framework enables the interpretation of linguistic phenomena that remain insufficiently explained within classical linear paradigms. As a result, linguosynergetics has developed into a distinct interdisciplinary field, supported by a substantial body of theoretical research.

Among the scholars who contributed to the adaptation of synergetic theory to linguistic studies, Mainzer (2009) conceptualized language and culture as complex self-developing systems, viewing meanings and concepts as outcomes of synergetic processes and language evolution as a continuous interaction between chaos and order. Bazilev (1998) interpreted language not only as a self-organizing system but also as a mechanism for releasing and transmitting cultural energy. Knyazeva (2010) emphasized the creative role of time in linguistic systems, arguing that temporal dynamics do not destroy language structures but stimulate their renewal through the emergence of new forms rather than disintegration.

Within linguocultural studies, Maslova (2021) stressed that contemporary linguistics operates within a synergetic alliance with cognitive science, philosophy, cultural studies, physics, and biology. She argued that language should be understood not merely as a system of signs but as a field of interaction between natural and spiritual energies. From this perspective, the human conceptsphere represents an open, nonlinear system in which transformations within one concept inevitably affect others. Her analysis of the dynamic interaction between the concepts of time and eternity illustrates this principle.

From a broader epistemological standpoint, Budanov (2009) proposed synergetics as a universal cognitive paradigm rather than a methodology limited to natural sciences, thereby establishing philosophical grounds for its application in the humanities, including linguistics and cultural studies. Similarly, Ponomarenko (2004) applied synergetic principles to explain the internal dynamics of language and communication systems, conceptualizing language as energy in motion, while speech, text, and discourse represent external manifestations of this energy. In his later works, he integrated synergetic theory with cognitive linguistics.

Cognitive and interdisciplinary approaches further enriched linguosynergetic thought. Feldman (2006) examined language and meaning through neurodynamic and embodied cognition theories, contributing to the understanding of the

energetic foundations of conceptual structures. Lakoff and Johnson (1980) demonstrated the embodied and culturally embedded nature of conceptual systems, while Langacker (2006) linked cognitive architectures of linguistic structures with dynamic, system-based models compatible with synergetic principles. In applied linguistics, Larsen-Freeman (2017) described second language acquisition as a complex adaptive system, reinforcing the relevance of linguosynergetics for modeling language development over time. Hutchins (1995) also contributed to the understanding of language as a culturally distributed and dynamically interacting system.

Building on the general principles of synergetics, Pikhtovnikova (2012) explored the mechanisms of self-organization in language and speech, identifying the prerequisites for linguistic self-organization within communicative processes.

Synthesizing these perspectives, linguosynergetics is grounded in the principle that language, thought, and culture function as mutually adaptive evolutionary systems (Agabekova et al., 2024). This approach integrates elements of everyday and scientific knowledge, connects established linguistic facts with contemporary theoretical advances, and reflects non-linear modes of cognition and perception.

Within this framework, a concept is understood not as a static semantic unit but as a dynamic structure endowed with semantic energy that accumulates, reorganizes, and renews cultural information. A concept functions as a cognitive node within cultural consciousness, capable of self-organization and semantic expansion across diverse socio-cultural contexts. From this perspective, the concept “Qut” emerges as a synergetic core of Turkic culture. Since antiquity, it has embodied the interaction of stability and change, tradition and renewal, the sacred and the social. Previous studies identify “Qut” as a fundamental Turkic cultural category (Telebaev, 2017; Tishin, 2022) and examine its historical development and cultural positioning within Kazakh worldview (Issabekova, 2017).

The concept “Qut” exemplifies a self-organizing semantic system within Kazakh cultural and cognitive space. While maintaining semantic continuity across religious texts, artistic works, oral traditions, and political discourse over centuries, it has simultaneously undergone dynamic transformation. Accordingly, the concept conforms to key synergetic principles:

- a) Self-organization – the semantic structure of “Qut” has evolved across historical epochs in accordance with internal laws of cultural experience and social consciousness;
- b) Nonlinearity – its semantic development has occurred through historical bifurcations rather than linear progression, while preserving its energetic core;
- c) Attractor stability – despite contextual variation across genres (poetry, epic, religious discourse, proverbs), the conceptual nucleus of “Qut” remains stable;
- d) Fluctuation – the concept exhibits shifts between positive and neutral evaluations, reflecting the dynamic balance between entropy and order;
- e) Emergence – through the interaction of its semantic components, “Qut” generates new cultural meanings that transcend the lexical level and form a broader cognitive field.

These principles collectively explain the historical adaptability and semantic resilience of the concept “Qut” under mythological, religious, political, cultural, and linguistic influences.

### III. MATERIALS AND METHODS

The study of the concept “Qut” was conducted at the intersection of synergetics and cognitive linguistics. The research employed a combination of synergetic, cognitive, discourse-analytical, system-structural, and modeling methods. The analytical framework was grounded in the core principles of synergetics, including self-organization, nonlinearity, attractor dynamics, fluctuation, and emergence.

The empirical material was selected according to three main criteria: (1) historical and cultural relevance to the conceptualization of “Qut” in Turkic and Kazakh traditions; (2) diachronic representativeness across key historical periods; and (3) linguistic productivity and frequency of use in discourse. The analyzed corpus included mythological narratives, religious texts, ancient Turkic inscriptions, lexicographic sources, phraseological units, proverbs, poetic texts of the zhyrau tradition, and examples from contemporary journalistic and literary discourse.

The analytical procedure consisted of three stages. First, lexical and contextual realizations of the concept “Qut” were identified within each historical corpus. Second, the identified units were grouped into semantic domains reflecting recurring conceptual features. Third, these domains were interpreted through linguosynergetic categories in order to model processes of semantic self-organization, bifurcation, stabilization, and attractor formation across different epochs.

To ensure analytical transparency and conceptual reproducibility, all interpretations were grounded in textual evidence and cross-checked with existing linguistic and cultural studies. Although the study is qualitative and interpretive in nature, the explicit criteria for source selection and the structured analytical procedure allow the model to be replicated in comparable linguocultural research.

## IV. RESULTS

The results of the analysis demonstrate that a lexical unit acquires the status of a concept when it comes to represent a deep cultural reality that transcends its basic denotative meaning. Such concepts emerge alongside the historical formation of humanity or a particular ethnic community and are transmitted across generations through language, ritual, belief systems, and collective memory. Over time, conceptual meanings may undergo transformation, partial semantic erosion, or reactivation; however, they remain preserved within ethnocultural consciousness as complex structures encoding long-standing value systems.

Within cognitive linguistics, the concept functions as a central analytical unit for describing this multilayered semantic reality. A word attains conceptual status only when it is deeply embedded in a nation's historical experience, cultural traditions, religious worldview, and linguistic practice, reaching a level of cultural abstraction and symbolic significance. From this perspective, the concept "Qut" represents an integrative cultural phenomenon whose semantic development corresponds to mythical, religious, social, and axiological stages of Turkic and Kazakh history. On the basis of core linguosynergetic principles, a linguosynergetic model of the concept "Qut" is proposed.

#### A. Ancient Period: "Qut" in Mythological Consciousness (Phase of Semantic Chaos)

An analysis of early historical and textual sources, including The Old Turkic Dictionary, Tonyukuk, Kül Tegin, and Bilge Kagan inscriptions, reveals a set of foundational meanings associated with the lexeme qut. These meanings reflect the earliest, mythologically grounded stage of conceptual formation characterized by semantic diffuseness and symbolic overlap.

##### **QUT I – Soul, life force, spirit**

Men sena başımni, qutımni berä men

("I give you my head, my soul, my spirit").

Here, qut denotes the vital essence of human existence, closely associated with life energy and spiritual presence.

##### **QUT II-1 – Happiness, prosperity, success**

This semantic group includes meanings such as happiness, wellbeing, fortune, health, success, and favorable destiny:

Tanrı jarlıqaduqın ücün özüm qutım bar ücün qağan olurttum

("By the blessing of Tengri and by my own qut, I became a kagan");

Qorqma, temis, qut bergäñ men

("Do not be afraid, I will grant you blessing and fortune");

Tebrätük säjü qut kelir

("He will succeed in all his endeavors").

These examples illustrate qut as a divinely endowed life force ensuring success and social legitimacy (Nadelyaev et al., 1969).

##### **QUT II-2 – Moral and social value**

In a figurative sense, qut expresses morality, honor, dignity, authority, and greatness:

Qağan qutı taplamadı erinc

("They did not respect the honor of the Kagan");

Qutına jukunur biz

("We bow to his glory").

Here, qut functions as a marker of ethical and political authority.

##### **QUT II-3 – Religious-philosophical meaning**

In Buddhist contexts, qut denotes a state of bliss, spiritual fulfillment, and enlightenment:

Burqan qutı

("Buddha's bliss");

Arhant qutına tegdi

("He attained the blissful state of the arhat").

This usage associates qut with transcendental joy and sacred illumination (Nadelyaev et al., 1969).

Ethnographic and linguistic studies further confirm the archaic interpretation of qut as a mobile spiritual entity. Western and Central Asian scholars have documented beliefs according to which the human spirit (qut) could leave the body due to illness or trauma and required ritual restoration. István (2006) describes shamanic practices aimed at retrieving the lost qut and reintegrating it into the human body, emphasizing that in pre-Islamic Kazakh beliefs qut denoted the human spirit itself. Similarly, Hoppál (2012) notes that rituals of restoring qut continue among certain Turkic and Altaic groups, including the Yakut and Korean peoples.

Contemporary Kazakh expressions such as qutty bolsyn ("may your spirit be restored"), qut darysyn ("may qut descend upon you"), and quty qaşty ("his qut has left him") preserve these archaic semantic traces, reflecting the belief in the departure and return of spiritual energy.

According to Sharip (2007), Sakha beliefs distinguish three forms of qut:

- (1) buor qut (bodily existence tied to earth),
- (2) iye qut (life force from conception to death),
- (3) salqın qut (inner spirit and cognitive essence).

This tripartite model further supports the interpretation of qut as a multidimensional spiritual construct.

#### **Semantic Characteristics of the Ancient Stage**

soul, spiritual energy, life force, light;  
manifestation of sacred natural harmony.

#### **Linguosynergetic Interpretation**

the system exists in a state of semantic chaos, where meanings of energy, spirit, and divinity overlap;  
qut functions as undifferentiated symbolic energy within language and consciousness.

#### *B. The Turkic Era: Political and Philosophical “Qut” as a Phase of Self-Organization*

The Turkic era, marked by the formation of early state structures such as the Karakhanid, Türgesh, and Uyghur Khaganates, represents a decisive stage in the semantic development of the concept “Qut”. During this period, the concept acquired explicit political and social significance, functioning as a key element in the ideological legitimization of power and governance.

The historical context for this stage is primarily reconstructed from Mahmud al-Kashgari’s (1997) *Dīwān Lughāt al-Turk*, which presents “Qut” not as a univocal lexical item but as a nonlinear, multilayered semantic system. In Kashgari’s dictionary, “Qut” is represented as a semantic field encompassing several interrelated meanings rather than a single definition. The derivative form *qutluğ* (“blessed”, “fortunate”, “prosperous”) illustrates the evaluative and axiological extension of the concept and is attested both as a descriptive adjective and as a personal name.

Kashgari’s poetic and proverbial examples further demonstrate the polyvectorial nature of the concept. For instance, in poetic contexts, *qut* denotes divine blessing, prosperity, and social wellbeing, while in proverbs such as “*Ümä kelse, qut kelir*” (“With the guest comes fortune”), the concept functions as a marker of ethical hospitality and social harmony. These parallel usages indicate that the semantic development of “Qut” does not follow a linear trajectory; instead, it unfolds simultaneously across spiritual, political, social, and ethical dimensions.

From a linguosynergetic perspective, this stage represents a transition from diffuse polysemy toward an internally ordered semantic structure through self-organization. Kashgari’s material reveals three interdependent semantic domains:

- a) Spiritual domain: “*Qut köñülge qonur*” (“Qut settles in the heart”), where “Qut” is conceptualized as an invisible sacred force or spiritual energy;
- b) Socio-behavioral domain: “*Ol erge qut qondı*” (“He was blessed”), where “Qut” reflects moral harmony between personal character and action;
- c) Political domain: “*Begning qutı bar*” (“The ruler possesses qut”), where the concept signifies the sacred legitimacy of authority and state power.

These domains interact dynamically, forming a coherent logical-energetic chain: spiritual energy → personal virtue → political stability. Such interaction exemplifies the self-organization of an open semantic system in which meaning is stabilized through reciprocal regulation between cultural, religious, and political fields.

The attractor of the concept during this period is the idea of spiritual harmony and prosperity. Kashgari’s assertion “*Qut – yoq yerden yoq bolmas*” (“Qut does not arise from nothing”) conceptualizes “Qut” as a phenomenon governed by order and law rather than randomness. In linguosynergetic terms, this reflects the transition of the concept from semantic instability (chaos) to a stable semantic nucleus (attractor). Consequently, the semantic space of “Qut” evolves in the direction: spiritual energy → personal quality → political legitimacy → symbol of prosperity, corresponding to the synergetic sequence of chaos → order → equilibrium.

Semantic characteristics of the Turkic era:

symbol of power, state stability, justice, and destiny;  
marker of the ruler’s legitimate authority.

Linguosynergetic properties:

semantic self-organization and internal ordering of meaning;  
transformation of “Qut” into a social-hierarchical as well as spiritual attractor.

#### *C. The Islamic Era: Religious–Spiritual Prosperity and Semantic Bifurcation*

With the spread of Islam in the Turkic world, the concept “Qut” entered a new phase of semantic development characterized by religious-spiritual enrichment and bifurcation. Rather than displacing earlier Turkic meanings, Islamic ideology integrated and reinterpreted the existing semantic core of “Qut”, expanding it into the moral and theological domain.

As noted by Nurmuratov (2016), within Islamic thought the concept of “Qut” became associated with divine light, sacred blessing, and spiritual sustenance originating from God. This integration did not produce a worldview conflict; instead, deeply rooted Turkic notions of “Qut” were recontextualized within an Islamic ethical and metaphysical framework.

A central textual source for this stage is Balasagun’s (2007) *Kutadgu Bilig*, which articulates a philosophical model of governance grounded in the unity of divine authority and human responsibility. In this work, “Qut” is conceptualized as the sacred power of wisdom and justice in ruling the state. The well-known formulation that “the possessor of qut is the possessor of the state” encapsulates the inseparability of political power and spiritual legitimacy.

From a linguosynergetic standpoint, this period marks a bifurcation point in the semantic evolution of the concept. During the transition from the Turkic political worldview to the Islamic moral-religious paradigm, “Qut” undergoes a qualitative shift, acquiring a new dominant attractor associated with light, faith, blessing, and justice. In Kutadgu Bilig, these meanings are articulated through several interconnected semantic propositions:

- a) the success or failure of the ruler determines the prosperity or decline of the state, emphasizing the spiritual energy underlying political authority;
- b) justice and inner moral illumination are identified as sources of collective happiness, extending the concept beyond state power to social ethics;
- c) prosperity and material wellbeing are presented as outcomes of spiritual and moral balance.

These semantic layers demonstrate that “Qut” in the Islamic era functions not merely as an attribute of power but as a comprehensive principle of spiritual and social harmony.

Semantic characteristics of the Islamic era:

- light, blessing, faith, justice, sustenance;
- integration of political authority with moral and spiritual order.

Linguosynergetic properties:

- semantic bifurcation and transition to a new religious-philosophical order;
- self-regulation of meaning through interaction between religion, morality, and society;
- stabilization of a new attractor centered on justice, spiritual harmony, and social balance.

#### D. The Khanate Era: “Blessed Land” as an Attractor Phase

In the post-Turkic period, when the Kazakh people began forming their own statehood, the concept “Qut” underwent further semantic stabilization and expansion. At this stage, “Qut” became associated not only with political authority and spiritual energy but also with territorial integrity, land prosperity, social harmony, and collective security. From a political and military perspective, “Qut” functioned as a symbol of state preservation, protection from external threats, and the maintenance of peaceful life within the country and on the land.

The primary historical and cultural context for this period is provided by zhyrau poetry, which reflects collective representations of ideal social order and harmonious coexistence between humans, nature, and livestock. In particular, the worldview of Asan Qayghy articulates the archetype of Zheruyik, a paradisiacal land accessible within earthly life (Zhanabayev & Tursynbayeva, 2021). Zheruyik is depicted as a space where enemies cannot intrude, livestock is secure, natural resources are abundant, and social equality prevails without ethnic or tribal conflict.

Asan Qayghy’s journeys across different regions, during which he evaluates rivers, mountains, and fertile lands according to their benefits for the people, reveal a semantic model of land as a bearer of “Qut”. His assessments of the Irtysh, Bayanaul, and Kyzyltau illustrate how natural features are interpreted through their capacity to sustain life, ensure prosperity, and maintain social balance. In this context, land endowed with “Qut” guarantees abundance, security, and continuity of communal life.

A similar conceptualization appears in the poetry of Kaztugan zhyrau, where the homeland is portrayed as a space of natural equality and abundance, characterized by balanced relations between rich and poor, highlands and lowlands, humans and animals. In both poetic traditions, the idea of a “blessed place” (qutty meken) emerges as a stable semantic construct representing harmony between nature, society, and political order.

From a linguosynergetic perspective, the metaphor of Zheruyik functions as a synonymic representation of “Qut” at the level of land and state. Expressions such as “the time when the rook laid an egg on a sheep” symbolize an idealized period of absolute peace, abundance, and security. These metaphors encode a collective vision of permanent harmony and prosperity, reflecting a stabilized semantic system.

At this stage, the concept “Qut” operates as a dynamic yet stable attractor, organizing meanings related to statehood, land, and social peace. Although responsive to historical political and social changes, the concept maintains a unified semantic center that integrates spiritual, political, and social energy. Thus, during the Khanate era, “Qut” reaches an attractor phase in which its semantic structure is oriented toward the preservation of the state and the assurance of collective wellbeing.

Semantic characteristics:

- “blessed land” (qutty meken): territory, abundance, peace, social stability;
- metaphors of ideal time and space symbolizing harmony and prosperity;
- “Qut” as an integrative expression of spiritual, social, and political energy.

Linguosynergetic properties:

- attainment of an attractor state with a stable semantic nucleus (prosperity, harmony, stability);
- self-organization of “Qut” energy through the interaction of statehood, society, and nature;
- intergenerational transmission of meaning as a cultural code.

#### E. Continuity in Kazakh Culture: Domestic and Social Stabilization of “Qut”

Following the Turkic and Khanate eras, the concept “Qut” entered the domestic and everyday social sphere of Kazakh culture. At this stage, it became directly connected with individual life practices, household morality, and

communal ethics. While the concept had previously passed through nonlinear phases of semantic development, in traditional Kazakh culture it functions as a stable attractor, maintaining equilibrium within society.

In this stabilization phase, the energy of “Qut” is associated with domestic activity, moral behavior, diligence, and social responsibility. The historical and cultural context of this period is represented by legends, proverbs, and paremiological units, which conceptualize “Qut” as the foundation of household prosperity and social harmony. The legend “Qut is in the ears of a sheep” (Kerimkhanuly, 2022) and sayings such as “May your home be blessed”, “The Kazakh’s wellbeing depends on the black hoof of a sheep”, and “The welfare of the land lies in its state, and the welfare of a person lies in the home” (Turmanzhanov & Akhmetbekuly, 2004) collectively express the idea of a home where blessings have settled.

Within the linguosynergetic model, the home functions as a semantic attractor—a fixed point that accumulates and preserves the energy of “Qut”. Moral imperatives such as “Idleness deprives one of blessing” and “Reason ultimately leads to blessing” indicate that “Qut” is not passively granted but requires ethical behavior, labor, and conscious effort. These formulations emphasize the prerequisites for the arrival and stabilization of “Qut” rather than its loss or departure.

Contemporary ritual formulas such as “Qutty bolsyn!” and “Quttyqtaymyn!” (“Congratulations!”) serve as linguistic mechanisms initiating and reinforcing positive transitions within social life. In linguosynergetic terms, these expressions provide an initial impulse to a system entering a new state and subsequently confirm the stabilization of that state. Similarly, expressions like “qut qongan üy” (“a blessed home”), “qut darysyn” (“may blessing descend”), and “qut ketpesin” (“may blessing not depart”) operate within a unified semantic field aimed at preserving balance, prosperity, and moral order.

From a synergetic perspective, these linguistic units activate mechanisms of self-regulation, ensuring that cultural energy remains oriented toward harmony and continuity. The concept “Qut” thus functions as a stabilizing force at the domestic, moral, and social levels.

Semantic characteristics:

prosperity, happiness, harmony, spiritual energy;

“Qut” as a force sustaining family and social stability through behavior, intention, and ethical labor.

Linguosynergetic properties:

stabilization in an attractor state with minimal semantic fluctuation;

concentration of “Qut” energy in domestic, moral, and social domains.

The evolution of the concept “Qut” during the Khanate era and its continuity in Kazakh culture corresponds to the attractor phase of linguosynergetic development. In both cases, the concept is oriented toward a stable semantic center—harmony and prosperity of land, society, and human life. The distinction lies in functional scope: while in the Khanate era “Qut” primarily symbolized the sacred energy of statehood and power, in traditional Kazakh culture it is recontextualized at the domestic, social, and moral levels.

#### *F. The Current Stage: Semantic Expansion and Synergetic Adaptation*

In the contemporary Kazakh worldview, the concept “Qut” demonstrates a phase of semantic expansion and adaptive stabilization. It actively functions within metaphorical and emotional domains and is realized in new cultural and communicative contexts, such as qutty qadam (“auspicious step”), qutty meken (“blessed place”), qut qonsyn (“may blessing descend”), and qutty enbek (“blessed labour”). These usages reflect the synergetic adaptability of the concept within modern linguistic practice.

Despite significant social, cultural, and temporal transformations, the semantic core of “Qut”—prosperity, harmony, and spiritual balance—remains intact. At this stage, the concept adapts to diverse domains of experience, including personal life, social relations, professional activity, and public discourse. Through this process, “Qut” enters new semantic fields while preserving its internal conceptual continuity.

For instance, the expression qutty qadam conveys a wish for success and positive outcomes at the beginning of a new endeavor, while qut qonsyn functions as a ritualized linguistic formula expressing a wish for happiness and wellbeing. The phrase qutty enbek emphasizes the ethical and social value of labor as a source of prosperity and dignity. In all these cases, the underlying semantic nucleus—harmony, prosperity, and positive life energy—remains stable.

From a linguosynergetic perspective, the current stage represents a balanced attractor state in which the concept “Qut” continues to generate new metaphorical meanings without losing its structural coherence. The concept operates as a stabilizing cultural mechanism, maintaining moral and social equilibrium while flexibly responding to new communicative needs. This process illustrates the synergetic adaptation of “Qut” as a living cultural concept in contemporary Kazakh linguistic consciousness.

Semantic characteristics:

prosperity, harmony, happiness, spiritual energy as a stable core;

metaphorical expansion into social, cultural, political, and everyday discourse.

Linguosynergetic properties:

expansion beyond traditional meanings into emotional and metaphorical usage;

sustained self-organization and adaptability within the linguistic system.

TABLE 1  
DIACHRONIC EVOLUTION OF THE CONCEPT “QUT”

| Historical stage             | Semantic core                                    | Dominant semantic field       | Linguosynergetic state |
|------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------|------------------------|
| Ancient period               | spirit, life energy                              | sacred natural force          | Chaos                  |
| Turkic era                   | power, order                                     | state stability, justice      | Self-organization      |
| Islamic era                  | light, blessing, faith, justice, sustenance      | religious–spiritual system    | Bifurcation            |
| Khanate era                  | abundance, peace, social stability               | harmonious state and land     | Attraction             |
| Continuity in Kazakh culture | prosperity, happiness, harmony, spiritual energy | everyday life, society        | Stabilization          |
| Contemporary stage           | spiritual harmony, balance                       | cultural awareness, integrity | Dynamic balance        |

V. DISCUSSION

The linguosynergetic modeling of the concept “Qut” demonstrates that its semantic evolution represents a nonlinear process shaped by cultural, historical, and ideological transformations. Rather than functioning as a static lexical meaning, “Qut” operates as a long-term semantic attractor that preserves a stable conceptual core while adapting to changing social environments.

From a linguosynergetic perspective, the diachronic trajectory of the concept illustrates successive shifts between states of semantic instability and stabilization (Alduais et al., 2025; He & Hani Shaari, 2025; Siregar, 2025). The ancient mythological stage reflects a high degree of semantic openness, which provided potential for further conceptual differentiation. Later historical stages show increasing internal organization of meaning, particularly as the concept became associated with political legitimacy, spiritual authority, and social harmony.

The Islamic reconfiguration of the concept illustrates a significant semantic bifurcation in which existing meanings were reorganized within a new religious and ethical framework. This transition highlights the adaptive capacity of cultural concepts to integrate new ideological systems while preserving structural continuity. In the Kazakh cultural context (Baltabayeva et al., 2024), the concept later expanded into territorial, social, and domestic domains, demonstrating how semantic attractors may shift in function without losing their core axiological orientation.

Contemporary uses confirm that the concept remains productive in modern discourse and continues to function as a stabilizing cultural mechanism. More broadly, the results confirm the analytical potential of linguosynergetics for studying culturally embedded concepts through processes of emergence, adaptation, and attractor formation.

VI. CONCLUSION

The concept “Qut” represents an archetypal cultural construct that embodies the spiritual core of Kazakh and, more broadly, Turkic culture. From a linguosynergetic perspective, it can be defined as a self-organizing and adaptive cultural code characterized by high semantic energy. The analysis of the linguosynergetic model of “Qut” demonstrates that its historical and cultural development constitutes not merely a linear evolutionary process but the functioning of a complex dynamic system. The observed semantic transformations are directly linked to shifts in worldview orientations, spiritual and ideological frameworks, and social structures. In this sense, “Qut” functions as one of the most stable and long-term attractors within Kazakh linguistic consciousness.

In its archaic stage, the mythological understanding of “Qut” manifested as a diffuse life force with chaotic semantic potential, forming the foundation for subsequent conceptual structuring. During the Turkic era, the concept acquired explicit political and philosophical significance and became a systemic principle organizing power, legitimacy, and social order. The Islamic period introduced a bifurcation in its semantic trajectory, redirecting the concept toward religious and ethical meanings and reinforcing its axiological and spiritual dimensions. In the era of Kazakh state formation, “Qut” was integrated with ideas of national unity, territorial integrity, and social stability, thereby acquiring a stabilizing function within the cultural system. At the contemporary stage, the concept demonstrates renewed activity in metaphorical and emotional domains, adapting to changing value orientations while preserving its semantic core.

The study leads to the following conclusions:

1. The concept “Qut” has evolved from a primarily sacred and mythological meaning toward ethical, social, and everyday interpretations, forming a multilayered semantic system.
2. Its linguosynergetic nature is expressed through the coexistence of semantic stability and adaptability, allowing the concept to respond to historical change without losing conceptual integrity.
3. “Qut” functions as a self-organizing mechanism within national language and culture, ensuring a synergetic balance between tradition and innovation.
4. Within the Kazakh conceptual sphere, “Qut” operates as a cultural-linguistic symbol integrating spiritual harmony, prosperity, and social cohesion.

From a linguosynergetic viewpoint, the concept “Qut” has traversed multiple semantic attractors, establishing a new equilibrium at each historical stage. This capacity for self-regulation and renewal has enabled its long-term preservation within the cultural-linguistic system. The findings confirm that “Qut” occupies a distinctive position in the Kazakh worldview as a conceptual structure capable of sustained self-organization. Consequently, the linguosynergetic analysis of “Qut” reveals the dynamic unity of language and culture and highlights the internal organizational principles of



national worldview formation. The adaptive and dynamic nature of the concept opens promising avenues for further research in cognitive linguistics, semiotics, and cultural studies.

Despite the theoretical and interdisciplinary contributions of this study, several limitations should be acknowledged. First, the research is primarily qualitative and interpretive, which may involve subjective elements in semantic interpretation despite reliance on textual evidence. Second, the analysis focuses mainly on historical, literary, and cultural sources and does not include quantitative corpus-based verification of contemporary usage. Future research may expand the linguosynergetic model through corpus linguistics methods, comparative analysis with other Turkic concepts, and empirical studies of conceptual perception in modern speakers. Such approaches would further clarify the mechanisms of semantic self-organization and strengthen the empirical basis of linguosynergetic modeling.

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# Emphasis Spread in Ḥā'ili Arabic

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**Abstract**—This article sheds light on the phonological phenomenon of emphasis spread in Ḥā'ili Arabic (HA), a variety of Arabic spoken in the region of Ḥā'il, within the framework of Autosegmental Theory. It mainly focuses on the behavior of emphasis spread, its directionality, and whether emphasis exhibits any preference for one direction over the other across the prosodic word, domain, and the interaction of emphasis spread with opaque segments. The data are elicited by using a digital recording device and an Aduix OM2 dynamic microphone from twenty native speakers of HA. It reveals that the primary emphatic phonemes occur in different vocalic environments and all word positions. The scope of emphasis spread is minimally over the syllable if there is an opaque segment that blocks emphasis spread, and maximally over the entire word if there is no blocker. The results manifest that emphasis spread is not limited to one direction, but it can operate regressively, progressively, or bidirectionally without any restrictions. However, in some cases, it is assumed that opacity appears if a phoneme blocks the emphatic feature. The paper concludes that certain segments can block the spread of emphasis within the phonological word, depending on the position of the emphatic trigger.

**Index Terms**—emphasis spread, emphatics, Autosegmental Theory, Ḥā'ili Arabic, opaque phonemes

## I. INTRODUCTION

Emphasis spread (also referred to as pharyngealization spread) is a hallmark phenomenon in the phonological system of Arabic and its dialects. It is typically described as an assimilatory process in which emphatic (i.e., pharyngealized) consonants extend their secondary articulation to adjacent and, in many cases, non-adjacent segments. While the core articulatory properties of emphasis are relatively well-understood, the patterns of spread, their directionality, domain, and interaction with opaque segments, they remain a locus of significant cross-dialectal variation and theoretical interest.

Previous research has documented both long-distance and short-distance variants of emphasis spread across a range of Arabic varieties. Long-distance spread, whereby emphasis extends over multiple syllables or across word boundaries, has been attested in dialects such as Palestinian Arabic and Cairene Arabic (Younes, 1982, 1993; Davis, 1995; Herzallah, 1990; Zawaydeh, 1999; Youssef, 2014). On the contrary, some Arabic varieties like Qassimi display short-distance spread, where the emphasis feature is confined to adjacent segments within the same syllable in both directions (Alharbi & Alammari, 2022). Arabic studies on Libyan (Algryani, 2014), Jordanian (Jaradat, 2020), Najdi (Almuhaimeed, 2021), and Haswai Arabic (AlTaisan, 2022) further indicate that the emphasis spread process is highly variable across regional dialects regarding both the domain of application and blocking effects.

A particularly fundamental dimension of variation concerns directionality. Some Arabic dialects permit bidirectional emphasis spread, whilst others restrain spread to the rightward direction. Therefore, the directionality of emphasis spread is a language-specific property. Moreover, opaque segments that block the spread of emphasis are not uniformly defined across dialects. It has been reported that certain high front segments (/i/, /j/, and /j/) frequently act as blockers, though this effect is not always symmetrical. Some dialects allow leftward spread but prohibit rightward spread by certain opaque segments (Davis, 1995, p. 472).

Although much of the literature discusses emphasis spread, the phonological aspects of emphasis spread remain unexplored, either descriptively or theoretically, in Ḥā'ili Arabic (HA), an Arabic variety spoken in the region of Ḥā'il, Saudi Arabia. The core of this study is devoted to presenting an important empirical foundation to further refine our understanding of the typology of emphasis spread and its theoretical modeling. Accordingly, this paper offers a detailed account of the phonological behavior of emphasis spread in HA, with special attention to directionality, emphasis domain, and the effect of opacity.

Under the framework of Autosegmental Theory, this study attempts to address the following questions: (i) Does emphasis spread operate productively in HA, and if so, what are its phonological boundaries? (ii) What is the directionality of spread, particularly at word boundaries? (iii) How does emphasis interact with putative opaque segments, and what are the implications for our understanding of blocking mechanisms in non-linear phonology?

The remainder of this paper is organized as follows. Section 2 provides a typological overview of emphasis in Arabic. Section 3 surveys key contributions to the study of emphasis spread in Arabic dialects. Section 4 describes the methodological procedures and participant background. Section 5 presents the empirical findings from HA. Section 6 offers a formal analysis within Autosegmental Phonology. Section 7 concludes the paper.

## II. EMPHASIS IN ARABIC

Most modern varieties of Arabic are typologically characterized by a set of coronal phonemes that exhibit pharyngealization, commonly referred to in the literature as emphatics. Emphasis is a salient phonetic and phonological feature in Arabic and other Semitic languages, involving a complex articulatory configuration. It typically entails a primary place of articulation in the dental or alveolar region, accompanied by a secondary articulation involving a lingual constriction in the upper pharyngeal cavity (Card, 1983; McCarthy, 1994; Davis, 1995; Watson, 1999).

Arabic comprises of four emphatic consonants /t<sup>ʕ</sup>/, /s<sup>ʕ</sup>/, /ð<sup>ʕ</sup>/, and /d<sup>ʕ</sup>/, each of which corresponds to a plain, non-emphatic counterpart /t/, /s/, /ð/, and /d/. The contrast between emphatic and non-emphatic segments is phonemic, as recognized by minimal pairs such as /ti:n/ 'fig' vs. /t<sup>ʕ</sup>i:n/ 'mud' (Obrecht, 1968; Trubetzkoy, 1969). Such contradictions underscore the systematic and contrastive status of emphasis in the phonological grammar of Arabic. The secondary articulation of emphatic segments encompasses the backing and lowering of the tongue body which contributes to a distinct acoustic and articulatory configuration. Yeou (2001) observes that this gesture involves retracting the tongue body against the posterior oral cavity, which boosts the pharyngeal quality of the segment and distinguishes it from its plain counterpart.

Diverse feature representations have been proposed to account for the phonological behavior of emphatics. For instance, Chomsky and Halle (1968), under the framework of the Sound Pattern of English, recognize emphatic segments as [+low] and [+back], wherein [+low] represents the tongue body depression and [+back] represents the retraction of the tongue body. Jakobson (1978), under feature geometry model, characterizes emphatics as [+flat], whilst Broselow (1979) presents the feature [+constricted pharynx] to differentiate them. Elgadi (1986) invokes a distinctive feature [+emphatic] to account for spread phenomena, which autosegmentally associates with adjacent segments to enable phonological processes such as emphasis spread. Davis (1993, 1995) proposes the feature [+RTR] (Retracted Tongue Root) and relies on parallels with other pharyngealized languages.

This study adopts Elgadi's (1986) feature specification [+emphatic] as it offers a representational economy that effectively accounts for emphasis spread under the framework of Autosegmental Phonology (Goldsmith, 1979; Van der Hulst & Smith, 1982). This model allows for non-linear representation of the emphatic feature as an autosegment that may spread over adjacent and non-adjacent segments, which can be interpreted based on the phonotactic and dialectal constraints in place. In general, by treating emphasis as an autosegmental feature, this study aims to capture the cross-linguistically attested variability in emphasis spread, while it maintains the internal consistency of phonological representation.

## III. PREVIOUS STUDIES ON EMPHASIS

Emphasis or pharyngealization is among the most typologically silent features in the phonological systems of Arabic and other Semitic languages. Its acoustic and articulatory complexity, along with its phonological patterns, has made it a central focus in Arabic phonology. Emphatic consonants are produced with a primary coronal articulation, particularly dental or alveolar, and a secondary articulation involving retraction of the tongue root or dorsum toward the posterior pharyngeal wall (Card, 1983; McCarthy, 1994; Davis, 1995; Watson, 1999). This secondary articulation generates the hallmark acoustic properties of emphasis, specifically a decrease in F2 and an increase in F1, which can differentiate emphatics from their plain counterparts at both phonetic and phonological levels.

Under the aspects of feature geometry, the representations of emphatics have been the subject of extensive analysis. These representational discussions shape directly into the analysis of emphasis spread, a phonological process in which the emphatic feature extends from a trigger emphatic consonant to surrounding vowels and sometimes consonants. This phenomenon varies in scope across dialects. In Palestinian and Cariene Arabic, the spread can extend over several syllables and even across word boundaries. This pattern is known as long-distance spread as reported by Younes (1993), Davis (1995), Zewaydeh (1999), Youssef (2014). By comparison, dialects such as Qassimi Arabic elucidate short-distance spread, where the emphatic feature is restricted to the immediate adjacent segments within the same syllable (Alharbi & Alammar, 2022).

Directionality and opacity have also received considerable attention in literature. Some dialects allow bidirectional spread, while others restrict spread to only the rightward direction. Of particular significance is the presence of certain segments that act as blockers or opaque domains impeding the propagation of emphasis. Davis (1995) states a common asymmetry where the rightward spread of emphasis is often blocked by opaque segments, whereas leftward spread proceeds unimpeded. This phonological behavior has significant implications for phonological theory, specifically the interface between segmental and prosodic structure.

Based on a large number of studies on emphasis spread, Hā'ili Arabic (HA) has not been examined with respect to emphasis spread and its phonological behavior. No previous study has considered a systematic investigation of emphasis spread in HA, nor has any accounted for its directionality, scope, or the interaction of emphatics with blocking segments.

The current study addresses the critical gap by presenting the first comprehensive and theoretically grounded account of emphasis spread in the understudied dialect. Couched within the framework of Autosegmental Theory, this paper not only documents the empirical patterns of emphasis propagation and opacity, but also examines their implications for feature representation and phonological theory. By adopting Elgadi's [+emphatic] feature and investigating the autosegmental behavior, this study contributes a theoretically motivated analysis that merges directionality, transparency,

and prosodic domain sensitivity. Therefore, the findings not only enrich our understanding of Arabic dialectology but also challenge existing assumptions about the universality and locality of pharyngealization processes.

#### IV. DATA SOURCE AND PROCEDURE

The data were elicited from twenty native speakers of HA: ten males and ten females, whose ages ranged from twenty-three to forty-six years. All participants were born and raised in Hā'il city and have spent their entire lives there to ensure that they are not influenced by any other contemporary Arabic dialects and to maintain the integrity of the dialect's native phonological features. In terms of their educational level, most of the informants hold bachelor's degrees and some of them PhD degrees in various disciplines. This diversity of educational background did not impact the reliability of the data, as all subjects were fluent and active users of HA everyday-life communications. None of the informants reported any history of speech impediments to guarantee that they are able to utter authentic and reliable data. Participation was totally voluntary, and no monetary compensation was offered to adhere to established ethical standards for non-invasive linguistic study.

Prior to data collection, each informant was individually informed about the nature and objectives of the study. The researcher provided detailed information on the procedures and tasks given to ensure consistent elicitation and production across participants. The selection of words is based on emphatic consonant position, vowel type, and the phonological environment being tested.

The audio recordings were undertaken using a digital recording device and an Audix OM2 dynamic microphone in a quiet room. The choice of this equipment was intended to ensure high-fidelity of precise phonetic details, specifically those pertaining to secondary articulation and emphasis spread. A total of 88 tokens were recorded by each participant. To account for intra-speaker variability and phonological sample reliability, each word was elicited three times and spoken loudly in isolation at a natural pace.

After the data collection process, each word was transcribed using the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA) symbols and analyzed phonologically to determine the presence, directionality, scope, and the opaque segments of emphasis spread. Both broad and narrow transcriptions were utilized. Broad transcription indicated by slashes represent the underlying phonological segments, whereas narrow transcription indicated by brackets represent the surface form of emphasis spread at the word level. Thus, the methodology allowed for a fine-grained analysis of the segmental and autosegmental model which governed emphasis spread in HA and provides a robust empirical foundation for the theoretical analysis advanced in the study.

#### V. EMPHASIS SPREAD IN HA

HA is similar to many contemporary Arabic dialects in having a group of coronal consonants that are characterized by pharyngealization, commonly referred to as emphatics (Abboud, 1979; Ingham, 1994; Alshammari, 2023; Abalkheel & Al Toreegi, 2025). These coronal consonants are conventionally classified into two categories: emphatics and non-emphatic counterparts. Emphatics include three primary pairs of consonants /tʕ/, /sʕ/, and /ðʕ/ along with their non-emphatic or plain coronal counterparts /t/, /s/, and /ð/. A notable feature of HA is the absence of the voiced alveolar emphatic stop /dʕ/, which has undergone a complete phonemic merger with the voiced dental emphatic fricative /ðʕ/ in HA. For example, the Classical Arabic word /dʕa.ma:n/ 'warranty' is realized as [ðʕa.ma:n], with /dʕ/ systematically replaced by /ðʕ/. Consequently, the phoneme /dʕ/ is no longer part of the HA phonological system.

Accordingly, this study concentrates on the primary emphatic consonants /tʕ/, /sʕ/, and /ðʕ/, which constitute the active set in HA and serve as triggers of emphasis spread. The table below outlines these primary emphatic segments with their description in the dialect under investigation.

TABLE 1  
EMPHATICS IN HA

| Emphatic consonants | Description                           |
|---------------------|---------------------------------------|
| /tʕ/                | Voiceless alveolar emphatic stop      |
| /sʕ/                | Voiceless alveolar emphatic fricative |
| /ðʕ/                | Voiced dental emphatic fricative      |

Traditionally, emphatic phonemes in Arabic are recognized to induce the spreading of their distinctive pharyngealized features onto neighboring segments within a given phonological word (McCarthy, 1994; Davis, 1995; Watson, 1999; Bellem, 2007). The process of emphasis spread implies that the segment surrounding an emphatic consonant are not intrinsically specified for the emphatic feature but acquire it through assimilation. Therefore, these adjacent segments undergo phonetic modification conditioned by proximity to an emphatic trigger. Elgadi (1986, p. 23) states that the influenced segments are conditioned allophones that temporarily bear the feature [+emphatic] in the presence of a triggering consonant.

The data analyzed in this study emphasize that the set of primary emphatic consonants /tʕ/, /sʕ/, and /ðʕ/ exhibit a clear phonemic contrast consonants with their respective non-emphatic counterparts /t/, /s/, and /ð/. This contrast is phonologically substantiated by minimal pairs given in Table 2, which exemplify the contrastive distribution carried by the emphatic feature in HA.

TABLE 2  
EMPHATIC VS. PLAIN CONSONANTS

| Emphatic | Gloss      | Plain  | Gloss                  |
|----------|------------|--------|------------------------|
| /tʰa:b/  | ‘to heal’  | /ta:b/ | ‘to repent, MS., Past’ |
| /tʰi:n/  | ‘mud’      | /ti:n/ | ‘fig’                  |
| /tʰu:b/  | ‘bricks’   | /tu:b/ | ‘repent, MS.’          |
| /sʰa:m/  | ‘to fast’  | /sa:m/ | poisonous              |
| /sʰe:f/  | ‘summer’   | /se:f/ | ‘sword’                |
| /sʰu:f/  | ‘wool’     | /su:f/ | ‘to sponge’            |
| /ðʰil/   | ‘shadow’   | /ðil/  | ‘humiliation’          |
| /ðʰa:ʃ/  | ‘got lost’ | /ða:ʃ/ | broadcast              |
| /ðʰam/   | ‘hugged’   | /ðam/  | ‘blamed’               |

A range of transcription systems has been utilized to represent emphasis spread across Arabic dialects. For instance, Davis (1995) and Watson (2002) adopt a system in which emphatic segments are marked with a dot underneath the segment, whilst segments that undergo emphasis spread are rendered in uppercase letters. In contrast, non-emphatic surface realizations are transcribed in lowercase letters. Other studies have opted for alternative transcription conventions, such as underlining or boldfacing segments affected by the process of emphasis spread in order to provide a visual cue to distinguish between underlying and surface emphatic effects (Huneety & Mashaqba, 2016; Slimani, 2018; Al-Bataineh, 2019).

This study adopts the traditional phonetic transcription system that marks emphatic consonants with a raised voiced pharyngeal approximant [ʰ], added to the base consonant. The diacritic added to the emphatic sound is designated to capture the secondary pharyngeal articulation characteristic of emphatic. The phonemes affected by emphasis spread are consistently underlined throughout the analysis in order to provide a clear and systematic representation of the phonological domain affected by the [+emphatic] feature.

#### A. Emphasis Spread at Word Level

In Ḥāʾili Arabic (HA), the primary emphatic phonemes /tʰ/, /sʰ/, and /ðʰ/ show systematic phonological behavior, where they occur freely across all word positions: word-initially, medially, and finally. These segments demonstrate consistent co-occurrence with different vocalic environments, further they underscore their phonemic stability within the dialect. By examining the dynamics of emphasis spread at the word level, a set of examples is drawn from monosyllabic, disyllabic, and polysyllabic words, as shown in Table 3. In each case, emphasis is marked by underlining the surface segments affected by the [+emphatic] feature as a result of spreading. This systematic transcription allows for a clear observation of the locality and directionality of emphasis propagation across various prosodic and segmental configurations in HA.

TABLE 3  
WORD-INITIAL TRIGGER CONSONANT

| Monosyllabic Words | Input          | Output         | Gloss        |
|--------------------|----------------|----------------|--------------|
|                    | /sʰamy/        | [sʰa.my]       | glue         |
|                    | /sʰo:m/        | [sʰo:m]        | fasting      |
|                    | /tʰa:h/        | [tʰa:h]        | he fell down |
|                    | /tʰi:n/        | [tʰi:n]        | mud          |
|                    | /ðʰulm/        | [ðʰulm]        | injustice    |
|                    | /ðʰajf/        | [ðʰajf]        | guest        |
| Disyllabic Words   |                |                |              |
|                    | /sʰa.ba:h/     | [sʰa.ba:h]     | morning      |
|                    | /sʰo:rah/      | [sʰo:rah]      | photo        |
|                    | /tʰa.bal/      | [tʰa.bal]      | drum         |
|                    | /tʰuy.mah/     | [tʰuy.mah]     | beautiful    |
|                    | /ðʰu.hu:r/     | [ðʰu.hu:r]     | appearance   |
|                    | /ðʰa.rab/      | [ðʰa.rab]      | hit          |
| Polysyllabic Words |                |                |              |
|                    | /sʰu.ʃu:ba:t/  | [sʰu.ʃu:ba:t]  | difficulties |
|                    | /sʰi.na:ʃa:t/  | [sʰi.na:ʃa:t]  | industries   |
|                    | /tʰa.la:ba:t/  | [tʰa.la:ba:t]  | requests     |
|                    | /tʰar.ba.gah/  | [tʰar.ba.gah]  | crumbling    |
|                    | /ðʰu.yu.tʰa:t/ | [ðʰu.yu.tʰa:t] | pressures    |
|                    | /ðʰu.ru:rah/   | [ðʰu.ru:rah]   | necessity    |

As can be seen in Table 3, when an emphatic segment occurs at the left edge of a word, it triggers a progressive rightward spread of the [+emphatic] feature to color the entire word. This phonological behavior is particularly apparent in monosyllabic, disyllabic, and polysyllabic form in HA. For instance, the pharyngealized /sʰ/ in the monosyllabic word [sʰamy] propagates the emphatic feature from left to right and extends to all neighboring segments /a/, /m/, and /y/. The data illustrate that the process of emphasis spread is not restricted to immediate adjacency but rather functions across multiple segments and syllables within a prosodic domain to underscore the assimilatory strength and phonological salience of primary emphatics in HA.

TABLE 4  
WORD-MEDIAL TRIGGER CONSONANT

| Disyllabic Words   | Input                                     | Output                                    | Gloss                |
|--------------------|-------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------|----------------------|
|                    | /mah.s <sup>h</sup> ul/                   | [mah.s <sup>h</sup> ul]                   | harvest              |
|                    | /na.s <sup>h</sup> ar/                    | [na.s <sup>h</sup> ar]                    | victory              |
|                    | /ba.t <sup>h</sup> al/                    | [ba.t <sup>h</sup> al]                    | hero                 |
|                    | /hu.t <sup>h</sup> u:l/                   | [hu.t <sup>h</sup> u:l]                   | heavy rain           |
|                    | /ʔay.ð <sup>h</sup> ar/                   | [ʔay.ð <sup>h</sup> ar]                   | green                |
|                    | /mah.ð <sup>h</sup> uð <sup>h</sup> /     | [mah.ð <sup>h</sup> uð <sup>h</sup> ]     | he is lucky          |
| Polysyllabic Words |                                           |                                           |                      |
|                    | /mu.s <sup>h</sup> a:.da.qah/             | [mu.s <sup>h</sup> a:.da.qah]             | attestation          |
|                    | /may.t <sup>h</sup> u.t <sup>h</sup> a:t/ | [may.t <sup>h</sup> u.t <sup>h</sup> a:t] | manuscripts          |
|                    | /ma.hat <sup>h</sup> .t <sup>h</sup> a:t/ | [ma.hat <sup>h</sup> .t <sup>h</sup> a:t] | stations             |
|                    | /mah.ð <sup>h</sup> u.ð <sup>h</sup> a:t/ | [mah.ð <sup>h</sup> u.ð <sup>h</sup> a:t] | they (FM.) are lucky |
|                    | /ya.ð <sup>h</sup> a:.rah/                | [ya.ð <sup>h</sup> a:.rah]                | goblet               |

As illustrated in Table 4, when an emphatic consonant occurs word-medially, it initiates a bidirectional spread (rightward and leftward) of the [+emphatic] feature within the phonological word. This phonological behavior is exemplified in the disyllabic form [ʔay.ð<sup>h</sup>ar], where the emphatic /ð<sup>h</sup>/ appears to spread bidirectionally affecting the preceding segments /ʔ/, /a/, and /χ/, and the following segments /a/ and /r/. This pattern shows that the domain of emphasis spread in HA is not constrained to linear adjacency alone but operates systematically across syllabic boundaries to enhance the phonological strength of emphatic segments and the permeability of surrounding segments to pharyngealization.

TABLE 5  
WORD-FINAL TRIGGER CONSONANT

| Monosyllabic Words | Input                                     | Output                                    | Gloss         |
|--------------------|-------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------|---------------|
|                    | /yas <sup>h</sup> /                       | [yas <sup>h</sup> ]                       | choke         |
|                    | /hirs <sup>h</sup> /                      | [hirs <sup>h</sup> ]                      | care          |
|                    | /ʔe:t <sup>h</sup> /                      | [ʔe:t <sup>h</sup> ]                      | string        |
|                    | /na:t <sup>h</sup> /                      | [na:t <sup>h</sup> ]                      | jumped (MS.)  |
|                    | /bajð <sup>h</sup> /                      | [bajð <sup>h</sup> ]                      | eggs          |
|                    | /ho:ð <sup>h</sup> /                      | [ho:ð <sup>h</sup> ]                      | sink          |
| Disyllabic Words   |                                           |                                           |               |
|                    | /ha.ris <sup>h</sup> /                    | [ha.ris <sup>h</sup> ]                    | eager         |
|                    | /yaw.wa:s <sup>h</sup> /                  | [yaw.wa:s <sup>h</sup> ]                  | diver         |
|                    | /mu.hi:t <sup>h</sup> /                   | [mu.hi:t <sup>h</sup> ]                   | ocean         |
|                    | /ba.la:t <sup>h</sup> /                   | [ba.la:t <sup>h</sup> ]                   | tiles         |
|                    | /ma.rað <sup>h</sup> /                    | [ma.rað <sup>h</sup> ]                    | sickness      |
| Polysyllabic Words |                                           |                                           |               |
|                    | /ha:.fið <sup>h</sup> /                   | [ha:.fið <sup>h</sup> ]                   | preservative  |
|                    | /ta.ra:. ʔi:s <sup>h</sup> /              | [ta.ra:. ʔi:s <sup>h</sup> ]              | licenses      |
|                    | /ma.ha:.mis <sup>h</sup> /                | [ma.ha:.mis <sup>h</sup> ]                | roasters      |
|                    | /ʔas.tan.bat <sup>h</sup> /               | [ʔas.tan.bat <sup>h</sup> ]               | he inferred   |
|                    | /ʔay.t <sup>h</sup> a.bu:t <sup>h</sup> / | [ʔay.t <sup>h</sup> a.bu:t <sup>h</sup> ] | octopus       |
|                    | /mta.na:.gið <sup>h</sup> /               | [mta.na:.gið <sup>h</sup> ]               | contradictory |
|                    | /ma.ʕa:.ri:ð <sup>h</sup> /               | [ma.ʕa:.ri:ð <sup>h</sup> ]               | letters       |

As illustrated in Table 5, when an emphatic consonant is positioned finally within the word, emphasis spread proceeds in a regressive direction to color all preceding segments covering the whole word. For example, in the polysyllabic form [ʔas.tan.bat<sup>h</sup>], the final emphatic /t<sup>h</sup>/ triggers leftward spread of the [+emphatic] feature to extend across the three preceding syllables. This phonological behavior reveals that regressive assimilation in HA is unimpeded by syllabic boundaries or intervening consonantal material.

In sum, the data reveal that emphasis spread in HA is not unidirectional, rather it can operate progressively, regressively, or bidirectionally, based on the position of the emphatic trigger. Fundamentally, no opaque segments are reported to block the propagation of emphatic features. This indicates that emphasis spread in HA is phonetically unrestricted and phonologically transparent across the prosodic word.

### B. Blockers of Emphasis Spread

Table 6 introduces the behavior of segments that act as potential blockers to emphasis spread in Hā'ili Arabic (HA). In phonological theory, opacity emerges when certain segments prevent the propagation of the [+emphatic] feature across adjacent segments. Regarding emphasis spread, many Arabic varieties show asymmetrical behaviors. That is, leftward spread is generally robust, while rightward spread is more frequently subject to phonotactic restrictions. This asymmetry has been reported in a number of Arabic dialects, involving Urban Jordanian Arabic (Al-Masri, 2009), Libyan Arabic (Algryani, 2014), Wadi Mousa Arabic (Huneety, 2015), and Fallaahi Jordanian Arabic (Jaradat, 2020), where segments classified by the features [+high, -back] block the propagation of emphasis rightward (Herzallah, 1990; Davis, 1995; Mashaqba, 2015).



TABLE 6  
BLOCKING SEGMENT: HIGH FRONT VOWELS /i/ AND /i:/

| Input                         | Output                     | Gloss         |
|-------------------------------|----------------------------|---------------|
| a. /s <sup>h</sup> i.dam/     | [s <sup>h</sup> i.dam]     | hit           |
| b. /t <sup>h</sup> a:.lib/    | [t <sup>h</sup> a:.lib]    | student (MS.) |
| c. /ð <sup>h</sup> i.ri:h/    | [ð <sup>h</sup> i.ri:h]    | shrine        |
| d. /mu.s <sup>h</sup> i:.bah/ | [mu.s <sup>h</sup> i:.bah] | calamity      |
| e. /t <sup>h</sup> i:.ra:n/   | [t <sup>h</sup> i:.ra:n]   | drums         |
| f. /ð <sup>h</sup> i:.fah/    | [ð <sup>h</sup> i:.fah]    | gathering     |
| g. /ð <sup>h</sup> a:.lim/    | [ð <sup>h</sup> a:.lim]    | unjust        |

In contrast, other dialects observe unrestrained emphasis propagation in both directions within the prosodic word (Bukshaisha, 1985; Hoberman, 1995; Watson, 1999; Sakarna, 1999). Cross-dialectal variation, Davis (1995, p. 472) assumes that segmental opacity tends to act symmetrically only with rightward spread.

The data from HA accord with this broader typological pattern. Emphasis spread in HA occurs categorically unrestricted in the leftward direction. This confirms that the dialect aligns with those varieties that allow full regressive assimilation. On the other hand, rightward spread exhibits clear limitations. Particularly, the segments /i/, /i:/, /j/, /dʒ/, and /ʃ/ arise as consistent blockers to the rightward spread of the emphatic feature. These opaque segments prevent the assimilation of emphasis beyond their phonological boundary.

Crucially, the blocking behavior is considered position-sensitive. Hence, when these opaque segments co-occur within the same syllable as the emphatic trigger, emphasis surfaces on that syllable without resistance. For example, the segment /j/ in the word /χaj.ja:t<sup>h</sup>/ ‘tailor’, although typically opaque, does not inhibit the realization of emphasis on the syllable containing the emphatic /t<sup>h</sup>/, nor does it block regressive spread. This motivates the interpretation that opaque segments in HA operate directionally, which prevent only rightward spread across syllables but permit emphasis with shared syllabic domains.

It should be noted that the HA data clearly confirm a directional asymmetry in the spread of emphasis. Leftward spread proceeds unimpeded across the phonological word, whereas rightward spread is subject to segment-specific resistance. This directional pattern shows the vital role of individual segmental features, specifically those associated with high front vowels, post-alveolar, and palatal segments in bounding the domain of assimilation. The behavior of the opaque segments /i/, /i:/, /j/, /dʒ/, and /ʃ/ reflects a systematic phonological constraint on the spread of emphasis. This suggests that phonetic properties such as high tongue position and frontness introduce articulatory conflicts with the pharyngealization gesture.

These results contribute to a more precise and theoretically significant understanding of opacity in Arabic varieties. They not only boost prior claims that progressive spread is more restrictive than regressive spread as reported by Herzallah (1990) and Davis (1995), but also assert that such asymmetry is not arbitrary, rather it contributes a deeper phonological organization where the interaction between emphatic features and the segmental system of a dialect specifies the limits of assimilation. Accordingly, HA conforms typologically to other varieties that enforce directionality and segment-sensitive restrictions. Consequently, Hā’ili Arabic introduces further empirical support for models of feature geometry and autosegmental association that formalize directionality and blocking as essential characteristics of phonological spreading processes. The HA pattern provides the basis for an important datapoint in evaluating cross-dialectal variation and contributes to ongoing theoretical debates regarding the dynamics of assimilation and the phonological representation of pharyngealization.

Table 6 demonstrates that the positional distribution of high vowels influences the course and scope of emphasis spread in HA. Specifically, high front vowels show a bifunctional role depending on their syllabic positioning relative to the emphatic trigger. When these vowels appear adjacent to the emphatic segment within the same syllable, they trigger emphasis which allows the syllable to be pharyngealized along with the preceding syllables. However, when positioned at the onset of a following syllable, high front vowels act blockers to rightward emphasis spread, effectively halting the propagation of the emphatic feature beyond their point of occurrence.

This blocking behavior is exemplified in forms such as [s<sup>h</sup>i.dam] and [t<sup>h</sup>i:.ra:n], where only the initial syllables are pharyngealized due to their adjacent to the emphatic consonants, yet the rightward spread is terminated at the boundary marked by the high vowels /i/ and /i:/ in the following syllables. Thus, these segments serve as phonological boundaries that restrict the domain of assimilation to within the initial syllable.

A further contrastive example illuminates the segmental identity of this blocking effect. In [ð<sup>h</sup>a:.lim] ‘unjust’, the occurrence of /i/ in the second syllable obstructs the spread of emphasis, wherein confines pharyngealization to the initial syllable. By comparison, in form such as [ð<sup>h</sup>a.la:m] ‘dark’, where no high vowel intervene, emphasis is free to spread unrestricted across both syllables.

In sum, these patterns suggest that high vowels in HA demonstrate a structural opacity to emphasis spread which conditioned by both syllabic boundaries and vowel quality. This observation supports the conclusion that the spread of emphasis in the dialect is not simply unbounded but is subject to a hierarchy of phonotactic constraints that manifest the interplay between articulatory compatibility and segmental organization.



TABLE 7  
BLOCKING SEGMENT: VOICED PALATAL GLIDE /j/

| Input            | Output        | Gloss         |
|------------------|---------------|---------------|
| a. /sʕa:.jim/    | [sʕa:.jim]    | fasting [MS.] |
| b. /masʕ.jaf/    | [masʕ.jaf]    | summer resort |
| c. /tʕaj.ja:rat/ | [tʕaj.ja:rat] | airplanes     |
| d. /ðʕa.ja:ʕ/    | [ðʕa.ja:ʕ]    | loss          |

Table 7 illustrates that the voiced palatal glide /j/ plays a central role in restricting the rightward spread of emphasis in HA. Specifically, /j/ acts as a phonological blocker that halts the propagation of the emphasis feature beyond its position in the word. This phonological behavior is associated with lexical items such as [ðʕa.ja:ʕ], where the emphatic phoneme /ðʕ/ triggers pharyngealization, but its spread is terminated at the segmental boundaries marked by /j/. Consequently, only the immediate adjacent vowel to the emphatic consonant and any other segments within the same syllable are pharyngealized, whereas any following segments after the palatal glide /j/ remain unaffected by the emphatic feature.

This pattern highlights the status of /j/ as an opaque segment in the phonological grammar of HA, thus this segment initiates a directional asymmetry in emphasis spread. The articulatory property of /j/ has a high and front tongue position, which is inconsistent with the pharyngeal constriction required for emphasis, obstructing assimilation across its position. This finding provides further evidence to support the opaque domain in Arabic dialects and confirms the gradient nature of emphasis spread across phonological environments.

TABLE 8  
BLOCKING SEGMENT: VOICED POST-ALVEOLAR AFFRICATE /dʒ/

| Input           | Output       | Gloss             |
|-----------------|--------------|-------------------|
| a. /tʕan.dʒah/  | [tʕan.dʒah]  | a city in Morocco |
| b. /tʕa:.dʒin/  | [tʕa:.dʒin]  | casserole         |
| c. /ðʕa.dʒi:dʒ/ | [ðʕa.dʒi:dʒ] | noise             |

The data in Table 8 show that the voiced post-alveolar affricate /dʒ/ acts as an opacity trigger that blocks the propagation of rightward emphasis in HA. For instance, in the word [tʕa:.dʒin], the emphatic consonant /tʕ/ fails to span its pharyngealization beyond the initial syllable due to the intervening presence of /dʒ/. Despite the adjacency of the emphatic trigger, the affricate inhibits the emphatic feature from propagation to subsequent segments. This behavior suggests that /dʒ/ behaves similarly to other high and front segments, which is phonetically incompatible with the secondary articulation required for emphasis spread and thus serves as a robust blocker in the phonological grammar of HA.

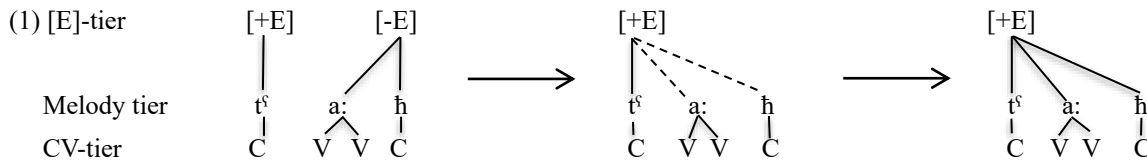
TABLE 9  
BLOCKING SEGMENT: VOICELESS POST-ALVEOLAR FRICATIVE /ʃ/

| Input            | Output        | Gloss   |
|------------------|---------------|---------|
| a. /tʕa.ba:ʃi:r/ | [tʕa.ba:ʃi:r] | chalk   |
| b. /tʕaf.ʃa:n/   | [tʕaf.ʃa:n]   | bored   |
| c. /ʕatʕ.ʃa:n/   | [ʕatʕ.ʃa:n]   | thirsty |

The data clearly illustrates that the behavior of the voiceless post-alveolar fricative /ʃ/ elucidates an asymmetrical effect on emphasis spread in HA. When /ʃ/ precedes the emphatic trigger, as in [ʃa:.tʕih] ‘unusual person,’ emphasis spreads leftward without restriction, yielding [ʃa:.tʕih]. Likewise, when the emphatic /tʕ/ precedes /ʃ/, as in [ʕatʕ.ʃa:n], the leftward spread proceeds unimpeded, which effectively pharyngealized all preceding segments. However, when /ʃ/ follows the emphatic consonant in forms such as [tʕaf.ʃa:n], the propagation of rightward emphasis is categorically blocked. In this phonological environment, /ʃ/ functions as an opaque segment that blocks the progressive propagation of the emphatic feature beyond its position, despite the proximity to the emphatic trigger. These patterns reassure the directional asymmetry of emphasis spread in HA and highlight the role of segmental characteristics in mediating the scope of emphasis assimilation.

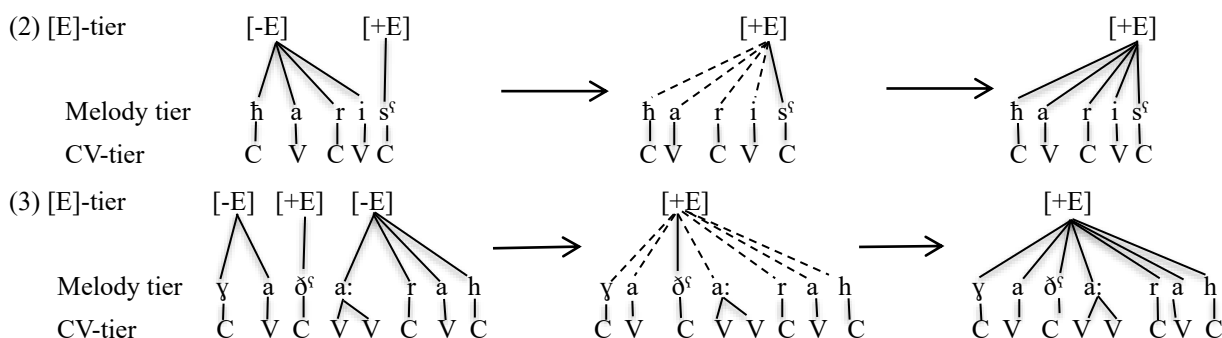
## VI. PHONOLOGICAL ANALYSIS OF EMPHASIS SPREAD IN HA

Various studies have been reported to account for emphasis spread within the framework of Autosegmental Theory (Goldsmith, 1976; Van der Hulst & Smith, 1982) on Cairene Arabic, Card (1983) on Palestinian Arabic, Amakhmakh (1997) on Moroccan Arabic, and Sakrana (1999) on Jordanian Arabic, among others. These studies provide an independent tier to represent the emphasis feature. This study adopts the feature [+emphatic] (henceforth, +E) to represent the emphasis feature. In an autosegmental analysis of HA, the feature [+E] will be in a separate tier, thus, [E]-tier. This tier has no access to consonants and vowels. In order to resolve this issue, McCarthy (1986) proposes the principle of ‘Tier Conflation’ which merges the consonants and vowels together onto one unified melody. After applying tier conflation, a given word contains three tiers in an autosegmental analysis: the [E]-tier, the melody tier, and CV-tier. Consider the following representation for the word [tʕa:h] ‘he fell down’ → [tʕa:h] under autosegmental approach:



This presentation displays that the emphatic segment /tʰ/ is linked to the [+E] feature by a solid line which indicates its presence underlyingly. The dotted lines illustrate the spreading of emphasis after applying the principle of tier conflation. The feature [+E] spreads from the trigger emphatic consonant /tʰ/ rightwards to /a:/ and /h/, rendering them pharyngealized segments. Hence, this presumes that the adjacent segments to the emphatic /tʰ/ are not substantially connected to the feature [+E] unless this feature spreads over them in order to surface as pharyngealized phonemes.

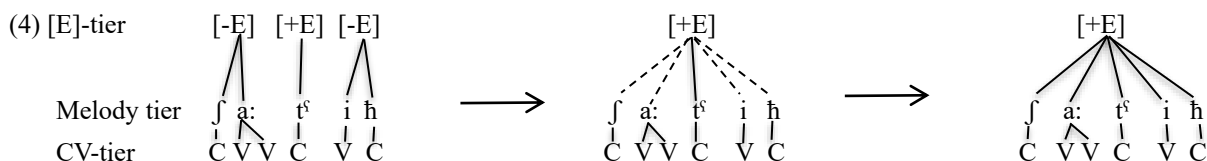
As mentioned earlier, emphasis can freely spread rightward (as can be seen in representation (1)), leftward, or bidirectionally. In what follows, this study provides an autosegmental analysis for the leftward and bidirectional spread of emphasis in HA. Consider the following representations (2) and (3) for the words /ha.risʰ/ ‘eager’ → [ha.risʰ] and /ya.ðʰa:.rah/ ‘goblet’ → [ya.ðʰa:.rah]:



The representation in (2) manifests that the feature [+E] spreads from the underlying emphatic sound [sʰ] leftwards to color all the preceding segments, allowing the syllable to be pharyngealized along with any preceding syllables. The representation in (3) illustrates that emphasis spreads bidirectionally from the underlying emphatic consonant [ðʰ] to target all the preceding and following neighboring segments in the word.

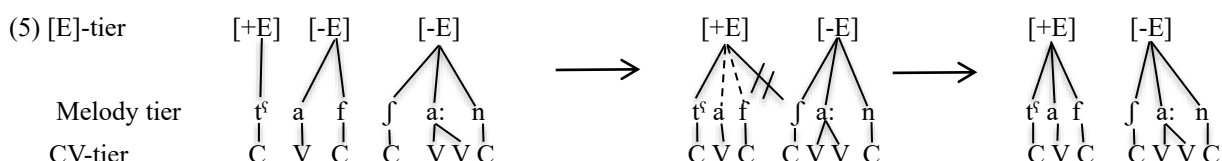
As for the emphasis blockers in HA, emphasis displays asymmetries between leftward and rightward spread in which the emphasis of leftward spread is unbounded, whilst the rightward spread is bounded by certain opaque segments /i/, /i:/, /j/, /dʒ/, and /ʃ/.

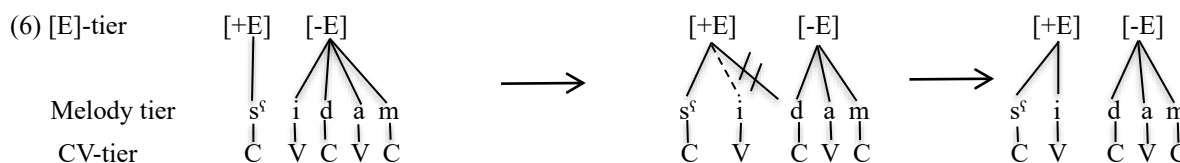
As mentioned previously, leftward spread is absolute in HA even though one of these opaque segments occurs in a word. Consider the following representation for the word /ʃa:.tʰih/ ‘unusual person’ → [ʃa:.tʰih]:



In this representation, the opaque segment /ʃ/ does not block the leftward spread of the emphatic feature [+E]. The reason beyond that is the presence of the voiceless post-alveolar fricative /ʃ/ before the emphatic consonant /tʰ/ in the phonological word.

Under the tenets of Autosegmental Theory, the opaque segments are introduced and how they are acted as robust blockers in the dialect. There are certain phonemes which effectively inhibit the rightward propagation of emphasis. Consider the following representations for the words /tʰaf.ʃa:n/ ‘bored’ → [tʰaf.ʃa:n] and /sʰi.dam/ ‘hit’ → [sʰi.dam], as shown in (5):





In representation (5), the emphatic consonant /tʰ/ spreads leftward its emphatic feature [+E] only to the neighboring segments within the same syllable. However, the emphatic feature fails to spread rightward beyond this syllable due to the presence of the voiceless post-alveolar fricative /ʃ/, which acts as a blocker. Representation (6) illustrates that the second syllable of the word [sʰi.dam] is not associated with the emphatic feature [+E] due to the presence of the high short vowel /i/, which halts the rightward propagation of emphasis in HA.

The present study makes a substantial theoretical contribution to our understanding of emphasis spread in Arabic phonology by offering a comprehensive empirical account of the phenomenon in Hā'ili Arabic (HA), a variety that has not been previously documented in this regard. Building on HA data, the findings introduced offer compelling evidence for the directional asymmetry and segmental conditioning of emphasis spread. These observations not only refine our understanding of the phonological system of Arabic but also manifest broader theoretical approaches about feature spreading, opacity, and the interaction between phonological domains and segmental features.

Significantly, this study establishes empirical confirmation of the bidirectionality of emphasis spread in HA, which aligns with previous studies of Palestinian Arabic (Younes, 1994; Davis, 1995) and Wadi Mousa Arabic (Huneety, 2015). In HA, emphasis spreads both leftward and rightward across syllables, a hallmark that has often been assumed to be typologically rare or subject to strict phonotactic conditions in other varieties. One of the most significant findings about this dialect is that emphasis is not inherently limited to syllable boundaries and can operate over extended domains without the existence of word-level boundaries or morphological constraints. This motivates the notion, originally proposed by Elgadi (1986) that the [+emphatic] feature acts as an autosegment capable of association with multiple segments, which provides rise to long-distance assimilation effects.

Unlike dialects such as Urban Jordanian Arabic (Al-Masri, 2009) or Libyan Arabic (Algryani, 2014), where the emphasis spread is typically unidirectional or subject to categorial blocking by high front vowels, HA reveals a more nuanced analysis of segmental interaction. Specifically, the data provide a clear asymmetry in the sensitivity of rightward versus leftward spread to blocking effects. Rightward emphasis spread is blocked by a subset of opaque segments /i/, /i:/, /j/, /dʒ/, and /ʃ/, whereas leftward spread remains consistently unimpeded. These findings align with Davis (1995, p. 472), who states that Arabic dialects often show symmetrical blocking behavior of rightward but not leftward spread. Thus, HA emerges as a compelling case study of directional opacity, which illustrates how phonological asymmetry is not merely a theoretical abstraction but a concrete, observable property of dialect-internal systems.

Regarding featural representation, this study supports the claim introduced by Elgadi (1986) that emphatic consonants are best analyzed utilizing a unary feature such as [+emphatic], rather than relying solely on acoustic articulatory descriptors such as [+low], [+back] (Chomsky & Halle, 1968) or [+constricted pharynx] (Broselow, 1979). The merit of Elgadi's approach resides in its capacity to model spread by feature association and disassociation, a representation naturally accounted for under the tenets of Autosegmental Phonology (Goldsmith, 1976). While autosegmental representation is not the primary analytic framework of this study, the empirical findings of emphasis in HA provides indirect support to its representational claims, particularly with regard to how emphasis spreads across adjacent and non-adjacent segments, sometimes across multiple syllables.

The role of syllable structure raises important questions about mediating the spread of emphasis. Previous studies (Watson, 1999; Bellem, 2007) have proposed that emphasis spread may be confined to prosodic or metrical boundaries. However, the present findings illustrate that emphasis in HA is not syllable-bound. Rather, spread is gradient and direction-sensitive and conditioned more by phonological properties of individual segments (e.g., [+high], [-back]) than fixed prosodic templates. This motivates the notion that phonological phenomena like emphasis spread are subject to both structural and featural representations, which determine the scope and limits of assimilation.

Importantly, this study provides empirical evidence for the claim that the behavior and restrictions of emphasis spread are dialect-specific. While HA shares several typological features with other Saudi and Levantine dialects such as the presence of emphatics and bidirectional spread, its distinctive treatment of opaque segments, particularly the glide /j/ and the affricate /dʒ/, marks it as a unique phonological system. This confirms the significance of documenting underrepresented dialects and adds a more detailed perspective to deepen our comparative understanding of Arabic phonology.

Finally, the results presented here contribute to broader theoretical foundations on phonological opacity and assimilation. The HA data demonstrate that opacity is not a homogenous property, but rather derives from the complex interplay of segmental identity, syllable structure, and directionality. Accordingly, this study challenges simplistic models that assume symmetry in feature spreading or neglect the role of segment-specific blocking. By illustrating that only certain segments block spread in specific directions, HA introduces compelling evidence that phonological theories must account for directional asymmetries and local interactions between features and segment classes.

In short, this study advances our theoretical understanding of emphasis in Arabic and offers a detailed empirical analysis of an unrepresented variety. The findings support feature-based models of phonological representation, enhance

the reality of directional asymmetry in assimilation, and require a more precise view of opacity in natural language phonology. As such, it makes a valuable contribution to the ongoing refinement of phonological theory and provides a foundation for further inquiry into the interplay of articulatory, acoustic, and grammatical factors in Arabic dialects.

## VII. CONCLUSION

This paper has addressed the phonological process of emphasis spread in Hā'ili Arabic in light of Autosegmental Theory. HA has three primary emphatic segments /t̤/, /s̤/, and /ð̤/ which may allow emphasis to propagate over the neighboring segments at the word level. This indicates that adjacent segments are not intrinsically linked to the [+emphatic] until this feature propagates and affects the vicinity of an emphatic segment. It has been shown that the propagation of emphasis in HA can operate leftward, rightward, or bidirectionally. The scope of emphasis spread is minimally over the syllable if there are opaque segments that block emphasis spread, and maximally over the entire word if there are no blockers. It also has revealed that emphasis displays asymmetries between rightward and leftward spread, where the leftward spread of emphasis was unbounded, while the rightward spread was blocked by certain opaque segments /i/, /i:/, /j/, /d͡ʒ/, and /ʃ/. Based on HA data, if these opaque segments occur within the syllable that contains the trigger emphatic phoneme, this syllable remains pharyngealized. Finally, the autosegmental approach has shown a robust analysis of the emphatic features, its directionality within the stem word, and the interaction with opaque segments in HA. As a result, it provides a significant contribution to the ongoing refinement of phonological theory and provides a foundation for further inquiry into the interplay of articulatory, acoustic, and grammatical factors in Arabic dialects.

Although this study has addressed emphatic features, its directionality, and the interaction with opaque segments, further data and a larger number of participants are required to ensure that the observed patterns of emphasis spread represent consistent phonological behavior. Further research could examine other phonemes that only contextually surface emphatic like [b, f, m, l, r] and their effects on neighboring sounds in HA. Furthermore, an acoustic study is recommended to provide additional theoretical insights into the analysis of emphasis spread in HA.

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# Linguistic Foundations for Automatic Simplification of Kazakh Texts

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**Abstract**—Universal and multilingual large language models cannot correctly simplify Kazakh texts in accordance with internal linguistic patterns. Using LLM without a linguistically sound simplification model leads to uncontrolled generation and increases the risk of lexical and grammatical errors. Therefore, there is a need to create formalized linguistic patterns for Kazakh text simplification, which will facilitate the creation of automatic simplification systems within LLM. This can be achieved through the analysis of manually adapted materials. A corpus of 20 Kazakh texts was annotated by the authors for the analysis, each presented in three versions such as the original (O) and two successive adaptation levels (A1 and A2). At the A1 stage, syntactic transformations predominate, while A2 demonstrates lexical stabilization. The text size is comparable at all levels, which ensures control and reliability of the analysis. The process is formalized through a two-level tagging system: lexical (LS) and syntactic simplification (SS) that records each operation. Frequency analysis revealed a limited core of dominant techniques, supplemented by peripheral layers, forming structured polyoperational architecture. Transitions from A1 to A2 demonstrate a process shift toward lexical changes while maintaining discursive coherence. The results emphasize the importance of linguistic expertise, operation typologies, and manual annotation for the interpretability and quality of systems. Hybrid approaches with humans in the loop improve the accuracy and reliability of ATS.

**Index Terms**—text simplification, lexical simplification, syntactic simplification, ATS

## I. INTRODUCTION

Automatic text simplification (ATS) is one of the tasks of NLP which is aimed at creating simplified (simple) version of an original (complex) text through linguistic (mainly on lexical and syntactic level) modifications by reducing its complexity without changing its core ideas and meaning (Shardlow, 2014; Alva-Manchego et al., 2020; Al-Thanyyan & Azmi, 2021). The primary goal is to improve the accessibility of complex texts to a wider readership (Devaraj et al., 2021).

Simplified texts are especially in demand in teaching foreign languages. The effectiveness of their use in FLT is supported by several studies (Crossley et al., 2012; Coxhead & Boutorwick, 2018). The main obstacle of using authentic texts in teaching reading is their high textual complexity – lexical, syntactic and discursive. Besides this, in international practice, simplified text is successfully used not only for educational purposes (Crossley et al., 2012), but also for adaption of reading materials for children (De Belder & Moens, 2010; Kajiwarra et al., 2013), processing scientific and specialized texts (Ermakova et al., 2022), adaptation of hard-to-read materials for people with various cognitive impairments (Carroll et al., 1998; Rello et al., 2013; Kover et al., 2014; Evans et al., 2014; Chen et al., 2017), and for people with a low level of functional literacy in their native language (Watanabe et al., 2009).

This is evidenced by the development of websites and parallel corpora focused on the tasks of ATS in different languages (*ASSET*, *Newsela English* for English; *FIRST*, *Simplext*, *Newsela Spanish* for Spanish; *SIMPITIKI*, *PaCCSS-IT* for Italian; *CLEAR*, *WikiLargeFR* for French; *EasyJapanese*, *Jados* for Japanese; *PorSimples* for Brazilian Portuguese, *Simple German*, *TextComplexityDE* for German; *The Corpus of Basque Simplified Texts (CBST)* for Basque; *DSim* for Danish, *SimplifyUREval* for Urdu, *RuWikiLarge*, *RuSimpleSentEval*, *RuAdapt* for Russian; *SloTS* for Slovene; *SAMER*, *Saaq al-Bambuu* for Arabic (Ryan et al., 2023). However, this process is still being done manually by language experts, teachers and linguists in low-resource languages, such as Kazakh. This is due to the limited number of language models, annotated parallel corpora and linguistic systems developed considering typological specifics of the Kazakh language. Even a specialist in the field of language teaching has a very low speed of text simplification. This entails large time costs and does not apply to a large number of texts available on the network. Therefore, automation of this process is a task that requires quick solutions.

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The Kazakh language belongs to the Turkic language family and is characterized by an agglutinative type of system. In the absence of formalized algorithms for ATS for the Kazakh language, it is impossible to assume that universal and multilingual large language models will be able to correctly simplify Kazakh texts in accordance with internal linguistic patterns without distorting the content. Using LLM without a linguistically sound simplification model leads to uncontrolled generation and increases the risk of lexical and grammatical errors.

The experience of high-resource languages shows that the emergence of neural network and LLM-oriented systems was preceded by extensive linguistic work: parallel corpora of original and simplified texts were manually created, simplification rules were formalized, and readability levels were developed. Based on these resources, rule-based automatic simplification systems were formed, followed by neural network models.

Thus, for the Kazakh language, the primary task is to create linguistically sound corpora and simplification models, without which the implementation of LLM-oriented ATS systems cannot be effective and reliable.

This topic is now dynamically developing in Kazakh linguistics. In general, the advantage of simplified texts has been pedagogically proven in numerous research papers, which indicates the need to form a system of adapted texts in teaching the Kazakh language (Mambetova et al., 2024). Research on Kazakh parallel corpus for machine translation “KazParC” (Yeshpanov et al., 2024) and generation models for paraphrasing (Kassenkhan et al., 2024) show that transformational models for the modern Kazakh language are able to effectively generate and paraphrase only under the condition of special linguistic and technical adaptation. The first major project that proved the technical possibility of ATS of the Kazakh language within NLP is the KazSim (Toleu et al., 2025). The authors of the project created the first parallel corpus of 8,709 pairs of simple and complex sentences using heuristic selection and LLM augmentation. This demonstrated the possibility of automating Kazakh-language materials. However, such projects are largely data-driven and lack explicit language simplification model, characterized by a model-adapted system which still shows that ATS requires linguistic selection and justification. To do this, the text for the Kazakh language requires the formalization of lexical, morphological and syntactic formations necessary for simplification, and a description of the level of complexity. Therefore, this paper aims to systematize the main general linguistic mechanisms of transformation for ATS by analyzing manually annotated corpora.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

From a linguistic perspective, text simplification should be understood as a complex, hierarchically organized process affecting several interconnected levels of linguistic structure, including lexicon, syntax, discourse, and pragmatics. At the vocabulary level, simplifying transformations involve replacing low-frequency or conceptually loaded units with more common equivalents, using hypernymic generalizations, or introducing clarifying constructions, which are particularly significant in texts with pronounced terminological density (Koptient et al., 2019).

Syntactic simplification is implemented through a number of operations, among which the key ones include the transformation of passive structures into active ones, segmentation of complex sentences, reduction of nested subordination constructions, and reorganization of word order to increase the transparency of syntactic relations (Brunato et al., 2022).

At the discourse level, coreference resolution mechanisms, adaptation of the discourse marker system, and ensuring the continuity of information flow both within and between paragraphs play a central role, directly impacting the coherence of a simplified text (Devaraj et al., 2021). The pragmatic dimension of simplification, in turn, requires consideration of genre specifics and the characteristics of the addressee: for example, texts aimed at children allow and even require proximization strategies, including direct addressing of the reader, whereas in encyclopedic genres, such techniques are considered inappropriate (Bott & Saggion, 2014).

These linguistic principles underlie modern typologies of simplification operations, which continue to be used as a theoretical and methodological basis for manual data annotation and evaluation of the effectiveness of ATS systems.

The development of ATS has gone through several stages: from rule-based systems to statistical models, and then to neural and LLM architectures. Early approaches relied on linguistic typologies and detailed language analysis, focusing primarily on syntactic transformations such as the removal of subordinate constructions and secondary components (Dras, 1999), but their application was limited.

With the transition to statistical and neural methods, the role of explicit linguistic interpretation has significantly weakened. Modern neural models (seq2seq, T5, BART) are trained end-to-end on parallel corpora, without directly modeling the simplification operations (Martin et al., 2020). Even in controlled CEFR-labeled scenarios, simplification often relies on superficial parameters such as sentence length and lexical frequency, without taking into account the deep structure of the text (Flores et al., 2023; Maddela & Alva-Manchego, 2025).

LLMs, including ChatGPT, are capable of simplification without specialized training (Kumar et al., 2020), but they are susceptible to systemic errors such as confusing simplification with summarization, excessive abbreviations, repetitions, and the addition of non-existent information (Vásquez-Rodríguez et al., 2023). These problems arise from the lack of explicit linguistic control, particularly at the discourse and pragmatic levels.

Fully ATS systems still face a number of persistent challenges. First and foremost, these are semantic distortions, for instance, even modern models do not always preserve the original meaning, especially when working with texts containing complex semantic relationships (Agrawal & Carpuat, 2024). An additional threat is “hallucinations” which is

the addition of information not present in the original, making such systems unsafe for use in sensitive fields, including medicine and law (Devaraj et al., 2021).

Another significant drawback is their ignorance of the discourse structure of the text. Focusing on individual sentences without considering the global context leads to reduced coherence, repetitions, and the loss of logical transitions (Sun et al., 2021; Vázquez-Rodríguez et al., 2023).

Finally, automatic systems are poorly tailored to the needs of specific audiences. Readability metrics rely on superficial indicators and poorly reflect actual text comprehension, while different reader groups require different simplification strategies, limiting the practical applicability of universal solutions (Tanprasert & Kauchak, 2021).

Linguists have developed typologies of simplification operations used for manual annotation and analysis. These approaches contrast with line editing, where text is processed as a sequence of tokens with formal operations of addition, deletion, and retention (Alva-Manchego et al., 2017; Cardon & Grabar, 2020). In contrast, linguistic typologies describe simplification as the transformation of structurally and functionally significant units, including operations such as specification and voice change (Bott & Saggion, 2014; Grabar & Saggion, 2022).

Such typologies ensure interpretable and reproducible annotation, clear instructions improve the consistency of annotators and allow simplifications to be explained from a linguistic perspective. Linguistic expertise is also important for quality control of corpora, as manual annotation takes into account grammatical correctness and semantic coherence, reducing noise in the data.

An important contribution of linguists is the development of evaluation protocols focused on error analysis rather than superficial metrics. Unlike BLEU, SARI, and BERTScore, such approaches identify specific violations such as incorrect deletions, additions, paraphrases, and ungrammatical statements as well as semantic losses, which are detected using text comprehension tests (Yamaguchi et al., 2023).

Linguistic expertise is also necessary for the multilingual adaptation of simplification systems. Studies show that simplification metrics and strategies vary significantly across languages, and many operations are language- and genre-specific, making direct transfer of English-language models ineffective (Gonzalez-Dios et al., 2018; Koptient et al., 2019; Scholz & Wenzel, 2025). Therefore, linguists adapt typologies of operations and annotation schemes to specific languages.

Finally, hybrid approaches combining automated methods with human intervention are considered promising. Incremental simplification and training on small, linguistically annotated datasets improve the manageability, coherence, and quality of results, while reducing semantic and discourse biases (Grabar & Saggion, 2022; Kumar et al., 2020).

Modern research shows that hybrid architectures that combine automatic methods with linguistically informed human intervention offer the greatest potential for ATS. For example, the progressive document simplification (ProgDS) approach replicates expert strategies and processes text step by step, at the discourse, thematic, and lexical levels, increasing the manageability of transformations and preserving coherence (Kumar et al., 2020). Training on small datasets annotated by linguists significantly improves the understanding of LLMs and the quality of simplification. Human intervention also enables iterative refinement of results and the reduction of semantic and discourse biases (Grabar & Saggion, 2022).

However, fundamental challenges remain in the field of automatic simplification, directly related to the insufficient role of linguistic expertise. First, document-level simplification quality assessment remains underdeveloped. Existing metrics, including D-SARI, are sensitive to text length and poorly capture semantics and coherence, while coherence models do not always distinguish between medium and low levels of quality (Lai & Tetreault, 2018; Vázquez-Rodríguez et al., 2023). This highlights the need for linguistically motivated metrics that take into account both local and global text structure.

Second, research remains predominantly English-centric and rarely considers cultural and linguistic differences in the perception of simplicity. Overcoming these differences requires an analysis of language and culture specific simplification strategies. Third, current systems offer little support for personalization and poor adaptation to the user's language proficiency and cognitive characteristics. Finally, automatic linguistic annotation remains unstable and requires subsequent review, necessitating linguistically informed post-editing procedures (Yamaguchi et al., 2023).

Automated linguistic annotation remains a challenging task: LLMs are unstable when tagging simplification operations and require subsequent validation (Yamaguchi et al., 2023). This necessitates linguistically sound post-editing and quality control procedures to create reliable and scalable corpora.

To sum up, this review demonstrates that linguistic expertise is not an intermediate step, but rather the foundation of automated text simplification. Linguists are developing a theoretical understanding of simplification as a multi-level process, developing operation types, assessment protocols, and ensuring cross-linguistic adaptation. The limitations of fully automatic approaches such as meaning distortion, loss of coherence, and weak audience orientation are directly related to the lack of explicit linguistic control.

Research on hybrid systems confirms that the integration of linguistic instructions, small-data learning, and iterative feedback improves the quality and reliability of results. Further development requires recognition that textual simplicity is a cognitively and culturally conditioned category and cannot be reduced to formal metrics.



### III. RESEARCH MATERIALS AND CORPUS CONSTRUCTION

The practical part of the study is based on a specially developed corpus focused on studying the mechanisms of manual text simplification. 20 texts, each presented in three versions (original, A1, A2) from collections No. 1 and No. 2 of “Adapted texts in Kazakh” (2024) compiled by Mambetova M. and Kuzembekova Zh. were selected as the corpus material. The source texts are characterized by a high degree of lexical and syntactic complexity and generally correspond to advanced levels of language proficiency, approximately to C1–C2.

The corpus is characterized by genre diversity and includes works of fiction, educational materials, and news texts. This combination allows us to consider the influence of genre specificity on the selection and implementation of simplification strategies. The adapted reflect a gradual reduction in complexity. As a result, each trio of texts forms a sequential chain of controlled simplification, creating conditions for analyzing changes on both a qualitative and quantitative level.

TABLE 1  
MANUALLY ANNOTATED CORPUS CHARACTERISTICS

| Parameter                            | O (original text) | A1    | A2    |
|--------------------------------------|-------------------|-------|-------|
| Number of texts                      | 20                | 20    | 20    |
| Number of total sentences            | 572               | 518   | 591   |
| Average number of sentences per text | 27                | 26    | 30    |
| Number of total tokens               | 7516              | 4 138 | 5 900 |
| Average number of tokens per text    | 376               | 207   | 295   |

The total size of the corpus is several thousand words and is distributed unevenly between the versions (see Table 1). The original texts retain the largest volume, while the simplified versions demonstrate a gradual reduction due to lexical and structural compression. This organization of the material allows us to trace the dynamics of the transformation of text parameters at different stages of adaptation. The manual preparation of the simplified versions guarantees their grammatical correctness and pedagogical relevance, ensuring the reliability of the corpus as an empirical basis for subsequent testing and evaluation of ATS methods.

### IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

#### A. Linguistic Model of Simplification: Alignment and Operation Types

##### *Types of structural alignment in Kazakh simplified texts*

It was mentioned above that ATS is detected based on corpus analysis. The central stage of such an analysis is alignment, since without establishing semantic correspondences between the original and simplified versions, it is impossible to formalize exactly *what is being changed* and *how*. Alignment is used to correlate text segments and then annotate basic simplification operations.

In several English-language studies based on the Newsela corpus, sentence alignment procedures were introduced, on the basis of which the main types of correspondences were described ( $1 \rightarrow 1$ ,  $1 \rightarrow N$ ,  $N \rightarrow 1$ , etc.) (Xu et al., 2015; Xu et al., 2016). Štajner and Saggion (2018) proposed a typology of simplification operations and implemented alignment as the basis for building a simplification model. In the context of the presence of developed parallel corpora (complex – simplified versions), alignment in English practice acts primarily as a technical stage and is used for automatic training of simplification models on ready-made data.

This study uses the opposite – linguistically motivated paradigm. Since there are currently no ready-made parallel corpora for the Kazakh language, simplified texts are not extracted from existing resources but are formed manually. In other words, the structural simplification model was built through manual markup, after which a system of alignment and linguistic simplification mechanisms were formalized.

To implement this procedure, all 20 texts, both original and simplified versions, were segmented into separate sentences and numbered (O1, O2, O3..., A1\_1, A1\_2..., A2\_1, A2\_2...). Further, these sentences were combined into semantic pairs representing carriers of the same semantic unit. The analysis of the changes occurring in such pairs allowed us to identify typical sequences of operations characteristic of the simplification of the Kazakh language.

The original and simplified versions were considered as one semantic pair, subject to the following criteria:

1. The key is the coincidence of the predicate, type and participants of the situation in the correlated variants.
2. Structural – the presence of lexical and/or syntactic changes in the simplified version (in the absence of structural changes, the transformation is interpreted as a rewrite, not as a simplification);
3. Partial overlap – even with structural changes, removal of individual components, or addition of explanations, at least one semantic core must be preserved.

A total of 572 sentences were disturbed in the source text, in A1 – 518, in A2 – 591, from which 480 semantic pairs were formed. Correlation of the number of sentences of the original and simplified texts included in one semantic pair allowed us to systematize the types of alignment for the Kazakh language (see Table 2).

As shown in Table 2, a total of six types of alignment were identified:

1.  $1 \rightarrow 1$  – deriving one sentence in a simplified version from one sentence in the original text;
2.  $1 \rightarrow N$  – deriving two or more sentences in a simplified version from one sentence of the original text;
3.  $N \rightarrow 1$  – deriving one sentence in a simplified version from two or more sentences of the original text;
4.  $N \rightarrow N$  – deriving two or more sentences in a simplified version from two or more sentences of the original text;
5.  $1 \rightarrow 0$  – deletion of one sentence of the original text in a simplified version;
6.  $N \rightarrow 0$  – deletion of two or more sentences of the original text in a simplified version.

The frequency of these types for the two levels is expressed as a percentage relative to the total number of pairs. These data are used to identify dominant and auxiliary strategies in the Kazakh language simplification model.

TABLE 2  
STRUCTURAL ALIGNMENT TYPES

| No | Alignment type    | $O \rightarrow A1$ (%) | $O \rightarrow A2$ (%) |
|----|-------------------|------------------------|------------------------|
| 1  | $1 \rightarrow 1$ | 47.9%                  | 62.7%                  |
| 2  | $1 \rightarrow N$ | 15%                    | 11.4%                  |
| 3  | $N \rightarrow 1$ | 2.5%                   | 3.1%                   |
| 4  | $N \rightarrow N$ | 8.1%                   | 9.5%                   |
| 5  | $1 \rightarrow 0$ | 23.3%                  | 12%                    |
| 6  | $N \rightarrow 0$ | 2%                     | 0%                     |

In both simplified variants, the predominant form of alignment is the  $1 \rightarrow 1$  structure ( $A1 - 47.9\%$ ,  $A2 - 62.7\%$ ), which indicates a tendency to maintain the “one sentence = one sentence” correspondence during the simplification process. The higher frequency of this type in version A2 indicates a greater degree of preservation of the original sentences at this level compared to A1. This difference is considered as one of the fundamental indicators of the gradation of simplification levels in the Kazakh language.

The second typical feature is that type  $1 \rightarrow 0$  (deletion) occurs at the A1 level almost twice as often as at the A2 level ( $A1 - 23.3\%$ ,  $A2 - 12\%$ ), which indicates a more intensive reduction of content at the initial simplification level. Thus, A1-level texts are formed primarily by actively reducing content, rather than by reconstructing structures.

An additional indicator for the A1 level is the higher frequency of type  $1 \rightarrow N$  (division), reflecting the tendency to split complex syntactic constructions into several simple sentences. Types  $N \rightarrow 1$  and  $N \rightarrow 0$  are characterized by low frequency and, although they are not dominant, perform an auxiliary function in the simplification structure.

The alignment of changes according to the world practice standard allowed us to more clearly define the linguistic mechanisms and their frequency for the Kazakh language, this can also serve as a basis for automation.

### B. Linguistic Simplification Mechanisms

While the types of alignment in the simplification process make it possible to determine what happens to sentences, the next step is to describe and explain exactly how simplification is implemented within these structures. In this regard, further analysis is aimed at identifying internal language operations. In this context, the operation is considered as a minimal linguistic action in the simplification process. Such operations are implemented at two levels – lexical and syntactic, which function in interrelation.

The simplification system for levels A1 and A2 is formalized based on quantitative frequency indicators of operations performed at these levels. The combination of frequency indicators of these operations forms a linguistic model that can be used in the training of automatic simplification systems.

In the framework of this study, 2 stable frequency zones are identified: 1) frequent; 2) rare and unstable operations. Accordingly, from this we deduce the model into two main zones, which can be interpreted as core and peripheral. This gradation forms the basis for adapting the simplification system while maintaining the semantic integrity of the text.

For a reader with an insufficient level of language proficiency when reading the source text, unfamiliar or rare words are the main obstacle to understand the text. In addition, variable word meanings, contextual dependence, and idiomatic expressions also make it difficult to interpret the text. Lexical changes are aimed at reducing cognitive and semantic load and are achieved through reworking the vocabulary. Along with lexical complexity, sentence structure (subordinate complex sentences, complex grammatical constructions) also requires simplification. These are syntactic operations.

In our simplification process, we grouped 7 lexical and 9 syntactic transformation operations (see Table 3). Data annotation was carried out manually by linguists, each operation was assigned an internal tag (L1, L2 ...). The following analysis focuses on their distribution and functional role within the model.

TABLE 3  
FREQUENCY OF LINGUISTIC OPERATIONS

| Operation type | Operation tag | Meaning                                                                    | Tag frequency in A1 simplification | Tag frequency in A2 simplification | O → A1 (%) | O → A2 (%) |
|----------------|---------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------|------------------------------------|------------|------------|
| Lexical        | L1            | Replacement of an abstract word with concrete                              | 7                                  | 2                                  | 1.4%       | 0.4%       |
|                | L2            | Replacement of word with its widely known synonym                          | 103                                | 143                                | 21.4%      | 29.7%      |
|                | L3            | Complex word deletion                                                      | 220                                | 107                                | 45.8%      | 22.2%      |
|                | L4            | Explanatory word addition                                                  | 4                                  | 63                                 | 0.8%       | 13.1%      |
|                | L5            | Removal of specialized terminology                                         | 9                                  | 10                                 | 1.8%       | 2%         |
|                | L6            | Reference clarification                                                    | 3                                  | 2                                  | 0.6%       | 0.4%       |
|                | L7            | Adding linking (cohesive) elements                                         | 17                                 | 33                                 | 3.5%       | 6.8%       |
| Syntactic      | S1            | Sentence splitting                                                         | 107                                | 88                                 | 22.9%      | 18.3%      |
|                | S2            | Sentence merging                                                           | 12                                 | 8                                  | 2.5%       | 1.6%       |
|                | S3            | Word reordering                                                            | 1                                  | 2                                  | 0.2%       | 0.4%       |
|                | S4            | Subordinate structures simplification                                      | 1                                  | 2                                  | 0.2%       | 0.4%       |
|                | S5            | General syntax simplification without an explicit SPLIT / MERGE operation. | 188                                | 231                                | 39.1%      | 48.1%      |
|                | S6            | Proposition deletion                                                       | 121                                | 51                                 | 25.2%      | 10.6%      |
|                | S7            | Tense simplification                                                       | 3                                  | 4                                  | 0.6%       | 0.6%       |
|                | S8            | Replacement of derived forms with non-derived forms                        | 1                                  | 1                                  | 0.2%       | 0.2%       |
|                | S9            | Complex case form simplification                                           | 3                                  | 2                                  | 0.6%       | 0.4%       |

At the lexical level, the most frequent changes for A1 level are the deletion of a compound word (45.8%) and the replacement of a word with a synonym (21.4%). For level A2, these types of lexical simplification also remain the leading ones, however, in the reverse hierarchy. When comparing the levels, the deletion of a complex word at the A1 level is carried out almost twice as often as at the A2 level (45.8% → 22.2%). This indicates that at the A2 level most of the complex words are preserved and replaced by alternative units, whereas at the A1 level there is strongly pronounced lexical reduction. This is also evidenced by the higher relative frequency of synonymous substitution operations at the A2 level (29.7%).

Another significant inter-level difference is frequent use of the lexical addition with an explanatory function at the A2 level (13.1%), whereas at the A1 level this operation is rarely used (0.8%). As an auxiliary lexical operation, the addition of connecting (cohesive) elements (3.5% and 6.8%, respectively) is highlighted, which play an important role in ensuring the coherence of the text (for example, the addition of words such as *therefore*, *that's why* (in Kazakh), etc.).

At the syntactic level, the most frequent operation for both levels is the general simplification of the syntactic structure of a sentence (A1 – 39.1%, A2 – 48.1%), which includes changes that are not limited solely to the mechanisms of division and unification. The next most frequent operation is the splitting of a complex sentence into several simple ones (A1 – 22.9%, A2 – 18.3%).

The A1 level is also characterized by a high frequency of proposition deletion (25.2%), whereas at the A2 level this indicator is significantly lower (10.6%). This reflects the tendency to delete fragments containing secondary information, because they do not contribute to the core propositional content of the text. The remaining types of syntactic operations belong to the peripheral layer of the model and perform an auxiliary function in the process of manual simplification.

The conclusion following from the data obtained is that for the Kazakh language, lexical reduction and syntactic reduction at the A1 level form a single reductive mechanism, and at the A2 level, lexical preservation and syntactic restructuring form a conservation-reorganization model.

### C. Empirical Implementation of the Simplification Model

#### 1 Lexical transformations

The most common type of lexical simplification in the transition from the original to level A1 was the deletion of complex words (L4), accounting for 45.8% of all lexical changes. This operation is aimed at reducing semantic complexity for beginning language learners.

For example, in the educational text “The Solar System” the original sentence O8 was simplified to level A1 by removing complex words such as «*едәуір, эклиптика, жазықтығына, көлбеу*» (Eng.: “significantly”, “ecliptic”, “plane” and “inclination”). These words were deemed too difficult for beginner learners to understand (see Table 4).

TABLE 4  
COMPLEX WORD DELETION (L4)

| Pair ID | Sentence ID                           | Text name                                 | Sentence                                                                                                                                                                            |
|---------|---------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 08      | Original 8 = A1 (8) + A1 (9) = A2 (9) | The Solar System (kaz.: Күн жүйесі)       | O8 Барлық кіші планеталар да үлкен планеталар қозғалған бағытта Күнді айнала қозғалады, бірақ олардың орбиталары едәуір созылыққы және эклиптика жазықтығына көлбеу орналасады.     |
|         |                                       |                                           | Eng: All the small planets also orbit the Sun in the same direction as the larger planets, but their orbits are significantly elongated and located obliquely to the ecliptic plane |
|         |                                       |                                           | A2 (9) Барлық кіші планеталар Күнді айнала қозғалады, бірақ олардың орбиталары созылыққы және эклиптика бетіне қиғашынан орналасады.                                                |
|         |                                       |                                           | Eng: All the smaller planets move around the Sun, but their orbits are elongated and located obliquely to the surface of the ecliptic.                                              |
| 429     | Original 456 = A1 (407) = A2 (455)    | Boy Chasing a Bird (kaz.: Құс қуған бала) | A1 (8) Барлық кіші планеталар Күнді айнала қозғалады.<br>A1 (9) Олардың орбиталары біраз созылыққы.                                                                                 |
|         |                                       |                                           | Eng: All the smaller planets revolve around the Sun. Their orbits are slightly elongated.                                                                                           |
|         |                                       |                                           | O456 Құнанына сүйеніп тұрған Сәтжанның аяғына тұмсығын сүйей Бөрібасар да еңтігін баса алмай келіп шөкесінен жатты.                                                                 |
|         |                                       |                                           | Eng: Boribasar, unable to catch his breath, came up to Satzhan's feet, leaning against his legs.                                                                                    |
|         |                                       |                                           | A2 (455) Құнанына сүйеніп тұрған Сәтжанның аяғына тұмсығын сүйей Бөрібасар да тізерлеп жатты.                                                                                       |
|         |                                       |                                           | Eng: Boribasar came to Satzhan's feet, leaning against his legs.                                                                                                                    |
|         |                                       |                                           | A1 (407) Сәтжанның қасына Бөрібасар тізерлеп жатты.                                                                                                                                 |
|         |                                       |                                           | Eng: Boribasar was kneeling next to Satzhan.                                                                                                                                        |

Similarly, in the fictional text “Boy Chasing a Bird”, the phrases «сүйеніп тұрған, тұмсығын сүйей, ентігін баса алмай, шөкесінен» (Eng.: “leaning against the beak” and “breathing heavily”, “kneeling down”) in sentence O456 were removed during simplification, allowing the original 16-word sentence to be reduced to 5-words while preserving the main plot action (see Table 4).

These examples clearly demonstrate how removing complex words effectively reduces the lexical complexity of a text without significantly losing information.

Replacing words with more common synonyms (L2) was the most common lexical technique used to simplify texts to level A2, accounting for 29.7% of all lexical changes. This method aims to adapt the text to the lexical competence of readers at this level, ensuring the use of words and expressions familiar and common in everyday speech.

For example, in the text “The Boy Chasing a Bird” the word «елең алу» (to startle) in sentence O415 was replaced with the more familiar «есту» (to hear), as the former is rare in everyday speech and may be difficult for beginning readers to understand. Similarly, the expression «аяқ бауын тартқылады» (Eng.: “inclined to fly”) was transformed into «ұшқысы келді» (Eng.: “wanted to fly”) as the original wording is typical of literary texts and does not meet the standards of level A1. Such substitutions improve the text's accessibility, simplify comprehension, and simultaneously preserve the key semantic content (see Table 5).

TABLE 5  
REPLACEMENT OF WORD WITH ITS WIDELY KNOWN SYNONYM (L2)

| REPLACEMENT OF WORD WITH ITS WIDELY KNOWN SYNONYM (L2) |                                    |                                           |                                                                                                                              |
|--------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Pair ID                                                | Sentence ID                        | Text name                                 | Sentence                                                                                                                     |
| 397                                                    | Original 415 = A1 (368) = A2 (415) | Boy Chasing a Bird (kaz.: Құс қуған бала) | O415 Қаз дыбысынан елең алғандай ителгісі талпынып, тұғырынан жерге қонып, аяқ бауын тартқылады.                             |
|                                                        |                                    |                                           | Eng: As if because of the sound of a goose, the falcon stood up from the pedestal to the ground and pulled on his shoelaces. |
|                                                        |                                    |                                           | A2 (415) Қаз дыбысынан елең еткен ителгісі талпынып, аяқ бауын тартқылады.                                                   |
|                                                        |                                    |                                           | Eng: The sound of goosebumps made his falcon twitch and pull on her shoelaces.                                               |
|                                                        |                                    |                                           | A1 (368) Сәтжанның ителгісі қаздың дауысын естігеннен кейін тезірек ұшқысы келді.                                            |
| 267                                                    | Original 274 = A1 (264) = A2 (246) | Totan Batyr (kaz.: Тотан батыр)           | O274 Күресте, ат бәйгесінде, алтын кабақ атуда, жаяу жарыста озып шықсын.                                                    |
|                                                        |                                    |                                           | Eng: May he succeed in wrestling, horse racing, shooting gold, and hiking.                                                   |
|                                                        |                                    |                                           | A2 (246) Күресте, ат жарыста, садақ атуда, жаяу жарыста озып шықсын.                                                         |
|                                                        |                                    |                                           | Eng: Let him excel in wrestling, horse racing, archery, and foot racing.                                                     |
|                                                        |                                    |                                           | A1 (264) Күресте, ат жарыста, садақ атуда, жаяу жарыста мені жеңіп шықсын.                                                   |
|                                                        |                                    |                                           | Eng: May he beat me in wrestling, horse racing, archery, and hiking.                                                         |

In a number of cases, synonym substitution included replacing obsolete or rarely used words with modern, commonly used equivalents, making the text more accessible to modern readers and corresponding to an A2 level of linguistic proficiency. For example, in the text “Totan Batyr”, the old expression «алтын қабақ» (Eng.: archaic version of “archery”), which is virtually unused in modern language, was replaced with the modern version «садақ ату» (“archery”).

A less frequently used text simplification technique for levels A1 and A2 is reference clarification (L6) for rarely encountered or historical words (A1 – 0.4%; A2 – 0.6%). For example, in the work “I was ashamed” by the prominent Kazakh writer Baubek Bulkyshiev, there are words that require clarification for adequate comprehension by students. For example, the original sentence

«Мен де ыстық күнде күні, басыма бөрік киіп, белімді буынып алып жүруге әбден үйреніп алдым»

(Eng: I, too, got used to the fact that on a hot day I wear a hat, a beret on my head and carry it around my waist)

has been simplified with the addition of explanations for complex lexical items indicated using numerical references:

«Мен де ыстық күнде күні<sup>1</sup>, басыма бөрік<sup>2</sup> киіп жүруге үйреніп алдым» (1-Түйенің немесе қойдың жүнінен жасалған қалың ұзын сырт киім. 2-Қалың бас киім).

(Eng: I also got used to wearing a hat<sup>1</sup> on a hot day and a beret<sup>2</sup> on my head" (1 – thick long outerwear made of camel or sheep wool. 2 – thick headdress).

Reference clarification was also used to preserve cultural authenticity of the material. For instance, during the adaptation of the fairy tale “Totan Batyr” special attention was paid to preserving culturally specific terms related to Kazakh tradition. While simplifying the sentence

Жолына ақсарбас<sup>1</sup> шалып аттандырып, бірнеше күншілік жерден жолдастары кері қайтады.

(Eng: Before setting off, the “aksarbas” sacrificial ceremony was performed, and the friends who conducted it returned a few days later)

the word «ақсарбас» was not simplified or replaced with a more common expression; instead, it remained in the text and was explained in footnotes as 1- Береке, бақыт үшін берілетін садақ, құрбандық (мал сойып, ас беру) (Eng.: Sacrificing animals for better times and providing foods for others, charity) to clarify its meaning and cultural context. This strategy ensures an understanding of cultural realities while simultaneously preserving the educational value of the text for language learners, demonstrating how adaptation can combine simplification with cultural awareness.

## 2 Syntactic transformations

Syntactic transformations affected the organization of the utterance and were aimed at reducing formal complexity. The most common operations were the splitting complex syntactic constructions into simpler ones, as well as the merging of sentences when this ensured a more linear and predictable structural unfolding. Additionally, word order reorganizations were observed with a focus on the canonical model, the reduction of subordinate constructions, and a general simplification of syntactic structure without explicit splitting or merging. In some cases, sentences not essential to the main content were excluded, verb tenses were simplified, derived morphological forms were replaced with non-derivative ones, and complex case realizations were reduced.

The most common syntactic adaptation strategy involves simplifying syntactic complexity without explicit sentence splitting or merging (S5). This type of transformation accounts for 39.1% of all syntactic changes at level A1 and increases to 48.1% at level A2. This approach involves simplifying the internal structure of a sentence through more straightforward syntactic design, eliminating overloaded constructions, and reducing the utterance to a more transparent form, which improves the readability of the text while maintaining its semantic integrity.

Splitting complex sentences into several simpler statements (S1) is a key syntactic simplification technique when adapting texts for levels A1 and A2, accounting for 22.9% of changes at level A1 and 18.3% at level A2. For instance, in the tale “Totan batyr”, a 10-word sentence is not technically very long. However, the specific syntactic organization and the way the components of the utterance are connected significantly complicate its comprehension on first reading. Therefore, during the adaptation process, a decision was made to split this construction into two independent sentences. This transformation increased the syntactic transparency of the text, facilitated decoding of semantic connections, and brought the utterance structure in line with the cognitive abilities of readers at level A2 (see Table 6).

TABLE 6  
SENTENCE SPLITTING (S1)

| Original                                                                | A2                                                                                                                                  |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| О236 Бірақ сонша алыс жолға ешбір адам жолдас болып баруға жарамайды.   | A2 (206) Күнiкейге баратын жол өте алыс болыпты.<br>(Eng.: The road to Kunikei was very long.)                                      |
| (Eng.: But no one is suitable to accompany him on such a long journey.) | A2 (207) Сондықтан Тотан өзімен бірге баратын адамды таба алмады.<br>(Eng.: Therefore, Totan could not find anyone to go with him.) |

Along with sentence division, the reverse strategy of sentence merging (S2) is also used in the syntactic adaptation process. However, according to the data obtained, this technique is used extremely rarely, accounting for 2.5% of changes at level A1 and 1.6% at level A2. The limited prevalence of this operation is explained by the specific nature of simplification at the initial levels, where priority is given to reducing syntactic load and linearity of structure rather than increasing its complexity through declarative enlargement.

TABLE 7  
SENTENCE MERGING (S2)

| Original                                                                                                                                            | A1                                                                                                                                                              |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| O86 Бір тұсында олар тым ұсақ: 70 сантиметрдің о жақ, бұ жағында ғана.<br>O87 Ал енді бірінде өте ірі – мүйізінің өзі 4 метрден асады.              | A1 (88) Олар кейбір суреттерде өте кіші, ал басқаларында өте үлкен.<br><br><i>Eng: In some images they are very small, while in others they are very large.</i> |
| <i>Eng: In one place, they are quite small — only about 70 centimeters. And in the other, they are very large: the horns alone exceed 4 meters.</i> |                                                                                                                                                                 |

As an illustration, consider the example from the text “Petroglyphs: A World Heritage Entrusted to Our People” where two original sentences were combined into one. The merging is not mechanical, syntactic simplification is accompanied by lexical simplification, resulting in the combined construction being a simple sentence with a transparent structure. This approach demonstrates that merging is only possible with parallel simplification of vocabulary and syntax, which maintains the text’s accessibility for language learners at levels A1 and A2 (see Table 7).

## V. CONCLUSION

Aligning a text with a target proficiency level requires substantial processing, known as simplification, which prior to the introduction of LLMs was carried out mainly manually by linguists and language specialists.

The article defines the main simplification mechanisms detected at A1 and A2 levels for Kazakh. This was determined by solving tasks consisting of several stages: 1) the theoretical framework of the ATS process was defined, the principles of text simplification were identified based on the study of researchers and various corpora. This is important because the Kazakh language has not been studied enough for the ATS, namely, there are no purely linguistic simplification mechanisms; 2) 20 texts in Kazakh were manually adapted to two simple levels and divided into sentences, which were then combined into semantic pairs depending on their semantic correspondence (original → A1 → A2); using these semantic pairs, the types of alignment structures and the frequency of linguistic operations were extracted, which are used to systematize and formalize rules and model for both levels. The analysis revealed that manual simplification implemented through the coordinated application of lexical and syntactic strategies. These strategies aim to reduce linguistic and cognitive complexity while preserving the core meaning and communicative function of the source texts. Sequential adaptation from the original to A1 and A2 ensures a controlled reduction in complexity and allows for the identification of stable patterns of linguistic transformation. This data can then be integrated into automatic simplification formalizations. This research paper can become a source on the Kazakh language, capable of filling theoretical and methodological gaps in NLP, LLM and ATS issues. Given that Kazakh is still considered a low-resource language, our study formalizes these operations as a multilevel linguistic simplification model.

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# The Impact of Integrating Digital Literature Based on Local Wisdom and the "One Value, One Literary Work" Technique on the Creativity in Writing Short Stories

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**Abstract**—The majority of students still have difficulty writing creative short stories. Their weakness lies in the quality and creativity of the short stories. The purpose of this study was to investigate the impact of integrating digital literature and the "one value, one literary work" technique in literature learning on creative short story writing skills. A quasi-experimental method was used in this study involving 250 students. Participants were divided into two groups: the experimental group received digital literature intervention and the "one value, one literary work" technique, while the control group received manual text literary media intervention with conventional instructions. Data collection used several instruments, namely the Short Story Quality Assessment, the Torrance Creative Thinking Test (TTCT), and interviews. The data analysis used was the t-test and descriptive analysis. Research findings indicate that the integration of a digital literary platform based on local wisdom and the "one value, one literary work" technique can improve the quality of short story writing and creativity. Improved short story quality is evident in the appropriateness of theme to content, the completeness of intrinsic elements, the cohesion of intrinsic elements, the complexity of the story, and the flexibility of language. Improved creativity is evident in the dimensions of fluency, flexibility, originality, elaboration, and sensitivity. This research implies that the use of digital literature media and the "one value, one literary work" technique is more optimal in improving the quality of short story writing and short story creativity.

**Index Terms**—digital literature, local wisdom, creative writing, "one value, one literary work" technique

## I. INTRODUCTION

Creative writing is the ability to express imagination and creative ideas through innovative and artistic writing (Effe, 2025; Zhao et al., 2025). Creative writing skills are needed by students to meet the academic demands of higher education. One medium that can be used to practice creative writing skills is writing short stories. The majority of students at the higher education level still struggle to write creative short stories. The majority of students struggle to develop aspects of originality of ideas, creativity, and internalization of local wisdom values in their short stories (Elias et al., 2025; He et al., 2025). This is caused by learning methods that have not been able to optimize imagination and exploration of local wisdom values in their short stories. This problem explains that the potential of local wisdom values has not been optimized in creative short story writing. To overcome these limitations, it is necessary to use digital literature technology, internalization of local wisdom values, and appropriate techniques to facilitate the ability to write literary works and internalize local wisdom values (Dixon & Cox, 2025; Ratri et al., 2025). The use of digital literature can effectively improve writing skills due to access to resources and ease of obtaining alternative ideas. Integration of local wisdom values in literature teaching is very important because it is considered capable of preserving cultural values and producing original and creative short story writing products (Padil et al., 2024; Zhang et al., 2023). This is reinforced by several previous studies showing that integrating local wisdom values and the use of digital literary technology can enrich ideas and creativity in short story writing (Calafato, 2024; Sun, 2023). Furthermore, the integration of local wisdom values can also promote and preserve local wisdom values among students.

The teaching technique that is considered appropriate for bridging local wisdom values with creative writing is the "one value, one literary work" technique. This literary teaching technique is not only able to improve creative short story writing skills, but also able to internalize local wisdom values in short story writing (Levin et al., 2025; Thomas et al., 2025). The use of digital literary media makes it easier for students to access reference sources to enrich ideas, while "one value, one literary work" is able to facilitate students in observing, experiencing, and exploring one local wisdom value (for example, reciprocal cooperation, deliberation, etc.) (Cheng & Zhang, 2025; Elias et al., 2025). This literary teaching technique can train students in analyzing local wisdom values and internalizing them in the literary works they create. In addition, the "one value, one literary work" technique functions as a contextual creativity driver. The success of this technique lies in its ability to make local wisdom values not only as a background, but also as a strength in creating intrinsic elements of creative short stories. This study was conducted to provide empirical evidence on the

causal impact of the "One value, one literary work" technique on improving creative writing skills. The urgency of this study lies in the need to develop more culturally sensitive and context-based literature teaching techniques, which are currently lacking.

Several previous studies have demonstrated the importance of contextual literature and the benefits of structured interventions in teaching creative writing (Waltz, 2025; Wintersparv, 2022). However, no experimental research has explicitly tested the effectiveness of the "one value, one literary work" literary writing technique in internalizing local wisdom values. Previous research has shown that the integration of local wisdom values significantly contributes to the originality of students' creative writing ideas (Prendergast, 2024; Wendimu & Gebremariam, 2024). Furthermore, other research has shown that the integration of local wisdom values also contributes to the recognition and preservation of local wisdom through creative writing instruction (Syam et al., 2024; Zebracki et al., 2025). Furthermore, previous studies have also revealed the contribution of the use of digital literature to creative writing skills (Dixon & Cox, 2025; Ratri et al., 2025). Previous research has revealed that the use of digital literacy technology can enhance creativity in literary writing (Alberti et al., 2022; Kirca & Baktir, 2024). This study differs from previous studies. Its novelty lies in the design and implementation of the "one value, one literary work" technique as a pedagogical model that explicitly aims to bridge the richness of local customary values with creative writing practices. Apart from that, the novelty of this research is the use of digital literature and the integration of local wisdom values in teaching short story writing. Based on this explanation, the researcher formulated the following research questions:

- a) How does the integration of digital literature based on local wisdom and the "one value, one literary work" technique impact the quality of short story writing?
- b) How does the integration of digital literature based on local wisdom and the "one value, one literary work" technique impact the creativity of short story writing?

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

### A. Digital Literature Learning

Current technological developments have impacted the implementation of language and literature learning in Indonesia. This technological development has contributed to a shift in the direction of the language teaching process, from a traditional to a digital one (Celik, 2025; Waltz, 2025). The use of technology has emerged in pedagogical practices to achieve learning objectives and increase learning motivation. The use of technology can make language and literature learning more flexible and effective. This is supported by several previous studies showing that digital-based language teaching can increase motivation and be more effective than conventional teaching (Healey, 2025; O'Sullivan, 2025). Furthermore, the use of technology in literature learning can enhance learners' self-regulation skills because through technology, learners can manage their learning process independently. Digital media technology in language and literature teaching includes various types, such as the use of GenAI technology, web media, digital text, audio-video, and other platforms that can facilitate students' language and literature learning without being bound by space and time (Gerkens, 2024; He et al., 2025). Digital literature learning is the study of literary works using digital media. The use of digital media in instructional design has attracted the attention of practitioners and teachers to optimize teaching.

The use of digital media significantly impacts access to material resources, learning methods, learning processes, learning time, assignments, and learning objectives. The difference between digital-based and traditional literature learning lies in the focus of the learning (Li, 2025; Luchini et al., 2025). Digital-based literature learning focuses on flexibility, accessibility, and learner convenience, while traditional literature learning focuses on adapting to the practical operational needs of learners in the classroom (Connell Pensky et al., 2025; Janebi Enayat, 2025). The use of digital literature in the learning process is expected to stimulate critical, creative, and social thinking in learners. Examples of digital literature platforms that provide various references to short stories and novels in digital form include Wattpad, Storial, Noveltoon, Penana, and KaryaKarsa. These platforms offer a wide range of short story references, both classic and modern (Zhang & Zhang, 2025; Zhao et al., 2025). Furthermore, these platforms facilitate learners' writing and publishing short stories to generate income. This digital-based literature learning not only facilitates learners' improvement of creative writing skills but also enables them to utilize their creative writing skills to earn income. The use of digital literature is also believed to enhance students' creativity in short story writing. This is supported by several previous findings. Digital literature can serve as a medium for elevating local wisdom values in creative writing lessons (Shen & Chen, 2025; Kiziltaş & Kultas, 2025). This aims to ensure that literature learning focuses not only on the beauty of writing and creativity but also on introducing and preserving local wisdom values.

### B. The "One Value, One Literary Work" Technique and Local Wisdom Values

The "one value, one literary work" technique is a literature learning method that aims to train creative short story writing skills while introducing local wisdom values through short story writing (Effe, 2025; Gnerre & Biassoni, 2025). Instilling local wisdom values in short stories aims to encourage learners' creativity in producing short stories while equipping them with the ability to analyze and incorporate local wisdom values into their writing. The one value, one literary work technique also trains students in understanding the dominant local wisdom values within the work, thus

making it easier for them to determine the message of a short story (Castano et al., 2025; Nigar, 2025). Several previous studies confirm that the one value, one literary work technique not only contributes to short story writing skills but also contributes to short story writing creativity (Celik, 2025; Fraver, 2025). This technique stimulates students' creative ideas in designing a creative short story outline, making it easier for them to write a creative short story (Shen & Chen, 2025; Kiziltaş & Kultas, 2025). Local wisdom values are a set of local knowledge, culture, customs, and beliefs. These local wisdom values are derived from the good habits of the local community and serve as a community identity (Alberti et al., 2022; Ratri et al., 2025). Furthermore, local wisdom values are also used as guidelines for life actions to avoid conflict with local societal norms.

Indonesia possesses numerous local wisdom values that must be preserved because they protect society from negative influences and improve public welfare. Local wisdom values are part of the character education curriculum. This is supported by previous studies, which revealed that local wisdom-based literature learning can develop positive character through introducing students to local culture (Padil et al., 2024; Syam et al., 2024). Furthermore, the benefit of internalizing local culture is that it can stimulate learners' creativity in writing short stories. Indonesia has diverse languages, ethnicities, beliefs, and customs. This encourages literature teaching to develop learners with strong cultural literacy. Knowledge of local cultural characteristics contained in literary works provides learners with opportunities to see universal values (Kirca & Baktir, 2024; Sun, 2024). Teaching literature based on local wisdom also facilitates learners' development of cultural understanding, knowledge, and awareness, which contribute to their communication skills. Several previous studies have revealed that local wisdom-based literature teaching designs contribute significantly to several aspects, including literary writing skills and students' understanding of local cultural values (Talbot, 2022; Zebracki et al., 2025). Another study found that WebQuest-assisted literature learning improved narrative writing skills and local wisdom knowledge (Waltz, 2025; Wendimu & Gebremariam, 2024). The use of local wisdom in language learning can also stimulate learners' interest and motivation, especially in second language learning.

### *C. Creative Writing and Creative Thinking Skills Development*

Writing is a complex cognitive skill that develops through four iterative stages (brainstorming, planning, composing, and revising). These stages involve not only language proficiency but also higher-order thinking skills, such as problem-solving, critical thinking, and student creativity (Sun, 2024; Zebracki et al., 2025). Several components can enhance the quality of short stories, including the development of novel ideas, the organization of ideas, the use of rich and complex vocabulary, and the ability to stimulate the reader's imagination (Blikstad-balas et al., 2018; Kirca & Baktir, 2024). The process of generating and organizing ideas reflects individual creativity. Composition in various forms of writing is an expressive approach that students can use to communicate their imaginations to others. In the writing process, individuals use divergent thinking skills to explore new ideas, then convergent thinking to select appropriate ideas and develop these ideas into creative writing (Crystal et al., 2024; Hrastinski, 2025). Teaching creativity and teaching writing share similarities, focusing on the use of scaffolding and active participation to produce creative writing. The combination of language, experience, textual context, and the writer's imagination can produce creative short stories (Calafato, 2024; Sun, 2023). Teaching short story writing is a practical approach to developing language skills, self-regulation, and creative thinking.

This occurs because certain criteria or requirements for writing are required to achieve high scores. Furthermore, writing issues are often predetermined, preventing students from expressing their creative thinking. This learning environment limits students' creative thinking and reduces motivation to write. Furthermore, teachers' workload in allocating time hinders the development of creative writing. Based on these conditions, there is an urgent need to change traditional teaching practices. Revitalizing writing instruction is necessary to increase motivation and provide opportunities for students to freely express their imaginations. This requires a practical and effective teaching approach in writing classes. Teachers play a crucial role in facilitating students' creative thinking, imagination, and motivation to write short stories (Arjomand, 2024; Patterson et al., 2025). Several strategies within a writing learning environment that can enhance creative thinking include recognizing skills, creating interaction, and gathering ideas before writing a short story. Short story writing is the most appropriate writing assignment for improving creative writing skills (Li, 2025; Luchini et al., 2025). Short story writing also provides a task that integrates several of these strategies, providing space for students to develop storylines, use their imagination, and be creative. Currently, teaching literary writing, including short stories, has not received optimal attention in educational practice, so it needs to be explored in the current study. Short story writing assignments consist of standardized and non-standardized stories (Elias et al., 2025; O'Sullivan, 2025). Standardized short stories have several aspects, including characters, events, and timelines. To improve creative writing skills and creative thinking, media are needed that facilitate learners' exposure to various forms of short story writing to stimulate their creativity.

## III. METHODOLOGY

### *A. Design and Participants*

This study used a quantitative approach with a quasi-experimental method to investigate the impact of integrating digital literature based on local wisdom and the "one value, one literary work" technique on enhancing short story

writing creativity. This study involved 250 language education students aged 16-19 years and currently studying in semesters two to seven. The gender composition of the students was 55% female and 45% male. The sample was randomly selected, dividing the participants into two equal groups of 125. The experimental group received an intervention involving the integration of digital literature media based on local wisdom and the "one value, one literary work" technique. The control group received an intervention involving manual print media and conventional teaching. All participants participated voluntarily. Participants received a detailed explanation and completed a consent form prior to participating.

### B. Intervention Procedure

The integration of digital literature based on local wisdom and the "one value, one literary work" technique was used in the short story writing instructional design. The integration of these two components was evident in the stages of teaching creative short story writing. The learning stages are designed to enhance short story writing, foster creativity, and foster understanding and internalization of the local wisdom contained within each story. Detailed stages of the short story writing instructional design, integrated with digital literary media and the "one value, one literary work" technique, are shown in Table 1.

TABLE 1  
STAGES OF THE SHORT STORY WRITING INSTRUCTIONAL DESIGN

| Steps | Detailed Explanation                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
|-------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1     | In the first phase, students were given material on writing short stories and various types of short stories with varying themes using various digital literary media (Wattpad, Storial, Noveltoon, Penana, KaryaKarsa). The material covered the structure, intrinsic components of short stories, and the local wisdom values contained within them. |
| 2     | Students were grouped and asked to analyze three types of short stories each on each platform: Storial, Noveltoon, Penana, and KaryaKarsa. The analysis included the structure, intrinsic components, and local wisdom values contained within the short stories.                                                                                      |
| 3     | The instructor and students discussed to strengthen their understanding of short story writing, including understanding the structure and intrinsic elements of short stories, and agreed within the group to determine the most dominant local wisdom value in each short story using the "one value, one literary work" technique.                   |
| 4     | Students were given the task of determining the outline of their short stories. This outline included the title, intrinsic elements, and the local wisdom values to be included in the short stories. At this stage, students can discuss with their group mates to exchange ideas.                                                                    |
| 5     | Students are given the opportunity to write short stories based on the framework created in the previous stage, taking into account the creativity of intrinsic elements and the local wisdom values that must emerge.                                                                                                                                 |
| 6     | Students can incorporate more than one local wisdom value in their writing, but one must be the most dominant.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
| 7     | Students' short stories are uploaded to digital platforms (Wattpad, Storial, Noveltoon, Penana, KaryaKarsa). Other students can assess their peers and upload their feedback in an online discussion forum. This feedback is intended to improve the quality of their short stories.                                                                   |
| 8     | Students revise their short stories if the feedback is acceptable and re-upload their writings to digital literary platforms, where they can sell their short stories.                                                                                                                                                                                 |

Data collection was conducted using procedures including a pretest to determine initial short story writing skills. After ensuring that all participants in both groups had similar initial skills, all participants in the experimental and control groups received interventions for one semester, or six months. The experimental group received a short story writing instructional design intervention using digital literature integration and the "one value, one literary work" technique, while the control group received a printed or manual literary media intervention combined with conventional teaching. The instructions received by the control group were the same as the experimental group, only the media used were different, namely printed or manual literary media with conventional teaching. After receiving the intervention, all students took a posttest to determine their short story writing skills. Short story writing skills were assessed based on their creativity.

### C. Research Instruments

Data collection used several instruments, namely the Short Story Quality Assessment, Torrance Creative Thinking Test (TTCT), and interviews. The assessment of the quality of short stories was carried out using a short story assessment rubric adapted from Hrastinski (2025). A short story is considered good if it meets the following criteria: the theme is reflected in its relevance to the story content, the completeness of intrinsic elements, the coherence of intrinsic elements, the complexity of the story, and the use of sufficiently flexible language. Assessment uses a Likert scale ranging from 1 to 4, with scores ranging from "poor" to "very good" based on the completeness of the components. This short story assessment was conducted to assess the impact of the intervention of integrating digital literary media and the "one value, one literary work" technique in teaching design.

The level of creativity in short story writing was assessed using the Torrance Creative Thinking Test (TTCT), adapted from Effe (2025). This test uses a creativity scale encompassing several indicators to assess creativity, including fluency, flexibility, originality, elaboration, and sensitivity. Fluency is assessed based on the coherence between paragraphs, including the absence of discordant sentences and paragraphs. Flexibility is assessed by the variety of vocabulary and the perspective used in the short story, ensuring it is not rigid. Originality is the novelty of ideas in each intrinsic element of the short story. Elaboration is the depth and quality of the narrative, which has a complex plot and character. Furthermore, the short story uses a combination of varied vocabulary and novel idioms in each story. Sensitivity is the appropriateness of the short story's ideas to the content and the development of an appropriate story.

framework. To ensure inter-evaluator agreement in evaluating short story creativity, a Spearman coefficient analysis was conducted. The Spearman correlation coefficient analysis showed that the  $r^2$  for the pretest phase was 0.738 ( $p < 0.05$ ) and the  $r^2$  for the posttest was 0.815 ( $p < 0.05$ ). These values indicate that both assessors had consistent agreement on all aspects of short story creativity.

Interviews focused on the experimental group to investigate the impact of the intervention of integrating local wisdom-based digital literature and the "one value, one literary work" technique on short story writing ability and short story creativity levels. Approximately fifty participants were selected as representatives of the experimental group to reveal their perceptions and attitudes toward the intervention. The interview questions encouraged learners to feel more confident in expressing their experiences and perspectives during the learning process. These interviews also provided an opportunity for open discussion among students. The questions used each highlighted the strengths of the learning design, its features, and challenges during the learning process. Examples of questions used in the interviews included, "What is the difference between the current creative writing learning experience and the previous learning process?" and "What are the features of the creative writing teaching design using local wisdom-based digital literature and the "one value, one literary work" technique?" "Was the intervention able to increase your creativity in writing short stories?", and "Was the intervention able to encourage you to express your creative ideas?"

#### D. Data Analysis

Data analysis employed several types of analysis, including normality and homogeneity tests to ensure that the creative writing skills of both groups were equal. Next, a paired sample t-test was used to determine the impact of the intervention on the quality of the short stories they produced. More specific analysis of the creative composition of the short stories was conducted using a paired t-test on the creativity scale. Data normality was tested using the Shapiro-Wilk test with a decision-making level of  $\alpha = 0.05$ , provided a p-value greater than 0.05, indicating normally distributed data. Data homogeneity was tested using the Levene's test with a significance level of  $\alpha = 0.05$ , provided a p-value greater than 0.05. Next, qualitative data analysis was conducted using thematic analysis based on key topics from the interviews. Quantitative and qualitative data analysis were conducted separately and then integrated for interpretation. The triangulated data complemented each other to generate data from multiple perspectives, resulting in robust and comprehensive conclusions.

### IV. RESULTS

#### A. Impact of the Intervention on Short Story Quality

Normality and homogeneity tests were conducted as prerequisite tests. The results of the normality test showed a significance value of 0.70 in the pretest phase and 0.34 in the posttest phase. These values are greater than the 0.05 significance level. From these values, it can be concluded that creative short story writing ability is normally distributed. The results of the normality test for short story writing ability are presented in Table 2. Furthermore, a homogeneity test was conducted using Levene's test with a significance level of  $\alpha = 0.05$  to ensure homogeneous data before further analysis. The analysis results showed that students' short story writing ability had a significance value of 0.56. This value indicates that the p-value is greater than 0.05, thus concluding that the participants came from a homogeneous population and possessed homogeneous creative short story writing ability. The results of the homogeneity test are presented in Table 3.

TABLE 2  
RESULTS OF THE NORMALITY TEST FOR CREATIVE SHORT STORY WRITING ABILITY

|                | Pretest | Posttest |
|----------------|---------|----------|
| Df             | 249     | 249      |
| Mean           | 86.463  | 86.572   |
| Median         | 87.245  | 87.357   |
| Minimum        | 81.04   | 81.10    |
| Maximum        | 96.04   | 96.05    |
| Std. Deviation | 4.325   | 4.475    |
| Sig.           | .072    | .250     |

TABLE 3  
RESULTS OF THE HOMOGENEITY TEST OF CREATIVE SHORT STORY WRITING SKILLS

|                                      | Levene Statistic | df1 | df2   | Sig. |
|--------------------------------------|------------------|-----|-------|------|
| Based on Mean                        | .586             | 1   | 53    | .456 |
| Based on Median                      | .295             | 1   | 56    | .586 |
| Based on Median and with adjusted df | .296             | 1   | 50.35 | .592 |
| Based on trimmed mean                | .585             | 1   | 57    | .453 |

Descriptive statistical analysis was used to evaluate the average scores during the pretest and posttest phases of essay writing skills. A more detailed assessment was conducted on each aspect, including the appropriateness of the theme to the story content, the completeness of the intrinsic elements, the cohesiveness of the intrinsic elements, the complexity

of the story, and the use of flexible language. The results of the analysis are shown in Table 4. All aspects of short story quality in the experimental group showed better scores than the control group in the posttest phase. To investigate significant variations in the improvement of each aspect of writing skills between the experimental and control groups, a one-way ANCOVA analysis was used. After controlling for pretest scores, Table 5 presents the results of the ANCOVA analysis related to the overall short story writing skills of both groups. The analysis revealed a significant difference between the posttest results of the two groups. The experimental group's score [ $F(1, 65) = 81.63, p < 0.00, \eta^2 = 0.52$ ] indicates that they are better writers than the control group.

TABLE 4  
RESULTS OF DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICAL ANALYSIS OF THE PRETEST AND POSTTEST PHASES

| Writing Aspect                          | Group      | N   | Mean | Std. deviation | Std. error mean |
|-----------------------------------------|------------|-----|------|----------------|-----------------|
| Pre-matching the theme to the content   | Experiment | 125 | 5.65 | 0.59           | 0.17            |
|                                         | Control    | 125 | 5.63 | 0.68           | 0.18            |
| Post- theme suitability with content    | Experiment | 125 | 8.42 | 1.15           | 0.25            |
|                                         | Control    | 125 | 6.74 | 1.24           | 0.24            |
| Pre-completeness of intrinsic elements  | Experiment | 125 | 6.25 | 0.68           | 0.17            |
|                                         | Control    | 125 | 6.14 | 0.82           | 0.19            |
| Post-completeness of intrinsic elements | Experiment | 125 | 8.46 | 0.84           | 0.16            |
|                                         | Control    | 125 | 6.78 | 1.08           | 0.28            |
| Pre-integration of intrinsic elements   | Experiment | 125 | 5.48 | 1.12           | 0.31            |
|                                         | Control    | 125 | 5.74 | 1.24           | 0.30            |
| Post-integration of intrinsic elements  | Experiment | 125 | 8.47 | 1.08           | 0.24            |
|                                         | Control    | 125 | 6.46 | 1.36           | 0.28            |
| Pre-complexity of the story             | Experiment | 125 | 5.38 | 0.69           | 0.16            |
|                                         | Control    | 125 | 5.46 | 0.93           | 0.20            |
| Post-complexity of the story            | Experiment | 125 | 7.46 | 1.36           | 0.27            |
|                                         | Control    | 125 | 6.35 | 1.52           | 0.24            |
| Pre- Local wisdom values                | Experiment | 125 | 5.38 | 0.69           | 0.16            |
|                                         | Control    | 125 | 5.46 | 0.93           | 0.20            |
| Post- Local wisdom values               | Experiment | 125 | 8.46 | 1.40           | 0.34            |
|                                         | Control    | 125 | 6.35 | 1.62           | 0.26            |
| Pre-Language flexibility                | Experiment | 125 | 5.86 | 0.68           | 0.15            |
|                                         | Control    | 125 | 5.75 | 0.85           | 0.20            |
| Post-language flexibility               | Experiment | 125 | 8.48 | 1.35           | 0.26            |
|                                         | Control    | 125 | 6.37 | 1.57           | 0.24            |

TABLE 5  
RESULTS OF ANCOVA ANALYSIS OF DIFFERENCES IN WRITING ABILITY OF THE TWO GROUPS

| Source                               | Type III sum of squares | df | Mean square | F      | Sig. | Partial Eta squared |
|--------------------------------------|-------------------------|----|-------------|--------|------|---------------------|
| Pre-writing performance (Covariates) | 53.24                   | 1  | 53.24       | 184.42 | 0.00 | 0.94                |
| Groups                               | 16.53                   | 1  | 16.53       | 78.52  | 0.00 | 0.51                |

### B. Impact of Intervention on Short Story Creativity

The next analysis was the compositional creativity analysis of students' short stories as a result of the intervention of integrating local wisdom-based digital literature and the "one value, one literary work" technique. The results of the short story compositional creativity analysis are presented in Table 6. The analysis showed that overall short story writing creativity in the experimental group showed a significant increase from the pretest phase with a score of ( $M = 21.54, SD = 4.36$ ) to the posttest with a score of ( $M = 26.86, SD = 5.36$ ),  $t(26) = 5.78, p = 0.000^{***}$ . In detail, each dimension of creativity also showed significant improvement. The fluency dimension experienced a significant increase with pretest scores:  $M = 4.86, SD = 0.98$ ; posttest:  $M = 6.84, SD = 0.98$ ;  $t = 5.86, p = 0.000^{***}$ ). The increase in the fluency dimension is seen in the use of smooth, coherent, and cohesive sentences and paragraphs. Furthermore, the flexibility dimension also increased significantly with a value (Pretest:  $M = 4.68, SD = 0.75$ ; Posttest:  $M = 6.78, SD = 0.94$ ;  $t = 5.72, p = 0.000^{***}$ ). The increase in the flexibility dimension is seen in the use of more varied language, the use of flexible local wisdom values in each story. The increase in the originality dimension is seen in creative and unpredictable story ideas, resulting in a complex and creative storyline. The increase in the originality dimension shows a value (Pretest:  $M = 4.58, SD = 0.68$ ; Posttest:  $M = 6.84, SD = 0.98$ ;  $t = 6.58, p = 0.000^{***}$ ). The elaboration dimension also showed a significant increase (Pretest:  $M = 4.74, SD = 0.75$ ; Posttest:  $M = 7.45, SD = 0.92$ ;  $t = 6.85, p = 0.000^{***}$ ). The increase in the elaboration dimension was evident in the ability to express ideas using complex language and the complexity of each story sequel. The sensitivity dimension also increased (Pretest:  $M = 4.76, SD = 0.74$ ; Posttest:  $M = 6.74, SD = 0.88$ ;  $t = 5.62, p = 0.000^{***}$ ). The increase in the sensitivity dimension was evident in the adjustment of local wisdom values to the short story theme. From the analysis of each creativity dimension, it can be concluded that the integration of local wisdom-based digital literature and the one value per work technique significantly increased short story creativity.

TABLE 6  
RESULTS OF THE PAIRED T-TEST FOR SHORT STORY COMPOSITION CREATIVITY

|             | N   | Pretest |      | Posttest |      | t     | df  | p       | ES   |
|-------------|-----|---------|------|----------|------|-------|-----|---------|------|
|             |     | M       | SD   | M        | SD   |       |     |         |      |
| Fluency     | 250 | 4.64    | .92  | 6.84     | .98  | -5.86 | 249 | .000*** | .92  |
| Flexibility | 250 | 4.68    | .75  | 6.78     | .94  | -5.72 | 249 | .000*** | .99  |
| Originality | 250 | 4.58    | .68  | 6.84     | .98  | -6.58 | 249 | .000*** | 1.20 |
| Elaboration | 250 | 4.74    | .75  | 7.45     | .93  | -6.85 | 249 | .000*** | 1.12 |
| Sensitivity | 250 | 4.76    | .74  | 5.86     | .88  | -6.74 | 249 | .000*** | .99  |
| Total       | 250 | 21.54   | 4.36 | 26.86    | 5.36 | -5.78 | 249 | .000*** | 1.12 |

### C. Students' Perspectives on the Creative Short Story Writing Instructional Design

The previous quantitative analysis demonstrated that the intervention improved the quality of short story writing and creativity. A qualitative analysis was then conducted to strengthen the quantitative findings. The qualitative analysis was conducted thematically, focusing on the intervention's contribution, the intervention's instructional design features, the intervention's constraints, and the experiences that differed from previous instruction. Interview analysis findings indicated that the intervention significantly contributed to the quality of short story writing and creativity. Further findings revealed that the creative short story writing instructional design possessed several features that students perceived as significantly contributing to their short story writing skills. Furthermore, interviews revealed challenges during the intervention process. Several students also shared varying experiences while participating in the digital literature intervention based on local wisdom and the "one value, one literary work" technique. For more details, the following is a detailed explanation of the following interview excerpts based on the aspects revealed above.

The first aspect is the contribution of the creative short story writing instructional design using digital literature based on local wisdom and the "one value, one literary work" technique. Students felt the intervention contributed to improving their creative thinking skills, understanding the local wisdom values contained in short stories, designing short story outlines, and writing them. Below are some excerpts from student interviews that illustrate the contributions they experienced.

*"Digital literature based on local wisdom and the one-value-one-work technique encouraged me to think creatively in designing the intrinsic elements of short stories. For example, I got ideas for characters and plots that were difficult to predict from digital literature".*

*"I learned many lessons about local wisdom values from various short stories I found on digital literature platforms such as Storial, Noveltoon, Penana, and KaryaKarsa. These local wisdom values broadened my knowledge and gave me the skills to incorporate these values into the short stories I wrote".*

*"Teaching literature using the one value, one literary work technique also gave me the ability to analyze and determine the local wisdom values contained in short stories. Furthermore, this technique helped me understand various local wisdom values and empowered me to instill them in the short stories I produced".*

The next aspect is an analysis of the intervention features of the creative short story writing instructional design using digital literature and the "one value, one literary work" technique. Several students revealed several features that significantly contributed to the quality of their short story writing and creativity. Here are some student quotes that reveal the benefits of the instructional design features.

*"Digital literature features, such as online discussions and feedback, gave me various creative ideas I hadn't previously considered, which I can use to improve the quality of my short stories".*

*"The 'one value, one literary work' technique, which provides students with the opportunity to analyze local wisdom values, enables me to analyze local wisdom values in short stories, differentiate local wisdom values, and embed these local wisdom values into the intrinsic elements of my short stories".*

*"Another very important feature of several digital literature platforms is the literary sales feature, which gives students the opportunity to sell their writing through the platform while simultaneously utilizing their writing skills for entrepreneurship. This feature makes me more enthusiastic about writing short stories and improves the quality of my short stories".*

The next analysis focuses on intervention barriers based on interviews with the experimental group. Several students revealed several challenges during the process of teaching creative writing short stories using digital literature and the "one value, one literary work" technique, namely signal issues and a lack of thorough understanding of platform operations. The following are excerpts from student opinions that reveal challenges during the creative writing teaching process:

*"I sometimes have difficulty accessing the digital literature platform because the signal strength is weak, so I have to try again when opening the platform".*

*"My uploaded writing sometimes changes format because I forget to save it. Using the digital literature platform requires me to be meticulous and remember to save my writing on the platform".*

Further analysis was conducted on students' perspectives on the different experiences they had during the intervention process compared to previous teaching sessions. Several students revealed several new learning experiences during the intervention. The following are excerpts from student interviews that reveal their learning

experiences during the intervention. "I gained a new experience from teaching creative writing using a digital literature platform. The instructor gave students the opportunity to sell their writing on one of these platforms and learn entrepreneurship through short story writing".

*"The experience of analyzing local wisdom values and distinguishing them was a new experience for me in learning creative short story writing. Through this experience, I learned that each short story has local wisdom values and how to integrate them into short story writing".*

*"The design of the short story outline made it easier and more creative for me to develop my short story writing. The instructor guided me in designing the outline based on intrinsic elements and facilitated access to the digital literature platform".*

Overall, student responses to the creative writing intervention using the digital literature platform and the one value, one literary work technique were positive. This creative short story writing instructional design significantly contributed to the quality of students' short story writing and creativity. Furthermore, they were given the opportunity to optimize their short story writing skills in the field of digital entrepreneurship. So, it can be concluded that the results of the qualitative analysis complement the quantitative findings which confirm that this creative writing teaching design intervention is able not only to improve the quality of short story writing, but also to increase the creativity of short story writing.

## V. DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to investigate the impact of integrating a digital literature platform based on local wisdom and the "one value, one literary work" technique on the quality of short story writing and creativity. The findings indicate that this intervention improved the quality of short story writing. This improvement occurred because the instructional design, which integrated digital literature based on local wisdom and the "one value, one literary work" technique, facilitated students' understanding of good short story writing. Through several literary platforms, students were given the opportunity to become familiar with various types of short stories with diverse local wisdom values. Through this introduction, students also gained an understanding of the structure and structure of short story outlines. The improvement in short story quality was evident in several indicators, including the appropriateness of the theme to the content, the completeness of the intrinsic elements, the cohesion of the intrinsic elements, the complexity of the story, and the flexibility of the language. This finding supports previous studies that demonstrated that digital literature learning facilitates students' understanding of various types of literary works, thus enhancing their knowledge in short story writing (Gerkens, 2024; Healey, 2025). This finding also aligns with literary learning theory, which suggests that students' understanding of literature can be enhanced through the presentation of various types of literary works and hands-on practice in creating them (Celik, 2025; Sun, 2024).

The next finding is the integration of the one value, one literary work technique in the teaching design provides a significant contribution to the ability to analyze local wisdom values and the ability to instill local wisdom values in short stories. The one value, one literary work technique promotes the introduction of local wisdom values through creative short story writing. The ability to analyze local wisdom values on the platform and instill local wisdom values in the short stories they produce in students increases because the one value, one literary work technique encourages students to find the most dominant values. Students are given the opportunity to analyze local wisdom values that intensively appear in short stories. This finding is in accordance with the theory that the one value, one literary work technique is considered effective in introducing local wisdom values to students through creative writing (Iyamuremye et al., 2024; Wendimu & Gebremariam, 2024). Knowledge of local wisdom values also encourages creative thinking skills in producing short story writing. Determining local wisdom values influences the intrinsic elements in it, for example the plot, character traits, and settings of the short story, this is what drives students' creative ideas in writing short stories (Sun, 2024; Zebracki et al., 2025). This finding is further supported by a previous study, which showed that instilling local wisdom values in short story writing lessons can stimulate students' creative thinking, leading to the production of creative short stories (Kirca & Baktir, 2024; Nursalam et al., 2024). Furthermore, instilling creative values in short stories can also improve the quality of short story writing, leading to more meaningful messages.

The next finding is that the creative writing instructional design integrated with digital literature platforms and the value of one value for one literary work can improve short story creativity. This increase in short story creativity is due to several features in the creative writing instructional design, including easy and unlimited access to resources with various types of short stories through various digital literature platforms and the "one value, one literary work" technique that encourages students to discover the values of local wisdom contained in short stories. The increase in short story creativity is evident in all dimensions of creativity, namely the dimensions of Fluency, Flexibility, Originality, Elaboration, and Sensitivity. The increase in the fluency dimension is evident in the use of sentences and paragraphs that are smooth, coherent, and cohesive. The increase in the flexibility dimension is evident in the use of more varied language, the flexible use of local wisdom values in each story. The increase in the originality dimension is evident in creative and unpredictable story ideas that produce complex and creative storylines. The increase in the elaboration dimension is evident in the ability to express ideas with complex language and the complexity of each story sequel. The increase in the sensitivity dimension is evident in the adjustment of local wisdom values to the short story theme. This finding is supported by the theory of literary learning that digital literary platform technology can not only



improve the quality of short story writing but also enhance short story creativity (Jing, 2023; Zhang et al., 2023). This finding is reinforced by a previous study, which showed that digital literary platform technology can enhance students' literary writing creativity (Hollis, 2023; Hrastinski, 2025). Furthermore, another study also confirmed that the "one value, one literary work" technique can improve the ability to analyze local wisdom values and instill these values in literary writing (Calafato, 2024; Crystal et al., 2024).

The qualitative findings revealed several important aspects, including the first aspect, the contribution of the creative short story writing instructional design using local wisdom-based digital literature and the "one value, one literary work" technique. Students perceived the intervention's contribution to improving their creative thinking skills, understanding local wisdom values contained in short stories, designing short story outlines, and writing them. The next aspect involved an analysis of the intervention features of the creative short story writing instructional design using digital literature and the "one value, one literary work" technique. Several students identified features that significantly contributed to short story writing quality and creativity. Further analysis focused on the barriers to the intervention, derived from interviews with the experimental group. Further analysis was conducted on students' perspectives on the different experiences gained during the intervention process compared to previous teaching. These different experiences included digital entrepreneurship through a digital literature platform, analyzing local wisdom values, distinguishing and integrating them into short story writing, and designing a short story framework that made things easier for me. These findings are supported by previous studies showing that the integration of digital literature platform technology and literature learning techniques can optimize students' literary writing potential through a supportive learning environment (Barwasser et al., 2025; Dixon & Cox, 2025). The digital learning environment's most significant contribution to the learning process, learning experience, and outcomes was deemed more optimal and effective (Shen & Chen, 2025; Kiziltaş & Kultas, 2025). The combination of conventional learning techniques and digital technology in literature learning can encourage the emergence of creative ideas, enabling students to think creatively in producing creative and high-quality short stories.

## VI. CONCLUSION

The integration of a local wisdom-based digital literature platform and the "one value, one literary work" technique in literature teaching can improve the quality of short story writing and creativity. Improved short story quality is evident in several aspects, including the appropriateness of the theme to the content, the completeness of the intrinsic elements, the cohesion of the intrinsic elements, the complexity of the story, and the flexibility of the language. Improved short story writing creativity is evident across all dimensions: fluency, flexibility, originality, elaboration, and sensitivity. Improved fluency is evident in the use of fluent, coherent, and cohesive sentences and paragraphs. Improved flexibility is evident in the use of more varied language and the flexible use of local wisdom values in each story. Improved originality is evident in creative and unpredictable story ideas, resulting in complex and creative storylines. Improved elaboration is evident in the ability to express ideas using complex language and the complexity of each story's sequel. Improved sensitivity is evident in the alignment of local wisdom values with short story themes. Thus, it can be concluded that the integration of the use of digital literary platforms and the one value, one literary work technique is not only able to improve the quality of short stories, but also able to increase the creativity of short stories. In addition, this intervention is also able to improve the ability to analyze local wisdom values in short stories. This study implies that the use of technology and conventional methods in teaching literature can optimize students' creative writing skills. Competence improvement is not only in the quality of the writing but also in the creativity of the writing results. This study has several limitations, including the use of technology focused on the type of digital literary platform, the literary works used are only one type, namely short stories, the measurement of creative writing competency is only focused on quality and creativity, only involved samples at the tertiary level, the analysis has not considered gender variables. Based on these limitations, the researcher recommends several suggestions for further studies, including the technology used can be combined between GenAI and platforms or with Web-based, the literary works that are targeted need to be tried on other types, such as poetry, the measurement of creative writing competency needs to be expanded in terms of indicators, the samples involved must be more varied, for example involving high school and college levels, and gender variables need to be considered which may influence creative writing competency.

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# Echoes of the Unspoken: Comparative Poetics of Silence and Speech Breakdown in *Ca Dao* and Anglo-Scottish Ballads

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**Abstract**—This study investigates the cross-cultural poetics of silence and speech breakdown in Vietnamese *ca dao* and Anglo-Scottish ballads through an integrated Form–Cognition–Affect–Culture framework. Combining corpus-based and performance analysis, it explores how silence operates simultaneously as a structural device and a culturally embedded act of meaning-making. A comparative corpus of 100 texts (50 per tradition) reveals three dominant mechanisms—ellipsis, truncation, and enjambment—whose distribution reflects contrasting semiotic ideologies. In *ca dao*, silence cultivates communal empathy and indirect moral guidance, aligning with Confucian–Buddhist communicative ethics. In the ballads, by contrast, it generates moral ambiguity and emotional rupture, transforming omission into narrative tension. Quantitative and qualitative findings demonstrate that silence constitutes a generative semiotic field mediating cognition, emotion, and contextual value. The study refines existing theories of performance and aesthetic response (Bauman, 1986; Fischer-Lichte, 2008; Iser, 1978) and introduces a transferable comparative model for analyzing the unspoken across oral traditions. Its implications extend to folklore pedagogy, translation studies, and cultural heritage preservation, highlighting silence as an active agent in intercultural poetics and collective memory.

**Index Terms**—silence poetics, cultural performance, cognitive poetics, comparative folklore, oral tradition

## I. INTRODUCTION

### A. Research Rationale

Silence and the breakdown of speech are not absences within poetic discourse but deliberate, highly structured devices that shape meaning, evoke affect, and guide reception. In oral–lyric traditions, such moments often carry greater communicative weight than articulated speech, marking emotional saturation, cultural propriety, or narrative withholding (Jaworski, 1993; Tannen & Saville-Troike, 1985). Yet despite their ubiquity, silence and speech disruption remain under-explored in cross-cultural research integrating formal, cognitive, affective, and cultural dimensions.

This study examines two traditions whose linguistic and sociohistorical contexts diverge sharply yet whose poetic functions converge: Vietnamese *ca dao* and the Anglo-Scottish ballad. Both arise from oral performance, sustained by rhythm, communal participation, and recurring motifs (Child, 1882–1898; Nguyễn, 2002). While *ca dao* compresses collective sentiment into elliptical lyric fragments open to communal completion, Anglo-Scottish ballads extend narrative arcs in which omission or verbal rupture signals moral tension, concealment, or the ineffable (Atkinson, 2014). In each, the “unspoken” operates not as void but as generative presence embedded in prosody, cognition, and cultural memory (Barthes, 1977; Lotman, 1990).

Foregrounding audience reception—how listeners and readers infer and respond to silence—this research treats the unspoken as both poetic strategy and sociocultural medium. It employs a four-dimensional framework (Form–Cognition–Affect–Culture) to capture the multifaceted nature of silence and speech breakdown, anticipating the model elaborated in later sections. Through this lens, absence becomes an active, meaning-bearing force that reveals the cognitive and affective architecture of oral poetics.

### B. Research Questions

Building on this rationale, the study is guided by three interrelated questions:

- 1) What formal structures and poetic mechanisms realize silence and speech breakdown in *ca dao* and Anglo-Scottish ballads?

- 2) Which cognitive, rhythmic, and narrative processes underpin these phenomena, and how do they function in oral performance?
- 3) How do cultural values and affective norms shape the differing roles and interpretations of the unspoken in both traditions, particularly regarding intertextual resonance and audience reception?

Together, these questions frame the investigation as both a structural inquiry—into the mechanics of omission—and a cultural-semiotic inquiry—into how absence is scripted, performed, and interpreted.

### C. Scope and Limitations

The corpus comprises 50 *ca dao* texts and 50 Anglo-Scottish ballads, selected through thematic stratification across four recurrent domains: love, loss, conflict, and exile. These fields provide a representative cross-section where silence and speech breakdown carry heightened emotional and cultural resonance. The analysis combines close textual and prosodic reading with frequency mapping of silence markers, focusing on texts containing sufficient linguistic data for semantic and intertextual interpretation. Non-verbal or purely performative variants lacking textual documentation are excluded.

While grounded in detailed textual analysis, the study remains attentive to the oral origins, performance contexts, and reception environments of both traditions. This dual focus enables a seamless transition to the *Literature Review* and *Theoretical Framework*, where the unspoken is situated within scholarship on comparative poetics, cognitive theory, affective prosody, cultural semiotics, and reception studies—offering a conceptual bridge between poetics and cultural cognition.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

### A. Literature Review

#### (a). Silence in Poetic and Literary Theory

Silence in poetry is not an inert void or a passive absence but a deliberate structuring principle that animates the sonic, semantic, and cultural dimensions of verse. Barthes (1977) describes silence as the *grain of the voice*—a textured, embodied presence that resists closure while infusing sound with affective density. Bachelard (1969) situates silence within the phenomenology of intimate space, where stillness amplifies the imaginative resonance of poetic imagery. Carson (1995) treats silence as epistemic tension, a purposeful withholding that unsettles fixed meaning and invites interpretive plurality, a function that recent scholarship has likewise identified in contemporary poetry where silence operates as a generative interpretive gap between text and reader (Teegala, 2024). Taken together, these perspectives reveal silence as both a formal and experiential dimension of poetics, shaping composition, performance, and reception alike. Recent studies in poetic ecocriticism likewise show that silence can function as an aesthetic device through which imagery, atmosphere, and affective resonance are intensified within poetic language (Pamungkas, 2024). Recent literary scholarship further demonstrates that narrative silence and ambiguity may also destabilize normative interpretive frameworks, revealing how identity and cultural meaning are negotiated through textual absence (Malcolm, 2024).

#### (b). Speech Breakdown in Oral Traditions

Within oral traditions, the breakdown of speech—manifested through aposiopesis, ellipsis, or repetition failure—rarely signifies communicative collapse. Rather, it serves as a performative strategy that sustains narrative tension and emotional intensity. Bauman (1986) notes that such disruptions typically coincide with moments of moral or affective charge, signalling content too sacred, perilous, or socially delicate to articulate openly. Finnegan (2012) adds that pauses and verbal truncations operate as cognitive catalysts, prompting listeners to infer and imaginatively reconstruct what has been withheld. Through this process, interpretive agency shifts from performer to audience, transforming silence into a site of shared authorship and communal imagination.

#### (c). Silence in Vietnamese *Ca Dao*

In Vietnamese *ca dao*, as explored by Nguyễn (2002, 2004), indirectness and implicature constitute core expressive values. Silence often manifests through truncated imagery or syntactic ellipsis, as illustrated in the verse:

*Thương nhau cau sáu bổ ba,*

*Ghét nhau cau sáu bổ ra làm mười.*

(When there's love, a small areca nut is shared in three;

When there's hate, that same nut is sliced into ten.)

Here, emotional depth is communicated through omission: listeners intuit devotion, sacrifice, and solidarity without explicit articulation. This aesthetic restraint reflects a Confucian-inflected sensibility that privileges harmony and mutual face-saving over direct expression. Silence, therefore, functions not as absence but as a coded medium of affective exchange—one in which meaning is completed through shared cultural inference.

#### (d). Silence in Anglo-Scottish Ballads

In the Anglo-Scottish ballad tradition, codified in Child's (1882–1898) anthology, silence operates as both narrative hinge and moral marker. Atkinson (2014) observes that withheld testimony or unexplained omission often accompanies

climactic crises, as in *The Cruel Mother*, where the protagonist avoids naming her transgression until the supernatural denouement. This strategic withholding heightens moral ambiguity and emotional tension, drawing audiences into an interpretive lacuna that sustains the ballad's tragic resonance. Viewed alongside the elliptical strategies of *ca dao*, silence in the ballads emerges as a distinctly Western form of withholding—one that dramatizes guilt and conscience rather than communal empathy.

(e). *Cross-Cultural Perspectives on Silence*

Comparative studies demonstrate that while silence is a universal communicative resource, its meanings are shaped by cultural convention. Tannen (1985) shows that in some societies silence signifies intimacy or alignment, whereas in others it indexes unease. Jaworski (1993) extends this insight by defining silence as a socially structured absence shaped by semiotic ideologies. Recent sociolinguistic research further suggests that silence may also emerge through processes of “silencing,” where communicative absence reflects tensions between cultural authority, linguistic legitimacy, and social power (Lane, 2023). Yet one might ask whether these contrasts reveal difference or simply distinct inflections of a shared communicative logic. In *ca dao*, silence tends to affirm cohesion and moral balance; in the ballads, it conveys isolation, uncertainty, or stoic endurance. Together, these patterns trace the Cognition–Affect–Culture continuum that underlies both traditions.

(f). *Intertextual Echoes of Silence*

A further dimension of silence lies in its intertextual persistence across generations. In both *ca dao* and the Anglo-Scottish ballads, recurrent motifs and patterns form what Lotman (1990) calls the “semiotic memory” of culture—a repertoire through which meaning is preserved and renewed. In *ca dao*, love verses such as

*Trèo lên cây bưởi hái hoa  
Bước xuống vườn cà hái nụ tầm xuân.* (Phạm, 2024)  
(Climbing the pomelo tree to pick flowers  
Stepping down to the eggplant garden to pluck the tam xuan bud)

retain a deliberate pause before emotional disclosure, sustaining the tension between concealment and revelation. In *Lord Randall*, the refrain “Where have you been, Lord Randall, my son?” postpones the fatal confession until the closing stanza. Both structures transform silence into a mnemonic rhythm that binds memory to affect.

Situated within the Form–Cognition–Affect–Culture framework, these cross-textual correspondences lay the foundation for the theoretical synthesis developed in Section 2.2. Silence in *ca dao* and in the Anglo-Scottish ballads thus appears not as absence but as a dynamic aesthetic principle—one that mediates between structure and emotion, cognition and culture, and bridges the domains of performance, memory, and interpretation.

B. *Theoretical Framework*

(a). *Comparative Poetics*

This study applies Lotman's (1990) concept of the *semiosphere* to situate *ca dao* and Anglo-Scottish ballads as distinct yet permeable semiotic systems. Each operates through its own network of codes—metrical patterns, figurative repertoires, and narrative conventions—that govern the poetic deployment of silence. This perspective extends comparative poetics beyond simple juxtaposition toward an analysis of how silence interacts with both textual form and cultural context.

In *ca dao*, an elliptical verse such as

*Qua đình ngả nón trông đình  
Đình bao nhiêu ngói, thương mình bấy nhiêu.* (Vũ, 1956)  
(Passing the communal house, I tilt my hat to look—tiles as many as my love for you)

withholds overt emotion, while in the ballad *Edward, Edward*, the absence of moral commentary intensifies the ambiguity surrounding patricide. Here, *silence* functions as an umbrella term encompassing withholding, ellipsis, and omission—a generative absence that produces meaning rather than negating it.

(b). *Cognitive Poetics*

Cognitive Poetics offers insight into how audiences process silence and disruption. Fauconnier and Turner's (2002) conceptual-blending theory explains how explicit cues merge with implicit omissions, generating emergent meaning through mental-space integration. Lakoff and Johnson's (1980) embodied schemas—particularly *CONTAINER* (silence as bounded space) and *PATH* (interrupted speech as a journey cut short)—render absence experientially tangible.

These models clarify why a withheld final line in *ca dao* evokes intimacy, whereas abrupt silence in a ballad's dialogue conveys foreboding or moral unease. Extending these cognitive insights to performance highlights how mental representation aligns with rhythm, breath, and expectation in live recitation.

(c). *Affective Prosody*

From cognition to sound, the prosodic dimension of silence—its duration, rhythmic placement, and integration into performance—determines how audiences register the unspoken. Couper-Kuhlen (1992) demonstrates that prosodic cues such as elongated pauses, tempo shifts, and tonal modulation can transform silence into a marked expressive event.

In *ca dao*, a brief pause between parallel lines softens tone and fosters intimacy, inviting collective inference. In contrast, the ballads' extended suspensions before revelation—as in *Lord Randall*—serve dramaturgical ends, intensifying anticipation and emotional release.

(d). *Cultural Semiotics*

Keane's (2003) notion of *semiotic ideology* explains how cultural norms assign moral and aesthetic value to silence. In Vietnamese oral tradition, indirectness aligns with Confucian ideals of relational sensitivity, elevating silence as a socially esteemed form of communication. By contrast, the Anglo-Scottish tradition often codes withholding as stoic endurance, guilt, or supernatural interdiction, depending on narrative context.

Viewed comparatively, silence embodies each culture's moral economy—whether signaling empathy and restraint or guilt and fatal resolve.

(e). *Reception Theory*

The significance of silence also depends on audience engagement. Jauss's (1982) *horizon of expectations* and Fish's (1980) *interpretive communities* conceptualize audiences as active participants in meaning-making. In oral performance, listeners fill narrative gaps and infer motives from what remains unsaid.

A Vietnamese audience, versed in agrarian metaphors within *ca dao*, may decode an image as romantic longing; an Anglo-Scottish audience encountering *The Wife of Usher's Well* might interpret closing silence as acquiescence to the supernatural. Reception theory thus situates interpretation in the interplay among performer intention, text, and audience cognition.

(f). *Integrative Framework*

By synthesizing Comparative Poetics, Cognitive Poetics, Affective Prosody, Cultural Semiotics, and Reception Theory, this study develops a four-dimensional analytical lens—*Form–Cognition–Affect–Culture*—that underpins its methodological design. The framework extends Lotman's semiotic ecology to oral poetics while bridging cognitive, affective, and cultural paradigms rarely unified in earlier scholarship. It ensures that the analysis of silence and speech breakdown remains grounded in formal precision, cognitive plausibility, affective subtlety, and cultural specificity, advancing a cross-disciplinary poetics of silence.

### III. METHODOLOGY AND CORPUS

The methodological framework integrates comparative literary analysis, cognitive poetics, prosodic mapping, and reception study to examine silence and speech breakdown as both formal devices and culturally embedded acts. This mixed-methods design ensures that interpretation remains grounded in textual precision, cognitive plausibility, affective resonance, and socio-cultural specificity, in alignment with the four-dimensional *Form–Cognition–Affect–Culture* schema introduced in Section 2.

#### A. *Corpus Selection*

The corpus includes fifty Vietnamese *ca dao* and fifty Anglo-Scottish ballads, selected to balance thematic breadth with formal comparability. Stratification followed four recurrent domains—love and longing, loss and mourning, interpersonal conflict, and exile—contexts most frequently marked by strategic silences and speech disruptions in oral-poetic traditions.

The *ca dao* texts derive from critically edited anthologies with verified oral transmission records (Nguyễn, 2001; Nguyễn, 2004), ensuring authenticity and fidelity to performance context. The Anglo-Scottish ballads were sourced from Child's *The English and Scottish Popular Ballads* (1882–1898) and Bronson's *The Traditional Tunes of the Child Ballads* (1959–1972), preserving canonical stability while recognising musical and diachronic variation. Incomplete fragments and non-verbal performance elements were excluded to isolate verbal–prosodic structures—the primary domain where silence functions as a compositional and interpretive device. This design safeguards cultural authenticity while enabling systematic comparison of structurally and thematically parallel texts.

#### B. *Analytical Procedures*

##### (a). *Coding of Silence Markers*

Silence was operationalised into three analytically distinct categories:

- **Ellipsis** – omission of expected syntactic or semantic elements;
- **Apophysis** – interruption of an utterance before syntactic completion;
- **Prosodic irregularity** – rhythmic or metrical deviation foregrounding absence or disruption.

Each *silence marker* was coded for its narrative function—emotive withholding, moral ambiguity, or structural transition—to reveal cross-cultural patterns in how absence operates as a formal and interpretive principle.

##### (b). *Prosodic Mapping*

Following Couper-Kuhlen's (1992) framework, silences were measured by pause duration (in syllable-equivalents), tempo modulation, and intensity shifts within performance lines. Particular attention was given to line-final pauses,

enjambment breaks, and rhythm delays preceding climactic or emotionally charged moments. This procedure grounds affective interpretations of silence in verifiable prosodic evidence rather than impressionistic reading.

(c). *Intertextual and Variant Analysis*

Textual variants were examined to identify recurrent motifs and silence structures across time and geography. Diachronic tracking of omission strategies and structurally homologous silences in culturally distinct yet thematically convergent narratives illuminated whether silence functions as a stable cultural constant or a flexible poetic resource responsive to context.

(d). *Reception Study*

To capture interpretive variation, a qualitative reception study was conducted with seventy participants:

- Thirty-five native Vietnamese speakers familiar with *ca dao*;
- Thirty-five native English speakers from Scotland or Northern England familiar with traditional ballads.

Participants (aged 25–65, gender-balanced) were recruited through folklore associations and university networks. They were presented with texts containing marked silences in the original language, accompanied by minimal glossing to prevent interpretive priming. Semi-structured interviews explored emotional responses, inferred meanings, and perceived cultural resonances. Transcripts were inductively coded for recurring interpretive strategies, recognising audiences as active co-constructors of meaning in oral-poetic traditions. All participation followed informed-consent protocols and anonymised reporting in accordance with institutional ethics.

C. *Data-to-Theory Translation Process*

Results from coding, prosodic mapping, and reception study were synthesised through three iterative stages:

- 1) **Coding → Frequency Distribution:** Silence types were quantified within and across traditions to establish statistical patterns.
- 2) **Pattern Mapping → Four-Dimensional Schema:** Findings were plotted onto the *Form–Cognition–Affect–Culture* matrix to visualise intersections among structure, cognition, emotion, and ideology.
- 3) **Interpretive Synthesis:** Quantitative trends were interpreted through Comparative Poetics, Cognitive Poetics, Affective Prosody, Cultural Semiotics, and Reception Theory, ensuring theoretical and methodological integration.

Together these stages transform empirical observation into interpretive insight, linking formal patterning with cognitive and cultural interpretation. Results will be presented in tables and visualisations in Section 4 to ensure analytical transparency.

## IV. RESULTS

### A. *Formal Mechanisms*

In both *ca dao* and Anglo-Scottish ballads, silence operates not as absence but as a deliberate poetic strategy that interrupts, suspends, or redirects interpretation. Three mechanisms dominate the corpus—omission, truncation, and enjambment—each manipulating the linear flow of verse in distinct ways. Their differing frequencies and expressive functions reveal shared formal logic yet divergent cultural inflections.

#### Omission

In *ca dao*, omission often appears as syntactic ellipsis, where key emotional or narrative elements are withheld. Meaning emerges through shared cultural scripts and proverbial repertoires completed by audience inference.

For example:

*Thương nhau cau sáu bổ ba,  
Ghét nhau cau sáu bổ ra làm mười.* (Vũ, 1956)  
(When in love, the sixth areca nut is split in three;  
When in hate, the sixth areca nut is split into ten.)

The couplet omits any explicit declaration of feeling; emotion is encoded through culturally resonant imagery. Such indirectness accords with Vietnamese norms of *nói giảm, nói tránh*—mitigated speech preserving social harmony (Nguyễn, 2001, 2004).

In the Anglo-Scottish tradition, omission builds suspense. In *Edward, Edward*:

*‘Why does your sword so drip with blood?  
Why so sad go ye?’  
‘O, I have killed my hawk so good,  
Mother, mother, O!’*  
(Child, 1882–1898, No. 13)

The son’s evasion conceals patricide until the final stanza, turning silence into moral tension (Child, 1882–1898; Atkinson, 2014).

#### Truncation

Truncation—the sudden break of a line or stanza—creates acoustic interruption and cognitive disjunction. In Vietnamese lyrics it often signals emotional saturation or a refusal to voice the ineffable:



*Chiều chiều ra đứng ngõ sau,  
Trông về quê mẹ ruột đau chín chiều.* (Phạm, 2024)  
(Each dusk I stand behind the gate,  
Looking toward my mother's home, my heart aching ninefold...)

The incomplete ending conveys grief beyond articulation, transforming absence into presence (Nguyễn, 2004).

In the ballads, truncation typically marks narrative climax, leaving decisive events implied. In *The Wife of Usher's Well*:

*It fell about the Martinmas,  
When nights are long and mirk,  
The carlin wife's three sons came hame,  
And their hats were o' the birk.*  
(Child, 1882–1898, No. 79)

The stanza's abrupt close foreshadows spectral return, compelling listeners to reconstruct the unsaid.

### Enjambment

Enjambment functions as temporal and interpretive delay. In *ca dao*, it sustains rhythmic parallelism while deferring closure:

*Trèo lên cây bưởi hái hoa,  
Bước xuống vườn cà hái nụ tầm xuân.* (Ma, 2022)  
(Climbing the pomelo tree to pick flowers,  
Stepping down to the garden to pluck the spring bud.)

The inter-line pause suggests expectancy and concealed desire (Nguyễn, 2001).

In the ballads, enjambment maintains metrical flow while delaying revelation. In *Lord Thomas and Fair Annet*:

*And he has till his brother gane:  
'Now, brother, rede ye mee;  
A, sall I marrie the nut-browne bride,  
And let Fair Annet bee?'*  
(Child, 1882–1898, No. 73A)

The question carried across lines exemplifies enjambment's power to sustain rhythm while postponing resolution (Finnegan, 2012).

The comparative distribution of these formal mechanisms across both traditions is summarized in Table 1 below, which quantifies their relative frequency and functional overlap within the corpus.

TABLE 1  
FREQUENCY OF FORMAL MECHANISMS OF SILENCE IN *CA DAO* AND ANGLO-SCOTTISH BALLADS  
(percentages rounded to the nearest whole number)

| Mechanism     | <i>Ca dao</i> (n = 50) | Anglo-Scottish Ballads (n = 50) | Total (n = 100) | Relative frequency (%) |
|---------------|------------------------|---------------------------------|-----------------|------------------------|
| Omission      | 42                     | 36                              | 78              | 39                     |
| Truncation    | 18                     | 25                              | 43              | 22                     |
| Enjambment    | 27                     | 34                              | 61              | 31                     |
| Combined Use* | 15                     | 22                              | 37              | 19                     |

Note: "Combined Use" denotes cases where two or more mechanisms co-occur within a single poem or ballad.

Source: Author's coding of corpus (Nguyễn, 2001, 2004; Child, 1882–1898; Atkinson, 2014; Finnegan, 2012).

Omission proves the most frequent silence mechanism (39 % of all recorded instances), appearing in 84 % of *ca dao* and 72 % of ballads. This reflects Vietnamese indirectness as a communicative value. Truncation occurs more often in ballads (50 %) than in *ca dao* (36 %), consistent with their narrative reliance on abrupt closure. Enjambment is slightly more prevalent in ballads (68 %) than in *ca dao* (54 %), shaped by the mnemonic demands of performance.

Interpretively, omission in *ca dao* invites collective completion of meaning, turning silence into a gesture of communal empathy. In ballads it provokes moral uncertainty, forcing listeners to weigh competing ethical inferences. Truncation, meanwhile, conveys restraint or muted grief in *ca dao* but injects narrative shock in ballads, leaving conflict unresolved. Enjambment modulates time itself—introspective and inward in *ca dao*, propulsive and anticipatory in the ballad.

Taken together, these findings show that while omission, truncation, and enjambment operate with structural parallelism across both traditions, their interpretive force remains culturally distinct. Within the Form–Cognition–Affect–Culture framework, silence emerges not as void but as a generative field of signification, transforming absence into meaning through the interplay of form, perception, emotion, and cultural ideology.

These formal mechanisms provide the structural basis for the cognitive and affective patterns explored in Section 4.2.

### B. Cognitive–Narrative Patterns

In both *ca dao* and Anglo-Scottish ballads, silence and speech breakdown act as deliberate cognitive–narrative devices rather than accidental lapses. They restructure interpretive frames, adjust emotional pacing, and compel audiences to participate in meaning-making. Across the corpus, silences consistently signal *frame-shift silence*,

prompting reinterpretation of earlier cues, whereas breakdowns interrupt linear storytelling, opening interpretive gaps that listeners fill through inference.

Within the Vietnamese lyric corpus, *frame-shift silences* often appear at emotional or moral climaxes, realised through ellipsis or incomplete clauses. Such absences recontextualise imagery—what begins as a pastoral river scene may, through a withheld phrase, reveal distance or relational fracture.

For example:

*Thuyền về có nhớ bến chăng?*  
*Bến thì một dạ khăng khăng đợi thuyền.* (Ma, 2022)  
 (When the boat returns, does it still remember the shore?  
 The shore, steadfast in heart, waits for the boat.)

Recorded in *Tục Ngữ, Ca Dao, Dân Ca Việt Nam* (Vu, 1956), this verse turns longing into absence: the unanswered question suspends emotional resolution, transforming silence into an implicit negotiation of fidelity. The dynamic reflects conceptual blending theory, where gaps in surface structure integrate distinct mental spaces to create enriched meaning (Fauconnier & Turner, 2002). Vietnamese oral poetics, shaped by *nói vòng, nói tránh* (indirectness), thus treats silence as inferential invitation rather than communicative failure (Vũ, 1956; Nguyễn, 2001, 2004).

In Anglo-Scottish ballads, breakdowns appear as truncations, aposiopesis, or self-interruption—embodiments of grief, guilt, or moral uncertainty. In *The Unquiet Grave*:

*The tears fell from her eyes two by two,*  
*And her heart was like to break;*  
*'Oh stay, my love, one moment more—'*  
*But never a word he spake.*  
 (Child, 1882–1898, No. 78)

The broken plea marks the point where affect overwhelms coherence. Such pauses recalibrate audience expectation, heightening tension and underscoring the unspeakable (Atkinson, 2014).

A dual-function occurrence surfaces in Lord Randall:

*Where hae ye been, Lord Randall, my son?'*  
*'I've been to the wild wood; mother, make my bed soon,*  
*For I'm weary wi' hunting, and fain wad lie down.*  
 (Child, 1882–1898, No. 12)

Here, “make my bed soon” conceals and discloses at once—the euphemism for death reframes earlier imagery while signalling emotional exhaustion. The truncated rhythm merges reframing and rupture into a single performative silence.

These tendencies are summarised in Table 2.

TABLE 2  
 COGNITIVE–NARRATIVE FUNCTIONS OF SILENCE AND SPEECH BREAKDOWN IN *CA DAO* AND ANGLO-SCOTTISH BALLADS

| Mechanism Type            | <i>Ca dao</i> (n = 50) | Anglo-Scottish Ballads (n = 50) | Total (n = 100) | Relative frequency (%) | Primary function                          |
|---------------------------|------------------------|---------------------------------|-----------------|------------------------|-------------------------------------------|
| Frame-Shift Silence       | 38                     | 29                              | 67              | 33.5                   | Reframing earlier narrative or imagery    |
| Narrative Breakdown       | 14                     | 26                              | 40              | 20.0                   | Signalling emotional or cognitive rupture |
| Dual-Function Occurrence* | 10                     | 15                              | 25              | 12.5                   | Combining reframing and rupture effects   |

Note: “Dual-function occurrence” refers to cases where a single silence or breakdown performs both frame-shift and narrative disruption within the same poetic or balladic unit. Percentages rounded to one decimal place.

Source: Author’s coding of corpus (Vũ, 1956; Nguyễn, 2001, 2004; Child, 1882–1898; Atkinson, 2014).

Quantitatively, *frame-shift silences* dominate in *ca dao* (76 %) compared with ballads (58 %), reflecting a cultural preference for implicit moral inference. *Narrative breakdowns* are nearly twice as frequent in ballads (52 %) as in *ca dao* (28 %), consistent with their dramatic narrative design. *Dual-function occurrences* appear in both but are more common in ballads (30 %) than in *ca dao* (20 %), indicating a stronger fusion of reframing and rupture in the latter tradition.

These patterns reveal that silence in *ca dao* functions as interpretive scaffolding, allowing audiences to co-construct meaning within communal ethics. For instance:

*Công cha như núi Thái Sơn,*  
*Nghĩa mẹ như nước trong nguồn chảy ra.* (Phạm, 2024)  
 (Father’s labour as high as Mount Tai,  
 Mother’s love as the spring water flows.)

Here, the omission of explicit moral instruction relies on shared cultural inference, transforming absence into moral resonance. By contrast, ballad breakdowns act as emotive ruptures that unsettle coherence and invite moral reflection. From a cognitive-narratological view, silences recalibrate interpretive frames, while breakdowns create temporal and

affective dislocation, urging listeners to reconcile fragmentation with their own moral and emotional schemas (Fauconnier & Turner, 2002; Keane, 2018).

Ultimately, both traditions render absence a semantically charged presence—an aesthetic and cognitive construct shaped by distinctive cultural logics, performance conventions, and interpretive expectations.

### C. Affective Functions

Building upon the cognitive–narrative findings of Section 4.2, this section examines the affective dimension of silence through both prosodic and semiotic lenses. In both Vietnamese *ca dao* and Anglo-Scottish ballads, silence acts not as the negation of sound but as an affective instrument—a means of shaping emotion through measured pauses, lexical omissions, and narrative ellipses. Analysis of the corpus reveals that both traditions rely on silence to heighten emotional impact, though they do so with distinct cultural inflections.

Table 3 presents the quantitative distribution of affective silences across four categories: anticipatory tension, empathic resonance, mourning or longing, and moral gravitas.

TABLE 3  
AFFECTIVE FUNCTIONS OF SILENCE IN VIETNAMESE *CA DAO* AND ANGLO-SCOTTISH BALLADS

| Function             | <i>Ca dao</i> (n = 50) | Ballads (n = 50) | Notes                                                                         |
|----------------------|------------------------|------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Anticipatory Tension | 14 (28 %)              | 9 (18 %)         | In ballads, linked to suspense; in <i>ca dao</i> , to relational uncertainty. |
| Empathic Resonance   | 11 (22 %)              | 13 (26 %)        | Shared imagery of natural cycles, with differing affective pacing.            |
| Mourning / Longing   | 16 (32 %)              | 19 (38 %)        | Ballads: death and loss; <i>ca dao</i> : separation in love or kinship.       |
| Moral Gravitas       | 9 (18 %)               | 9 (18 %)         | Silence as ethical punctuation reinforcing communal norms.                    |

Note. Coding based on combined prosodic and semantic markers; inter-coder agreement = 0.91 (Cohen's  $\kappa$ ). Dataset ID: SLC-2025.

From a prosodic perspective, silences associated with mourning in *ca dao* often coincide with elongated melodic contours, sustaining emotional resonance and extending the listener's empathic attention (Couper-Kuhlen, 1993). One widely cited verse exemplifies this interplay:

*Gió đưa cây cải về trời,  
Rau răm ở lại chịu đời đắng cay.* (Ma, 2022)  
(The mustard greens are blown to the sky,  
The coriander left behind endures life's bitterness.) (Vũ, 1956)

The temporal pause between the two lines transforms separation into tenderness; emotion is not spoken but felt through rhythmic suspension. Silence, in this sense, mediates between lyric voice and communal empathy, turning absence into affective presence.

Anglo-Scottish ballads, by contrast, often employ truncation or aposiopesis to generate tension or convey moral closure. In *The Unquiet Grave*, the mourner's lament culminates in a moment of unuttered grief:

*The wind doth blow today, my love,  
And a few small drops of rain;  
I never had but one true-love,  
In cold grave she is lain.*  
(Child, 1882–1898, No. 78)

The silence that follows—punctuated by the mourner's withheld voice—extends emotion into time. This technique exemplifies Fish's (1980) notion of affective stylistics, in which textual rhythm regulates both temporal pacing and emotional intensity.

In *ca dao*, silence frequently functions as a gesture of social cohesion, reinforcing relational ethics through implicit understanding. The following verse encapsulates this ethos:

*Bầu ơi thương lấy bí cùng,  
Tuy rằng khác giống nhưng chung một giàn.* (Vũ, 1956)  
(Bottle gourd, love the squash as well;  
Though of different kind, they share one trellis.)

Here, the moral injunction remains unspoken; empathy emerges from shared imagery and communal inference rather than explicit declaration. Silence thus anchors emotional unity within a collective moral frame.

Ballads, meanwhile, mobilise silence as narrative fracture—a site of hesitation and reckoning that draws audiences into the performance itself. Because ballads were composed for oral delivery, the pause or held breath acquires performative power, shaping listeners' expectations and intensifying emotional suspense. In *Barbara Allen*, the moment between utterance and consequence transforms pathos into inevitability:

*O mother, mother, make my bed,  
O make it saft and narrow:  
My love has died for me today,  
I'll die for him tomorrow.*  
(Child, 1882–1898, No. 84)

The withheld commentary between recognition and death embodies silence as moral punctuation—a stillness that marks the boundary between emotion and fate.

This contrast accords with Finnegan’s (2012) observation that oral poetics embed silence within distinct semiotic economies. Vietnamese tradition privileges restraint and relational tact, while the Anglo-Scottish ballad transforms silence into revelation—a performative moment when emotion overwhelms speech. Consequently, silence becomes not merely a structural device but a culturally encoded mode of meaning.

Viewed alongside the cognitive–narrative patterns analysed in Section 4.2, these affective dynamics clarify silence as a cultural and semiotic resource—a medium through which communities articulate emotion, morality, and memory. Silence, far from empty, functions as the texture of understanding itself: it shapes engagement, governs interpretation, and infuses the act of listening with moral and emotional significance. These findings lay the conceptual groundwork for Section 5, where form, cognition, affect, and culture will be synthesised into a cross-cultural model of poetic silence.

D. Cultural Semiotic Variations

The semiotic contrasts between *ca dao* and Anglo-Scottish ballads reveal that silence is not merely an absence of sound but a culturally embedded communicative act. In *ca dao*, silence functions as a relational and moralising device, embedding indirect counsel and fostering communal empathy. Pauses, ellipses, and truncations operate within what Keane (2003) describes as a solidarity-oriented semiotic ideology, in which interpretive gaps are bridged through shared cultural knowledge and collective ethical norms.

An illustrative *ca dao* verse exemplifies this ethic of mutual care and moral inference:

Nhiều điều phủ lấy giá gương,  
Người trong một nước phải thương nhau cùng. (Ma, 2022)  
(The scarlet silk covers the mirror’s frame;  
Those of one nation must cherish one another.)

The imagery of fabric shielding glass conveys solidarity without explicit didacticism. Its moral imperative—to protect and empathise—is implied through poetic restraint. The silence following the verse allows the audience to internalise its meaning, turning absence into ethical reflection and communal resonance.

Conversely, Anglo-Scottish ballads often frame silence as a narrative destabiliser, aligning with Lotman’s (1990) concept of the semiosphere’s border zones, where ambiguity and unresolved tension drive narrative momentum. In *Edward*, the mother’s probing questions and the son’s evasions enact moral fracture:

What bluid’s that on thy coat lap,  
Son Davie, son Davie? ...  
‘It is the bluid of my great hawk,  
Mother lady, mother lady.’  
(Child, 1882–1898, No. 13A)

The silence between question and confession sustains uncertainty, transforming evasion into moral exposure.

The quantitative and functional distinctions observed across the two traditions are summarised in Table 4, which maps the cultural semiotic roles of silence through the integrated Form–Cognition–Affect–Culture framework.

TABLE 4  
CULTURAL SEMIOTIC CODING OF SILENCE IN *CA DAO* AND ANGLO-SCOTTISH BALLADS

| Cultural Tradition     | Frequency of Silence Markers (n = 50) | Dominant Semiotic Function               | Form–Cognition–Affect–Culture Mapping                                                                                 |
|------------------------|---------------------------------------|------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <i>Ca dao</i>          | 34 (68%)                              | Indirect moral counsel, communal empathy | Form: elliptical closure → Cognition: normative framing → Affect: reassurance → Culture: collectivist harmony         |
| Anglo-Scottish Ballads | 29 (58%)                              | Moral ambiguity, unresolved tragedy      | Form: narrative gap → Cognition: interpretive openness → Affect: tension/sorrow → Culture: individual moral reckoning |
| Total / Mean           | 63 (63%)                              | —                                        | —                                                                                                                     |

Source: Author’s dataset, coded according to Section 3 procedures.

The quantitative data indicate that silence markers appear at comparable rates (≈63%) across both traditions, yet their semiotic trajectories diverge sharply. In *ca dao*, these devices reinforce communal ethics, reflecting the high-context communicative ethos of Vietnamese folk discourse (Trần, 2013). The affective register tends toward conciliation, as silence safeguards *hoà khí* (social harmony). The verse

Lời nói chẳng mất tiền mua,  
Lựa lời mà nói cho vừa lòng nhau. (Pham, 2024)  
(Words cost nothing; choose them kindly to please all hearts.)

further illustrates this ethic of restraint, where tactful speech and deliberate silence sustain interpersonal balance.

In the Anglo-Scottish corpus, however, omission and narrative gaps intensify affective dissonance. Rather than invoking resolution, they compel audiences to confront moral tension. A parallel effect appears in *The Twa Corbies*, where knowledge is withheld and morality unsettled:

As I was walking all alane,  
I heard twa corbies making a mane;

*The tane unto the t'other say,  
'Where sall we gang and dine the day?'*  
(Child, 1882–1898, No. 26)

The crows' dialogue, untroubled by human grief, turns silence into the ground of irony and existential unease.

From a qualitative standpoint, this divergence underscores that silence is not a universal signifier but a culturally constructed semiotic resource. The *ca dao* tradition situates the unspoken as a locus of ethical consensus, whereas the ballad tradition turns it into a space of interpretive divergence. This bifurcation demonstrates that even when formal mechanisms—ellipsis, truncation, enjambment—are analogous, their affective valences and cultural functions are mediated by distinct semiotic ideologies.

#### E. Intertextual Resonances

The recurrence of the silence motif across textual variants underscores its function as a cultural mnemonic (Assmann, 1995), embedding individual narratives within collective memory. In Vietnamese *ca dao*, silence emerges through ellipsis and metaphorical compression, creating interpretive gaps that invite contextual completion during performance. This dynamic reflects Lotman's (1990) *semiosphere*, where recurring motifs persist yet adapt across socio-historical boundaries.

A representative *ca dao* exemplifies this elliptical subtlety:

*Chim quýt ăn trái nhãn lồng,  
Lia thia quen chầu, vợ chồng quen hơi.* (Vũ, 1956)  
(The cuckoo eats longan fruit;  
The gourami grows used to its bowl—so, too, do spouses grow accustomed to one another's scent.)

Here, familiar natural imagery conveys intimacy without explicit declaration. Silence becomes encoded understanding—its unspoken message completed through collective recognition and shared moral inference.

If *ca dao* encodes silence as ethical resonance, the Anglo-Scottish ballad reframes it as narrative opacity. In *Lord Randall*, silence withholds causality and moral clarity, sustaining tension and interpretive suspense:

*Where hae ye been, Lord Randall, my son?  
And where hae ye been, my handsome young man?'  
'I hae been at the wild wood; mother, mak my bed soon,  
For I'm weary wi' hunting, and fain would lie down.*  
(Child, 1882–1898, No. 12)

Repetition and rhythmic pauses conceal the truth of poisoning, compelling audiences to infer meaning. Silence thus heightens suspense while preserving moral openness, exemplifying Bauman's (1986) view that oral performance depends on audience participation. This dynamic also supports Assmann's (1995) claim that cultural memory functions through repetition and transformation—a principle Lotman (1990) extends to adaptation within the *semiosphere*.

The comparative distribution and interpretive functions of the silence motif across both traditions are summarised in Table 5, which integrates quantitative frequency with qualitative analysis to illustrate how form, affect, and cultural logic intertwine.

TABLE 5  
QUANTITATIVE–QUALITATIVE CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SILENCE MOTIF IN VIETNAMESE *CA DAO* AND ANGLO-SCOTTISH BALLADS

| Tradition                       | Frequency | Percentage (%) | Formal Features                                       | Emotional Functions                                    | Illustrative Examples                                                             |
|---------------------------------|-----------|----------------|-------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Vietnamese <i>Ca dao</i></b> | 29 / 70   | 41.4           | Ellipsis, metaphorical compression, interpretive gaps | Fostering communal empathy, indirect moral instruction | “Chim quýt ăn trái nhãn lồng / Thia thia quen chầu, vợ chồng quen hơi” (Vũ, 1956) |
| <b>Anglo-Scottish Ballads</b>   | 26 / 70   | 37.1           | Omission of causal links, unresolved conflicts        | Evoking moral ambiguity, sustaining unresolved tragedy | <i>Lord Randall</i> (Child, 1882–1898, No. 12)                                    |

Note. Percentages represent the proportion of silence-related motifs relative to the total corpus (n = 70); rounding = 1 decimal place.

Although the overall incidence of silence is similar ( $\approx 63\%$ ), its semiotic trajectory diverges sharply. In *ca dao*, silence reinforces communal ethics and the high-context ethos of Vietnamese discourse (Trần, 2013), its affective tone conciliatory—guarding *hoà khí* (social harmony). In the ballads, omission and unresolved conflict heighten affective dissonance, prompting audiences to confront ambiguity and moral tension, consistent with the *semiosphere's* creativity through contradiction (Lotman, 1990).

Viewed through cultural semiotics and performance theory, silence emerges as a mediating force that negotiates between stability and transformation. It endures as a cross-cultural device of meaning-making, ensuring interpretive vitality across evolving textual and cultural contexts. These findings converge with Section 5, where silence is analyzed through the integrated Form–Cognition–Affect–Culture model.

## V. DISCUSSION

This discussion integrates the empirical findings with theoretical perspectives drawn from cross-cultural poetics, performance studies, and cognitive semiotics. By synthesizing quantitative patterns (as shown in Table 5, Section 4.5) with qualitative interpretations, it positions the motif of silence within a multidimensional framework of Form ↔ Cognition ↔ Affect ↔ Culture, illustrating how structural omissions operate within wider systems of cultural performance and aesthetic practice (Bauman, 1986; Bial & Brady, 2025; Fischer-Lichte, 2008). The analysis also aligns with audience-oriented approaches that treat meaning as co-constructed through interaction rather than embedded in the text itself (Bennett, 2013).

### A. Intercultural Poetics of Silence

Across Vietnamese *ca dao* and Anglo-Scottish ballads, silence emerges as a shared poetic strategy yet takes culturally distinct forms. In *ca dao*, ellipsis and metaphorical truncation open interpretive spaces that invite audiences to recover moral and relational codes grounded in communal ethics (Nguyễn, 2004). In the ballads, by contrast, silence manifests through unresolved endings or withheld causality, sustaining ambiguity in line with gap-filling aesthetics where interpretive participation is key (Iser, 1978). *Ca dao* registers a marginally higher frequency of silence (41.4%) than the ballads (37.1%), reflecting a preference for social harmony through indirect expression. The ballads, meanwhile, use ambiguity as a means of moral inquiry, often leaving tension deliberately unresolved.

### B. Speech Breakdown as Cultural Performance

Silence is not simply the absence of language; it is a performative act that materializes cultural values in specific contexts (Bauman, 1986). Within *ca dao* performance, strategic omission operates as a communal cue, signaling mutual understanding without overt articulation—an enactment rooted in Confucian-Buddhist communicative restraint (Tran, 2013). In the Anglo-Scottish tradition, moments of speech breakdown frequently coincide with emotional or narrative peaks, turning the performance space into a site of suspended meaning where the audience participates as co-creator (Bial & Brady, 2025; Bennett, 2013). Fischer-Lichte's (2008) concept of the "autopoietic feedback loop" captures this dynamic precisely: silence becomes an embodied dialogue through which performer and audience reciprocally produce significance.

Building upon this performative dimension, the following section turns to the question of audience response, examining how silence is received as an affective and moral cue across cultural contexts.

### C. Affective Reception Across Cultures

Reception analysis reveals distinct interpretive orientations. Vietnamese listeners tend to perceive silence in *ca dao* as a moral and emotional gesture that strengthens collective identity and reinforces social cohesion (Nguyễn, 2004). In contrast, British and Scottish audiences often interpret narrative gaps in ballads as invitations to speculative reconstruction, cultivating individualized affective engagement (Atkinson, 2014). This intercultural divergence corresponds with cross-cultural emotion research indicating that collectivist audiences seek closure through shared interpretive norms, while individualist audiences sustain open-ended reflection (Mesquita et al., 2016). In both cases, silence functions as an affective code—a culturally mediated cue that shapes emotional resonance and interpretive stance.

### D. The Paradox of the Unspoken

Silence simultaneously operates as presence and absence, a paradox that underpins its aesthetic force. In *ca dao*, what remains unspoken carries moral weight, constraining interpretation within the bounds of communal ethics (Nguyễn, 2004). In the ballads, silence often represents absence-as-invitation, destabilizing closure and enabling reinterpretation across generations. This duality resonates with the notion of "performative fracture" (Bial & Brady, 2025), where the disruption of speech reorganizes communicative frames and transforms absence into generative presence. Yet one might ask whether silence signifies loss or potential. The evidence suggests that it embodies both: it withholds meaning while simultaneously creating the conditions for its renewal.

### E. Proposed Comparative Model

To synthesise the study's theoretical and empirical findings, Figure 1 below visualises the *Four-Dimensional Comparative Model*, mapping the intersections among Form, Cognition, Affect, and Culture.

This integrative framework links intertextual resonance with reception aesthetics, illustrating how silence operates simultaneously as a structural technique, a cognitive prompt, an affective cue, and a cultural code.

Within this schema, silence is conceptualised as:

- **Form:** Structural devices such as ellipsis, aposiopesis, and unresolved endings;
- **Cognition:** Inferential and imaginative gap-filling;
- **Affect:** Emotional modulation through empathy, tension, or ambiguity;
- **Culture:** Normative frameworks and performance conventions.

The following figure presents the Four-Dimensional Comparative Model, showing how these domains interact to generate a cyclical process of interpretation and meaning-making within oral poetics.

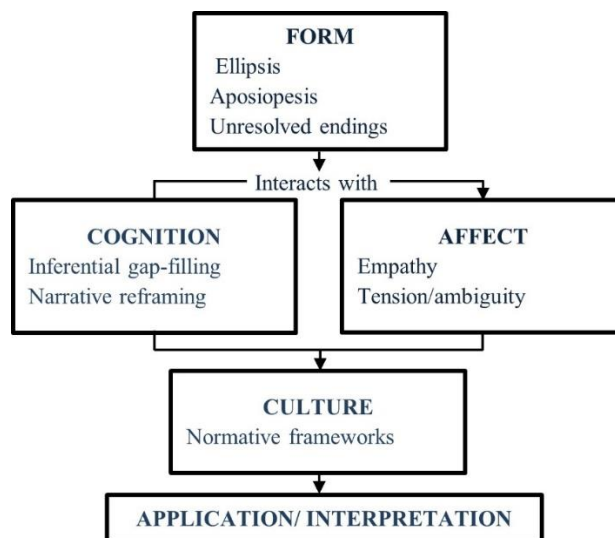


Figure 1. The Four-Dimensional Comparative Model of Silence in Oral Poetics

*Form* introduces structured absence; *Cognition* interprets and reconstructs it; *Affect* transforms it into emotional experience; *Culture* situates it within moral and social frameworks.

This cyclical configuration demonstrates that silence functions not as a void but as a dynamic field of signification—continuously negotiated across poetic, cognitive, and cultural dimensions.

By embedding silence within this integrated framework, the model transcends the *ca dao*–ballad comparison to provide a transferable analytical lens for examining the unspoken across oral and written traditions.

While the present schema captures the major cultural and formal dynamics at play, future comparative research involving other oral corpora may further refine its range and adaptability within broader semiotic ecologies.

## VI. CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

### A. Summary of Contributions

This study has developed a comparative typology of silence and speech breakdown in oral poetic traditions, framed within an integrated Form–Cognition–Affect–Culture model. Drawing on both quantitative and qualitative analyses (see Table 5, Section 4.5), the research demonstrates that silence is not a passive void but an active semiotic force shaping poetic structure and cultural meaning. Vietnamese *ca dao* exhibits a slightly higher frequency of silence-related mechanisms (41.4%) than Anglo–Scottish ballads (37.1%), yet these figures encode distinct socio-aesthetic logics. In *ca dao*, ellipsis and metaphorical truncation cultivate moral inference and collective empathy through indirect expression. In the ballads, by contrast, unresolved narrative gaps sustain moral ambiguity and tragic indeterminacy. Silence thus functions simultaneously as a mnemonic device and a generative interpretive agent—binding individual experience to collective memory and embedding affect within each tradition’s ethical and cognitive frameworks.

Building on these findings, the discussion turns to their broader theoretical significance within current debates on cultural performance and semiotic interpretation.

### B. Academic Implications

The findings refine and extend contemporary understandings of cultural performance (Bauman, 1986; Fischer-Lichte, 2008) by positioning silence as a form–function complex that bridges poetics, cognition, and affect. Silence, rather than being peripheral to expression, emerges as integral to the architecture of meaning itself. The incorporation of gap-filling aesthetics (Iser, 1978) underscores that interpretive agency is co-constructed between audience and tradition: meaning arises not from what is spoken but from what is strategically withheld. This observation complicates the assumption that silence merely reflects restraint; it reveals instead how distinct cultures encode ethical and epistemological positions through their preferred modalities of omission. The comparative framework developed here reinforces the *Four-Dimensional Comparative Model* (see Figure 1), providing a scalable tool for tracing how silence operates across intersecting axes of form, cognition, affect, and culture.

### C. Applied Implications

Beyond theoretical synthesis, this typology offers practical value in folklore pedagogy, translation studies, and cultural heritage preservation. In educational contexts, approaching silence as a culturally embedded aesthetic enriches interpretive literacy and attunes learners to the implicit dimensions of oral artistry. In translation, retaining purposeful silences—rather than resolving them—preserves the moral and affective subtleties of the source text. In heritage preservation, documenting silence as an expressive form safeguards its interpretive complexity and ensures continuity

across changing sociohistorical landscapes. Collectively, these applications affirm silence as a vital yet often overlooked component of cultural transmission and aesthetic endurance.

#### D. Future Research Directions

Future studies may extend this framework to additional oral repertoires—such as Nordic or Balkan ballads—where silence interacts with ethnopoetic and performative conventions in unique ways. Mixed-method approaches that integrate performance ethnography, audience reception, and corpus-based poetics would allow more nuanced mapping of how formal, cognitive, and emotive dimensions of silence vary across traditions. Further collaboration with cognitive neuroscience could illuminate how audiences process interpretive gaps and emotional resonance, bridging aesthetic theory with empirical inquiry. Such interdisciplinary expansion would deepen understanding of silence as both a universal human phenomenon and a culture-specific mode of meaning-making.

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# FIFA World Cup Host Nations in Media: A Critical Discourse Analysis Perspective

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**Abstract**—With the announcement of the winning nations to host the upcoming World Cups in 2026, 2030, and 2034, global media started reporting on this pivotal event to international readers. Such media narratives play a crucial role in shaping readers' perceptions of the host countries' cultural identities, offering insights into their social, historical, and cultural contexts. However, these discourses may carry bias or prejudice, reinforcing or contesting dominant global narratives. The present study examines the discursive construction of the host nations in global media from a critical discourse analysis perspective. The dataset comprises a corpus of news stories and reports from various international news outlets. The underlying themes that dominate the discourses on the host nations were identified using a corpus analysis tool, and a qualitative analysis of their discursive strategies. The results emphasize the economic benefits of the World Cup and the opportunity to promote the host nation's culture and legacy. However, media discourse implies bias in favor of developed nations (the United States, Canada, Europe) compared to other host nations (Mexico, Morocco, Saudi Arabia). A range of subtle discursive strategies was employed to influence public perception about the host nations' sociocultural identities.

**Index Terms**—CDA, corpus linguistics, discourse analysis, World Cup

## I. INTRODUCTION

The FIFA World Cup is one of the most prestigious global sporting events, bringing together nations and cultures in a shared celebration of football. Beyond the competition itself, the tournament serves as a strategic platform for host nations to shape their international image and assert their cultural identity. The global visibility offered by the World Cup allows host countries to influence perceptions about their culture, values, and societal norms. Historically, countries have leveraged this opportunity to showcase their national heritage and project a favorable image on the world stage. For instance, Qatar's hosting of the 2022 FIFA World Cup was not merely a sporting endeavor but a calculated effort to highlight its Arab and Islamic heritage. The opening ceremony incorporated symbolic elements such as traditional Bedouin tents, reflecting the nation's cultural roots. Similarly, Brazil used the 2014 World Cup and the 2016 Summer Olympics to promote its vibrant culture and address social issues, influencing international media portrayals (Gutierrez et al., 2021).

How the international media represent host nations plays a crucial role in shaping global perceptions and intercultural understanding. Media outlets in the United Kingdom and Egypt framed the 2022 FIFA World Cup in Qatar differently, demonstrating how geopolitical biases and cultural narratives influence sports journalism (Dhaenens, 2023). Additionally, a single symbolic moment, such as Lionel Messi wearing a Bisht during the 2022 World Cup final, was interpreted in competing cultural, national, and political frames, sparking global debate on identity, tradition, and media representation (Ghobain, 2024). Furthermore, a comparative analysis of New York Times coverage of the 2018 Russia

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and 2022 Qatar World Cups reveals a stark contrast, with Qatar facing significantly more negative framing, often influenced by anti-Muslim and Western-centric narratives (El-Nawawy & Elmasry, 2024). These examples demonstrate how media narratives can reinforce or challenge existing stereotypes, impacting diplomatic relations, tourism, and foreign investment. Discussions surrounding the 2022 World Cup in Qatar also highlighted orientalist discourses in Western media, reflecting broader challenges that Middle Eastern nations face in reshaping their global image (Li et al., 2023).

Hosting the FIFA World Cup allows nations to engage in nation branding and soft power diplomacy, using the event to project cultural heritage, values, and traditions on an international stage. In a similar effort, Qatar strategically positioned itself as a global sports tourism destination; however, Western media critiques often contested Qatar's image by focusing on labor rights, social policies, and allegations of "sportswashing" (Theodoropoulou & Alos, 2020). Likewise, Japan's hosting of the 2019 Rugby World Cup demonstrated a deliberate effort to frame the nation as an inclusive, cosmopolitan society, while still maintaining traditional nationalist narratives (Kobayashi et al., 2023).

Despite extensive research on media portrayals of individual World Cup hosts, existing studies generally examine single events or focus on media narratives within limited or isolated cultural contexts. We find research on Qatar 2022, South Africa 2010, or Brazil 2014 provides constructive insights; however, these studies do not cover multi-event or cross-cultural comparisons. Additionally, very few studies have analyzed how different host nations are represented across successive tournaments, and genuinely none have compared the 2026, 2030, and 2034 hosts within a unified analytic framework. This gap limits our understanding of how media discourse evolves across regions and over time. Therefore, by examining representations of three upcoming World Cups together, this study contributes a broader comparative perspective on how international media construct cultural identity, hierarchy, and geopolitical narratives across diverse host nations.

### *Research Objectives*

This study intends to address these gaps by accomplishing two main objectives:

- To identify and compare the dominant narratives used in international news coverage of FIFA host nations
- To examine how the discursive constructions of the host nations shape international discourse and perception

By addressing these gaps and achieving the stated objectives, this study aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of cross-cultural communication dynamics in global sporting events and to provide insights into how media representations shape international perceptions of national identities.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

The FIFA World Cup, as a premier global sporting event, has long been a subject of academic inquiry, particularly regarding how the international media portray host nations. The intersection of sports mega-events and media representation plays a crucial role in shaping national identity and influencing global perceptions. This section synthesizes key scholarly works on the topic, focusing on cross-cultural discourse analyses, nation branding, and the role of media in framing host nations.

First, the study investigates sports mega-events and national identity construction, where international sporting events such as the FIFA World Cup and the Olympic Games serve as powerful platforms for host nations to shape their cultural narratives and global images. Early studies, such as those by Tomlinson and Young (2006), explore the political, cultural, and economic dimensions of these events, highlighting how they serve as both nationalistic spectacles and instruments of soft power. Similarly, Roche (2000) examines the historical evolution of mega-events, from the 1851 Crystal Palace Expo to the 1992 Barcelona Olympics, illustrating how they contribute to national identity construction and international recognition.

Building on this foundation, Grix and Houlihan (2014) analyze the strategic use of sports mega-events as tools for soft power. Their studies of Germany (2006) and the United Kingdom (2012) demonstrate how host nations leverage these events to strengthen their diplomatic standing and reshape international perceptions. However, media representation plays a decisive role in this process. Knott et al. (2017) provide an empirical analysis of media coverage of the 2010 FIFA World Cup in South Africa, revealing how global narratives emphasized crime and infrastructural shortcomings over cultural vibrancy. These findings reinforce the idea that media narratives can either enhance or hinder a host nation's image. Further reinforcing this perspective, Dhaenens (2023) argues that sports mega-events offer a platform for nation branding, but that media framing often overshadows official narratives. Similarly, Misener (2012) highlights how the 2010 Winter Paralympics' legacy discourse focused primarily on economic benefits, largely ignoring accessibility and social inclusion. These studies collectively emphasize the media's power to shape perceptions, influencing whether a host country is seen positively or negatively on the global stage.

The second factor underscores cross-cultural discourse analysis in sports media, providing a deeper understanding of how different media outlets construct narratives about the same event. Kim (2023) examines South Korean media representations across multiple World Cups, demonstrating how nationalism in sports media has evolved from collectivist portrayals to more globalized narratives. This shift underscores how domestic and international political contexts influence media framing. Additionally, a comparative analysis of British and Egyptian media coverage of the 2022 Qatar World Cup highlights stark differences in framing that reflect ideological and political biases (Dhaenens,

2023). Similarly, Japan's 2019 Rugby World Cup was framed as an example of cosmopolitan nationalism, presenting an image of an open, inclusive society while still maintaining strong nationalist narratives (Kobayashi et al., 2023). Gender representation in sports media has also been a subject of analysis. Coche (2021) investigates ESPN's coverage of the 2019 Women's World Cup, highlighting persistent gender disparities in sports journalism, despite record-breaking viewership numbers. This study ties into broader discussions on how media construct dominant narratives in sports, whether through cultural identity, nationalism, or gender bias.

Third, the research emphasizes a few studies on the media's role in framing host nations, finding that the host nations' portrayals in international media significantly impact global perceptions and diplomatic relations. Grix and Houlihan (2014) discuss how countries utilize events like the World Cup to enhance their soft power, arguing that positive media coverage strengthens a nation's brand, while negative portrayals reinforce stereotypes. Their study aligns with Knott et al. (2017), who found that media coverage of South Africa's 2010 World Cup often focused on crime and infrastructure challenges, overshadowing the nation's efforts to promote its cultural diversity and progress. Further research explores how Western and non-Western media frame the same sporting event differently. Kim's (2023) study on South Korean media and Kerry et al.'s (2024) analysis of global media coverage of Qatar's 2022 World Cup indicate that media outlets vary in their emphasis on cultural heritage versus political controversies. For example, while some media sources highlighted Qatar's Islamic traditions, others focused on human rights concerns, demonstrating the subjectivity of media narratives.

The concept of sportswashing has also emerged in discussions about media framing of mega events. Brannagan and Giulianotti (2018) argue that Qatar's hosting the 2022 World Cup was part of a broader strategy to reshape its international image, but media coverage largely focused on labor rights and governance issues. Similarly, Hellmeier and Zurn (2022) surveyed European public perceptions of Qatar, revealing that countries with a more critical media landscape (e.g., Germany and Sweden) maintained skeptical views about Qatar's World Cup despite its branding efforts.

The fourth factor examines the research conducted to identify the major emerging research and gaps in literature. Recent studies continue to explore the complexities of media representation of World Cup host nations. For example, Alhugbani (2025) conducted a content analysis of the Gulf States' media coverage of Qatar's hosting of the 2022 World Cup, uncovering a regional divide between supportive and critical narratives. These findings suggest that even within the Arab world, perceptions of Qatar's hosting varied significantly.

Despite the extensive body of literature, gaps remain in understanding the long-term effects of media portrayals on host nations' cultural identities and international relations. Additionally, existing research primarily focuses on Western media perspectives, with limited studies analyzing non-Western media representations of sports mega-events. The primary research discussed here provides a comprehensive foundation for understanding the intersection of sports mega-events, media representation, and national identity. They highlight how media narratives can reinforce stereotypes, reshape global perceptions, or serve as instruments of soft power. At the same time, these studies emphasize the need for further comparative analyses to fully understand the long-term impact of media framing on host nations.

### *Research Questions*

1. How do media representations shape the discourse on FIFA World Cup host countries in international news coverage?
2. What are the comparable discursive aspects of FIFA World Cup host countries in international news coverage?
3. What are the dominant narratives employed by media to represent FIFA World Cup host countries, and how do these narratives shape public perceptions?

### III. METHODOLOGY

To gather relevant data and address the research questions, this study employed a mixed-methods approach that combined quantitative and qualitative methods. The quantitative aspects utilized Antconc (Laurence, 2020), a corpus analysis tool, to generate a list of statistically significant keywords in the target corpus (see Appendix A), which was compared against the reference corpus of American English 2006: press reportage (Baker, 2006). The analysis focused on content words that convey meaningful information about themes and concepts, excluding grammatical or functional words, as well as corpus-specific terms like FIFA, World, Cup, and geographical names. The Discourse Analyzer AI Toolkit (Khettab, 2024) was utilized to extract latent themes.

The identified keywords were then examined in broader contexts to uncover underlying sociocultural meanings and discursive constructions through a critical discourse analysis perspective. The qualitative analysis was grounded in the sociocognitive approach (SCA) to critical discourse analysis (van Dijk, 2014, 2015, 2016), which triangulates discourse, cognition, and society. SCA provides a theoretical and analytical framework for critically examining media discourse, particularly in uncovering power abuse and discursive strategies such as framing, foregrounding and backgrounding, and nominalization. This study applied SCA to analyze media discourse structure, including macrostructure (title, headlines, lead sentence) and microstructure (lexicon, syntax, style, rhetoric), and explicated the cognitive and social underpinnings through discussion.

### *Data Collection and Processing*

The dataset was collected from the Corpus of News on the Web (Davies, 2016), often known as the NOW Corpus. This corpus comprises about 19.5 billion words of data from news media, newspapers and magazines, from 20 English-speaking countries. The NOW Corpus is cumulative, with the news collection continuing to grow from 2010 to the present. The search terms were the phrase FIFA World Cup and the planned dates (2026, 2030, 2034) to retrieve texts and contextualized instances from various news media outlets. A search conducted in April 2025 found 600 news articles about the 2026 FIFA World Cup, 50 articles about the 2030 World Cup and 35 articles about the 2034 World Cup. This disparity likely stems from the media's heightened interest in the upcoming 2026 World Cup. The target was to create three separate small corpora corresponding to the World Cups in 2026, 2030, and 2034, comprising 100 articles for each corpus. However, the final corpora comprised 100 articles from the 2026 World Cup (61,850 words), 50 articles from the 2030 World Cup (13,061 words), and 35 articles from the 2034 World Cup (23,189 words), totaling 98,100 words.

#### IV. RESULTS

After preparing each corpus and running it through the corpus analysis tool, a keyword list (see Appendix A) was generated that included words typical of news about the FIFA World Cup in all corpora. However, by investigating the keywords within the wider context, the underlying meanings and themes are subtly unveiled using the Discourse Analyzer AI Toolkit (Khettab, 2024). Whereas the economic and financial benefits of organizing the FIFA World Cup have been a common theme in media discourse, the social and cultural representations of the host nations were intricately constructed. The subsequent analysis explores the dominant themes in media coverage of host nations and the discursive strategies, in bold, used to construct narratives about these countries. Selective instances from each corpus, including some keywords, are examined in their wider contexts with a critical perspective. Example keywords were made bold in the excerpts for analysis purposes.

##### *(a). FIFA World Cup 2026*

The keyword list for the FIFA World Cup 2026 corpus included words that generally relate to football cups. The contexts through which the host countries (the United States, Canada, Mexico) were represented in media coverage vary; however, featured themes for each host nation can be identified. The United States is associated with **proven leadership** and a **growing soccer culture**. On the other hand, Canada is portrayed as **multicultural** and **committed to gender equity**. Regarding Mexico, media coverage highlights its **cultural pride** and **football heritage**.

##### *Excerpt 1*

FIFA's Council, the organization's most powerful decision-making body, chose the U.S. at a virtual meeting this week. "The decision was reached based on the United States' position as a proven leader in staging global events and because it would allow FIFA to maximize synergies with the delivery of the FIFA World Cup 2026, to the benefit of both **tournaments** and the development of **football** in the North American region" (Bushnell, 2023).

However, media discourse implies unequal representations of the host countries. For instance, excerpt 1 portrays the United States as a reliable host for major world events. The macrostructure of excerpt 1 features the news article's title ("Another soccer bonanza, the 2025 Club World Cup, is coming to the United States"), where the word bonanza suggests the prevailing profitable view of the event. The microstructure is marked by deliberate word choice and the strategic use of passive structures. The lexicon, featuring terms such as leader, allow, maximize, synergies, and benefit, conveys a narrative of leadership and leverage. Furthermore, the deployment of passive structures, as seen in phrases like the decision was reached, contributes to a broader discursive strategy of nominalization, which subtly shifts agency and emphasis.

Excerpt 1 employs three discursive strategies to attribute FIFA's decision to award the 2026 World Cup to the United States to its proven leadership rather than its adherence to bid criteria. Specifically, excerpt 1 utilizes **intertextuality**, **nominalization**, and **appealing to authority**. Intertextuality was employed through a selective quote to support the newspaper's narrative of the United States as a reliable host for major world events. The phrase the decision was reached exemplifies nominalization, which obscures agency and shifts the focus from the decision-makers to the decision itself and the winning country. The appeal to authority is achieved by referencing FIFA's council to invoke the credibility of the governing body and, thus, the news story on FIFA's decision.

##### *Excerpt 2*

Cochrane repeated that Canada Soccer's offer to the national teams involved equal **match** fees and splitting competition prize money between them. "Simply put, national team players, regardless of their gender identity, will be paid the same amount for their work in representing our **country**," Cochrane said. He said the proposed deal would make the Canadian women the second-highest-paid team in the world, behind only the U.S. (Davidson, 2023).

The commitment to gender equity has emerged as a prominent theme in media discourse surrounding Canada, particularly in the context of the World Cup. The news report's title, "Canada Soccer officials defend controversial deal with Canadian Soccer Business," suggests an argumentative tone, setting the stage for a discussion of the issues. At the microstructure level, excerpt 2 reveals stylistic and grammatical features that characterize the report's language. Notably, the organization's general secretary, Cochrane, employs a sympathetic tone, evident in phrases like, "Simply put, national team players, regardless of their gender identity, will be paid the same amount for their work in representing our country." The informal language style used here conveys Cochrane's understanding and empathy

toward the gender equity issue. Furthermore, the use of the inclusive pronoun *our* in “our country” reinforces a sense of shared identity and community, aligning with Cochrane’s attempt to build a connection with the audience.

Cochrane utilized two key strategies to reinforce Canada Soccer’s commitment to gender equity: **legitimation** and **quantification**. Through legitimation, he appealed to widely accepted values and norms, such as equality, to validate the organization’s stance on gender equity. Specifically, he emphasized Canada Soccer’s commitment to equal match fees and prize money for national teams, thereby legitimizing its position. Additionally, Cochrane employed quantification, citing concrete numerical data, such as the women’s team being the second-highest-paid in the world, to demonstrate tangible progress and convey a promising plan to support the national women’s team.

Mexico’s football heritage theme is reflected in media coverage, with the country having participated in the FIFA World Cup 17 times and hosted it twice. Despite the United States leading the winning joint bid for the 2026 World Cup, with Canada and Mexico as cohosts, news media coverage often places Mexico in a secondary position, either in the middle or at the end, when mentioning the host countries. This **foregrounding and backgrounding** discursive strategy prioritizes the United States and Canada, relegating Mexico to a less prominent role. Figure 1 illustrates a sample (see Appendix B for full concordance) concordance output from Antconc, highlighting Mexico’s recurrent positioning at the end of host-country references, which reveals a notable discursive trend of foregrounding and backgrounding.

| Total Hits: 54 Page Size 100 hits 1 to 54 of 54 hits |                                                                  |         |                                                                        |
|------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------|---------|------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| File                                                 | Left Context                                                     | Hit     | Right Context                                                          |
| 1 FIFA 2026...                                       | that the 2026 World Cup in Canada, the United States, and        | Mexico  | will have four-team groups and 24 more games than                      |
| 2 FIFA 2026...                                       | set to take place in Canada, the United States and               | Mexico. | The governing body’s council announced on Tuesday that                 |
| 3 FIFA 2026...                                       | to four-team groups. The competition in the United States,       | Mexico  | and Canada was due to feature 16 groups of three                       |
| 4 FIFA 2026...                                       | also hosted the sold-out 2023 CONCACAF Gold Cup Final between    | Mexico  | and Panama. The fourth edition of the Concacaf Nations                 |
| 5 FIFA 2026...                                       | set to take place in the United States, Canada and               | Mexico. | USMNT striker Jesus Ferreira was asked about his thoughts              |
| 6 FIFA 2026...                                       | World Cup which will be held in the United States,               | Mexico  | and Canada. In what was the biggest announcement of                    |
| 7 FIFA 2026...                                       | s Hard Rock Stadium will host the bronze medal match             | Mexico  | City will host the tournament opener on June 11, 2026 (Friday,         |
| 8 FIFA 2026...                                       | FIFA World Cup 2026 will be held in 16 cities across Canada,     | Mexico  | and the United States, 11 June–19 July, 2026." "The FIFA World         |
| 9 FIFA 2026...                                       | billion people. With the United States of America, Canada, and   | Mexico  | already guaranteed qualification as hosts, the remaining 45 spots have |
| 10 FIFA 2026...                                      | of the upcoming World Cup in the USA, Canada and                 | Mexico  | will be broadcast live, free and exclusive on SBS,                     |
| 11 FIFA 2026...                                      | Cup will feature 16 stadiums, including 11 in the USA, three in  | Mexico, | and the remaining two in Canada. Only Mexico’s                         |
| 12 FIFA 2026...                                      | three in Mexico, and the remaining two in Canada. Only           | Mexico’ | s Estadio Azteca has previously hosted a World Cup                     |
| 13 FIFA 2026...                                      | the FIFA World Cup 2026, which will be broadcast from Canada,    | Mexico  | and the US on SBS, SBS VICELAND and SBS                                |
| 14 FIFA 2026...                                      | the biggest TV audience event of 2026. "Coming live from Canada, | Mexico  | and the USA – it will be a World Cup                                   |
| 15 FIFA 2026...                                      | Men’s World Cup being staged in the United States,               | Mexico  | and Canada. With Qatar hosting in 2022, Asia would ordinarily          |

Figure 1. Concordance of the Keyword Mexico in the 2026 World Cup

(b). FIFA World Cup 2030

Media discourse depicts the host countries of the 2030 FIFA World Cup through a lens of unity and collaboration, with each nation showcasing distinct themes. Morocco is celebrated for its *cultural identity* and *religious values*, while Spain is lauded for its *footballing reputation* and *social legacy*. Portugal’s *historic significance* and *legacy* as the host of the inaugural World Cup take center stage.

Excerpt 3

Speaking after the announcement at the FIFA Extraordinary Congress, Dr. Motsepe said, “The Morocco, Portugal, and Spain partnership brings together and unites Africa and Europe through **football** and inspires all of us to work together to make the world a better place. Today is a proud day for African football as Morocco becomes only the second African **country** in FIFA’s history to **host** the FIFA World Cup.” Morocco, the only African country to have reached the semi-final of the FIFA World Cup, follows in the footsteps of South Africa, which hosted the competition in 2010 (JoySports, 2024).

Excerpt 4

Hosting the FIFA World **Cup** could be transformative for Africa. **Football** can be a catalyst for large-scale development across the continent. We often forget that this would only be the second time the FIFA World Cup™ is held in Africa in 100 years of history (Brand Spur, 2024).

However, the media narrative subtly uses a **framing** strategy to view the partnership between the host countries through a Eurocentric lens, emphasizing European superiority. Notably, in excerpts 3 and 4, the joint bid is presented as a triumph for African football, with Morocco’s involvement seen as a benchmark of success due to its African representation. The deliberate lexical choice of words and phrases collectively emphasizes the significance of European involvement; for example, *partnership*, *unites*, *proud*, *African country*, *only*, and *100 years of history*.

This narrative is further reinforced by the **repetition** strategy in excerpt 4, which highlights the significance of Africa hosting the World Cup for only the second time and positions it as an opportunity for development. Using **hyperboles**, such as “FIFA World Cup could be transformative for Africa” and “large-scale development across the continent,”

serves as a rhetorical device to amplify the anticipated impact of the European partnership with Africa. The underlying tone implies that Europe's involvement lends credibility and weight to the bid, possibly due to Morocco's previous unsuccessful attempts to host the World Cup. This subtle suggestion underscores the perceived value of European expertise and validation in the joint bid.

(c). *FIFA World Cup 2034*

The dominant themes in the 2034 corpus, which Saudi Arabia will host, revolve around the *national transformation* under the KSA's Vision 2030 and the country's *growing influence in global sports*. The keyword list bears similarities to those of the 2026 and 2030 corpora, with notable exceptions such as *human* and *rights*. Media coverage focused on two critical issues: concerns about LGBTQ+ human rights and the potential agency involved in securing the 2034 bid.

*Excerpt 5*

Peter Tatchell has written to Saudi Arabia's **Football** Federation urging organisers to guarantee the safety of LGBTQ+ folks attending the men's World Cup in 2034, given the country's harsh anti-queer laws (Perry, 2025).

*Excerpt 6*

**Human rights** advocates have responded after Saudi Arabia was awarded as hosting the men's football World Cup in 2034, despite anti-gay laws in the country (PinkNews Reporter, 2024).

Excerpts 5 and 6 employ an **oversimplification** strategy, reducing the human rights issue to LGBTQ+ rights and framing it in simplistic terms. This strategy is evident in phrases like guarantee the safety, which proposes a straightforward solution, and the binary representation in anti-gay laws, which collectively oversimplifies the complexities of ensuring safety and rights for LGBTQ+ individuals.

In excerpt 7, news media coverage frames Saudi Arabia's World Cup win with skepticism, hinting at potential FIFA involvement in the 2034 bid award. This narrative employs a **mitigation** strategy, downplaying Saudi Arabia's achievement and subtly implying that external factors, rather than the country's actual capabilities, may have influenced the outcome. This example uses grammatical structure through a hypothetical conditional clause, which allows for a nuanced expression of doubt regarding FIFA's agency in the bid process.

*Excerpt 7*

If Saudi Arabia could have designed a process for choosing future **World Cup** hosts, it might look similar to what FIFA unveiled this week for the 2030- and 2034-men's soccer **tournaments** (Dunbar, 2023).

## V. DISCUSSION

This analysis of media discourse on the upcoming FIFA World Cups presents striking differences in how host nations are framed, illustrating deeper cultural hierarchies and geopolitical descriptions. These representations are not neutral; they operate as powerful discursive strategies that outline international understandings of host countries and fortify prevailing global inequalities. The succeeding paragraphs underscore three overarching themes that emerge from the findings: first, the privileging theme of developed nations as "ideal hosts"; second, the marginalizing of Mexico in cohosting contexts; and third, the framing of Saudi Arabia as a place of cultural tension between Western liberal values and local traditions.

### A. *Developed Nations as the Ideal for Hosting*

Most nations globally concede that media discourse consistently positions developed nations, predominantly the United States and Canada, as replicas of reliability and modernism. The United States is described in terms of proven leadership, organizational capacity, and global infrastructure, demonstrating an image of efficiency and solidity. Similarly, Canada is known for its commitment to gender equity, with reports emphasizing equal pay and inclusivity as characteristic of its modern social values. These interpretations reinforce the perception that advanced democracies are not only capable but also foreseeably aligned with FIFA's global initiatives. Such narratives illustrate what van Dijk (2014, 2016) identifies as discursive legitimation, where shared values like leadership, equality, and progress are invoked to naturalize certain nations as "ideal" hosts. In addition, comparable discursive strategies have also been documented in the coverage of Germany 2006 and the UK 2012, where media highlighted democratic credentials and infrastructural superiority as benchmarks of success (Grix & Houlihan, 2014).

### B. *Mexico's Secondary Positioning*

Mexico, in contrast, is often relegated to a background role, even though it has a long footballing tradition and successfully hosted the tournament in 1970 and 1986. Media coverage regularly lists Mexico last among the 2026 cohosts, subtly diminishing its role and supporting and reinforcing the United States and Canada instead. This discursive marginalization shows the strategy of foregrounding and backgrounding, where certain players are prioritized while others are downplayed. Such positioning raises questions about the implicit hierarchies surrounding and implanted in global sports reporting. Similar discursive imbalances were evident in international coverage of South Africa's 2010 World Cup, where global narratives highlighted crime and infrastructural shortcomings while minimizing cultural vibrancy (Knott et al., 2017). Thus, Mexico's football heritage is acknowledged; nevertheless, it is overshadowed by narratives that represent it as dependent on its North American counterparts, sustaining a symbolic center-periphery dynamic (Tomlinson & Young, 2006).

### C. Saudi Arabia as a Potential “Clash of Civilizations” Narrative

Looking ahead to 2034, Saudi Arabia’s selection as host has been framed through a markedly different lens. Some media have been trying to paint a different image since they do not portray and highlight the organizational capacity or infrastructure but emphasize human rights issues, particularly concerning LGBTQ people and freedoms. Unfortunately, this framing places the event as a potential “clash of civilizations” between Western liberal norms and Saudi sociocultural traditions. On one hand, Saudi Arabia projects itself as modernizing under Vision 2030; on the other, Western media often reduce its hosting narrative to questions of rights and restrictions. The oversimplification and generality of complex cultural and legal contexts into a binary of freedom versus repression mirrors broader orientalist discourses that have long shaped Western portrayals of Middle Eastern nations (Li et al., 2023; El-Nawawy & Elmasry, 2024). Similar criticisms were leveled at Qatar during the 2022 World Cup, where Western-centric reporting focused disproportionately on human rights while downplaying cultural heritage initiatives (Hellmeier & Zurn, 2022; Dhaenens, 2023). This tendency not only foregrounds conflict but also obscures Saudi Arabia’s agency in reshaping its international image through sports diplomacy, a strategy increasingly described in the literature as sportswashing (Brannagan & Giulianotti, 2018).

### D. Toward a Critical Understanding of Media Bias

Against this backdrop, these findings demonstrate that media discourses around FIFA World Cups do more than report sports news and reproduce hierarchies of legitimacy and belonging in the global order. Media position developed nations, such as the United States and Canada, as norm setters; however, middle-tier nations like Mexico are symbolically subordinated, and non-Western nations like Saudi Arabia and Qatar are framed as problematic or culturally incompatible. Such patterns and perceptions underscore the importance of critical discourse analysis in unpacking power relations and abuse embedded in media narratives (van Dijk, 2014, 2016). Therefore, understanding these dynamics is crucial for appreciating how global sports not only reflect but also actively construct perceptions of culture, identity, and international standing.

Despite this study’s valuable insights into the media representation of FIFA World Cup host nations, it has certain limitations. The dataset was confined to English-language media sources, excluding diverse perspectives from non-English outlets, including those within the host nations. Moreover, the corpus focused only on the pre-tournament period and therefore does not capture post-event media shifts. The qualitative component of the mixed-methods design primarily focused on textual analysis and did not include audience reception data, which could have provided a better understanding of how readers interpret these media narratives. Nevertheless, future research could bridge these gaps by integrating multilingual corpora, longitudinal data, and audience-centered approaches to gain a better understanding of global media discourse surrounding mega sporting events.

## VI. CONCLUSION

A considerable bias toward host nations in North America and Europe influences Western media discourses on the upcoming FIFA World Cups in 2026, 2030, and 2034. This study identified three major themes that characterize Western media bias: the privileging of developed nations as “ideal hosts,” the marginalizing of Mexico in cohosting contexts, and the framing of Saudi Arabia as a place of cultural tension between Western liberal values and local traditions. Thus, negative narratives mark the discursive constructions of the cultural identity of host countries such as Mexico, Morocco, and Saudi Arabia. A range of implicit and explicit discursive strategies was utilized, including legitimization, oversimplification, intertextuality, and hyperbole. Further research could explore data from diverse countries or analyze media discourses from past FIFA World Cups to uncover biases toward specific nations.

### APPENDIX A. KEYWORDS LIST PER CORPUS

| FIFA 2026 Keywords |          |          |              |              |                      |                  |
|--------------------|----------|----------|--------------|--------------|----------------------|------------------|
| Keyword            | Freq_Tar | Freq_Ref | NormFreq_Tar | NormFreq_Ref | Keyness (Likelihood) | Keyness (Effect) |
| soccer             | 155      | 4        | 2503.27      | 44.802       | 243.837              | 0.005            |
| matches            | 142      | 1        | 2293.319     | 11.201       | 242.874              | 0.005            |
| stadium            | 123      | 2        | 1986.466     | 22.401       | 201.363              | 0.004            |
| host               | 132      | 6        | 2131.817     | 67.204       | 192.81               | 0.004            |
| football           | 151      | 15       | 2438.67      | 168.009      | 184.892              | 0.005            |
| tournament         | 117      | 5        | 1889.565     | 56.003       | 172.563              | 0.004            |
| team               | 191      | 42       | 3084.675     | 470.425      | 165.692              | 0.006            |
| qualifiers         | 67       | 0        | 1082.059     | 0            | 119.675              | 0.002            |
| content            | 74       | 3        | 1195.11      | 33.602       | 109.988              | 0.002            |
| final              | 79       | 5        | 1275.86      | 56.003       | 108.471              | 0.003            |



| FIFA 2030 Keywords |          |          |              |              |                      |                  |
|--------------------|----------|----------|--------------|--------------|----------------------|------------------|
| Keyword            | Freq_Tar | Freq_Ref | NormFreq_Tar | NormFreq_Ref | Keyness (Likelihood) | Keyness (Effect) |
| cup                | 174      | 11       | 13482.101    | 123.207      | 641.617              | 0.027            |
| football           | 122      | 15       | 9452.968     | 168.009      | 415.237              | 0.019            |
| tournament         | 55       | 5        | 4261.584     | 56.003       | 194.732              | 0.008            |
| bid                | 57       | 12       | 4416.55      | 134.407      | 175.565              | 0.009            |
| host               | 41       | 6        | 3176.817     | 67.204       | 135.497              | 0.006            |
| matches            | 24       | 1        | 1859.6       | 11.201       | 91.229               | 0.004            |
| countries          | 35       | 18       | 2711.917     | 201.611      | 81.846               | 0.005            |
| infantino          | 18       | 0        | 1394.7       | 0            | 74.51                | 0.003            |
| centenary          | 17       | 0        | 1317.217     | 0            | 70.369               | 0.003            |
| digital            | 15       | 0        | 1162.25      | 0            | 62.089               | 0.002            |

| FIFA 2034 Keywords |          |          |              |              |                      |                  |
|--------------------|----------|----------|--------------|--------------|----------------------|------------------|
| Keyword            | Freq_Tar | Freq_Ref | NormFreq_Tar | NormFreq_Ref | Keyness (Likelihood) | Keyness (Effect) |
| cup                | 325      | 11       | 14080.846    | 123.207      | 940.559              | 0.028            |
| world              | 362      | 84       | 15683.896    | 940.85       | 756.973              | 0.031            |
| host               | 147      | 6        | 6368.875     | 67.204       | 418.182              | 0.013            |
| football           | 155      | 15       | 6715.48      | 168.009      | 396.86               | 0.013            |
| bid                | 125      | 12       | 5415.71      | 134.407      | 320.352              | 0.011            |
| tournament         | 92       | 5        | 3985.962     | 56.003       | 254.412              | 0.008            |
| rights             | 74       | 23       | 3206.1       | 257.614      | 138.719              | 0.006            |
| asian              | 43       | 0        | 1863.004     | 0            | 136.177              | 0.004            |
| human              | 50       | 7        | 2166.284     | 78.404       | 119.108              | 0.004            |
| infantino          | 35       | 0        | 1516.399     | 0            | 110.832              | 0.003            |

## APPENDIX B. CONCORDANCE OF THE KEYWORD MEXICO IN THE 2026 WORLD CUP

|    |              |                                                                                   |              |                                                                         |
|----|--------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 15 | FIFA 2026... | New Zealand, the FIFA World Cup 2026 in the United States,                        | Mexico       | and Canada and the FIFA Women's World Cup 2027                          |
| 16 | FIFA 2026... | to four-team groups. The competition in the United States,                        | Mexico       | and Canada was due to feature 16 groups of three                        |
| 17 | FIFA 2026... | the continent of North America, the United States of America,                     | Mexico       | and Canada will host the FIFA World Cup 2026. Earlier                   |
| 18 | FIFA 2026... | World Cup which will be held in the United States,                                | Mexico       | and Canada. In what was the biggest announcement of                     |
| 19 | FIFA 2026... | Men's World Cup being staged in the United States,                                | Mexico       | and Canada. With Qatar hosting in 2022, Asia would ordinarily           |
| 20 | FIFA 2026... | World Cup, which will be hosted by the U.S.,                                      | Mexico       | and Canada. They are: MetLife Stadium, Hard Rock Stadium,               |
| 21 | FIFA 2026... | also hosted the sold-out 2023 CONCACAF Gold Cup Final between                     | Mexico       | and Panama. The fourth edition of the Concacaf Nations                  |
| 22 | FIFA 2026... | will the number of competing nations will increase from 32 to 48.                 | Mexico       | will also host 10 matches, and the U.S will                             |
| 23 | FIFA 2026... | of the upcoming World Cup in the USA, Canada and                                  | Mexico       | will be broadcast live, free and exclusive on SBS,                      |
| 24 | FIFA 2026... | that the 2026 World Cup in Canada, the United States, and                         | Mexico       | will have four-team groups and 24 more games than                       |
| 25 | FIFA 2026... | three-country host in World Cup history. Canada, along with                       | Mexico,      | will host only 10 games during the group stage, with                    |
| 26 | FIFA 2026... | set to take place in Canada, the United States and                                | Mexico.      | The governing body's council announced on Tuesday that                  |
| 27 | FIFA 2026... | are 14 host cities — 11 in the U.S. and three in                                  | Mexico.      | The tournament is scheduled to run June 11 to July 19, 2026,            |
| 28 | FIFA 2026... | November's contest in Qatar would be jointly hosted by                            | Mexico,      | the U.S., and Canada, the first three-country                           |
| 29 | FIFA 2026... | Seattle, San Francisco, and Los Angeles. Mexican hosting cities are               | Mexico       | City, Guadalajara, and Monterrey. It had already been confirmed         |
| 30 | FIFA 2026... | Miami, and New York/New Jersey. The Mexican sites are                             | Mexico       | City, Monterrey and Guadalajara." "TORONTO — After an "extensive global |
| 31 | FIFA 2026... | in the U.S., and 10 in each of Canada and                                         | Mexico       | in the first expanded 48-team tournament. The B.C.                      |
| 32 | FIFA 2026... | in the U.S., and 10 in each of Canada and                                         | Mexico       | in the first expanded 48-team tournament. Toronto was the               |
| 33 | FIFA 2026... | official bid book put forward by the U.S./Canada/                                 | Mexico       | United Bid, which in 2018 won the right to host                         |
| 34 | FIFA 2026... | official bid book put forward by the U.S./Canada/                                 | Mexico       | United Bid, which in 2018 won the right to host                         |
| 35 | FIFA 2026... | Brazil) Flamengo (Brazil) Monterrey (Mexico) Seattle Sounders (U.S.) León (       | Mexico)      | Al Ahly (Egypt) Wydad Casablanca (Morocco) Al-Hilal (Saudi              |
| 36 | FIFA 2026... | billion people. With the United States of America, Canada, and                    | Mexico       | already guaranteed qualification as hosts, the remaining 45 spots have  |
| 37 | FIFA 2026... | already committed to hosting 60 matches, with 10 to be hosted in                  | Mexico       | and 10 in Canada. Canada-hosted games were to be                        |
| 38 | FIFA 2026... | which is being co-hosted by the U.S. and                                          | Mexico.      | Canada Soccer's annual general meeting took place Saturday              |
| 39 | FIFA 2026... | s Hard Rock Stadium will host the bronze medal match                              | Mexico       | City will host the tournament opener on June 11, 2026 (Friday,          |
| 40 | FIFA 2026... | hosts have been confirmed as Canada, the U.S., and                                | Mexico.      | FIFA is expected to finalize the host cities in                         |
| 41 | FIFA 2026... | the watershed in Argentina's World Cup campaign. From the                         | Mexico       | game onwards, we saw the true Argentina, fighting for                   |
| 42 | FIFA 2026... | body confirmed that Canada — along with the U.S. and                              | Mexico —     | have secured automatic berths as co-hosts of the 2026                   |
| 43 | FIFA 2026... | be joined by six CONCACAF qualifiers. The host United States,                     | Mexico,      | Jamaica and Panama earned their spots by winning in                     |
| 44 | FIFA 2026... | Scaloni learnt from his mistakes. His team became unpredictable from              | Mexico       | onwards, in a good way. Be it a centre-                                 |
| 45 | FIFA 2026... | s Mercy Park on the Kansas side of the border.                                    | Mexico       | opens in Houston on June 22, plays four days later                      |
| 46 | FIFA 2026... | three in Mexico, and the remaining two in Canada. Only                            | Mexico'      | s Estadio Azteca has previously hosted a World Cup                      |
| 47 | FIFA 2026... | Spain) Manchester City (England) Palmeiras (Brazil) Flamengo (Brazil) Monterrey ( | Mexico)      | Seattle Sounders (U.S.) León (Mexico) Al Ahly (Egypt)                   |
| 48 | FIFA 2026... | matches and won two of them while drawing one against                             | Mexico.      | So, playing against such a team will be difficult                       |
| 49 | FIFA 2026... | Qatar. Canada qualified for the first time since competing at                     | Mexico 1986. | The 2010 naming of Qatar to host the 2022 World Cup                     |
| 50 | FIFA 2026... | to co-host the 2027 Women's World Cup along with                                  | Mexico.      | Then comes the 2028 Los Angeles Olympics. Now, 12 months before         |
| 51 | FIFA 2026... | FIFA originally awarded in 2018 to the U.S., Canada and                           | Mexico       | under an 80-match format. However, after high international TV          |
| 52 | FIFA 2026... | set to take place in the United States, Canada and                                | Mexico.      | USMNT striker Jesus Ferreira was asked about his thoughts               |
| 53 | FIFA 2026... | will be jointly hosted by Canada, the United States and                           | Mexico       | with matches held in select host cities across North                    |
| 54 | FIFA 2026... | event being co-hosted by the United States, Canada and                            | Mexico.      | Yet the decision marks a seismic shift in the                           |

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# Semantic Evolution of the Word *Qatyn* in the Kazakh Language: Identifying the Causes of Negative Connotation

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**Abstract**—This article investigates the semantic evolution of the lexeme *qatyn* in Kazakh from an originally respectful designation for a married woman to a socially marked, often pejorative label. Drawing on historical dictionaries, early Kazakh texts, Old Turkic inscriptions, and contemporary media discourse, the study combines methods of historical lexicology, etymological analysis, and sociolinguistic interpretation. The analysis systematizes competing etymologies that derive *qatyn* from Old Turkic *qatun* and from internal Turkic word-formation, and relates them to cultural models of marriage, kinship, and social hierarchy. Particular attention is paid to the role of Soviet-era language policy, purism, and ideological regulation of public discourse in shifting the evaluative profile of the word, as well as to the continuing coexistence of respectful and pejorative uses in present-day Kazakh. The paper argues that the semantic degradation of *qatyn* is not the result of purely internal linguistic change, but reflects broader transformations in gender ideology, urbanization, and the reconfiguration of Kazakh–Russian bilingual practices. By tracing micro-level changes in collocations, phraseology, and genre distribution, the article demonstrates how a key element of the Kazakh kinship lexicon has become a site where issues of linguistic correctness, national identity, and gendered respectability are negotiated.

**Index Terms**—semantic change, Kazakh language, Turkic languages, etymology, language ideology

## I. INTRODUCTION

In modern Kazakh, the word *äiel* (a borrowing from Arabic) is used far more actively than the native term *qatyn*, which has been noticeably displaced from everyday usage. Moreover, today the word *qatyn* is often perceived as coarse or even abusive. It is possible that this stereotype was formed during the Soviet period under the influence of the Russian word *baba* in its derogatory sense.

In her study of the semantics of kinship-related terms, Pokrovskaya (1961) notes that in a number of Turkic languages—particularly Kazakh, Khakas, and Altai—the word *qatun* (“wife”, “woman”) has acquired a negative connotation. At the same time, she emphasizes that in Old Turkic monuments and in modern Turkish this lexeme is used with a positive meaning.

Similar tendencies are observed in other Turkic languages. A comprehensive study of Tuvan proverbs and sayings shows that gendered paroemias overwhelmingly reproduce androcentric stereotypes and asymmetrical expectations towards men and women, thereby reinforcing a hierarchical model of gender relations (Egorova et al., 2020). The fact that in Tuvan paremias, as in Kazakh, pejorative shades cluster around certain female designations suggests that the negative re-evaluation of lexemes referring to women is part of a wider Turkic pattern rather than a uniquely Kazakh development.

Syzdykova (1995) points out that in Kazakh the word *qatyn* was displaced from active usage by the Arabic-derived word *äiel* (“wife”, “woman”), and that *qatyn* is currently regarded as semantically obsolete, that is, it belongs to the category of semantic archaisms.

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Representatives of the Kazakh intelligentsia emphasize that *äiel* is a borrowed word that does not carry a positive semantic load and entered common usage relatively recently, whereas *qatyn* has lost its ancient meaning. Thus, Akhmet Toqtabai argues that *qatyn* denotes “the assistant of the khagan, the support of the people, and in a broader sense, the mother of the people.” In turn, Qarzhabay Sartqozha explains that among the ancient Turks the principal wife of the khagan was called *qatyn*, while her attendants were referred to as *qalaš*; it is from this usage that the modern expression *qatyn-qalaš* originates.

Tursyn Zhurtbai adds that in contemporary literary usage the word *äiel* is traced to the Arabic *kūñ* (“female slave”), that is, a person deprived of free will, working without remuneration and regarded as someone’s property. According to him, during the Soviet period of egalitarian policy, some Kazakh female activists who had not absorbed traditional upbringing and customs declared: “We are not *qatyn*, who possess property; we are *äiel*, like peasants without possessions,” thereby introducing a class-based connotation into the terminology. Since that time, the term *äiel* has become established as the standard literary designation (Sagyndykuly, 2021).

Thus, the arguments advanced by scholars appear logical and worthy of attention. Their perspectives on the evolution and usage of the terms *qatyn* and *äiel* highlight the multidimensional nature of linguistic change and the crucial importance of historical context.

Recent gender-linguistic research on Turkic languages has shown that lexemes denoting women and gender roles form a dense cultural and evaluative conceptosphere and play a key role in encoding social expectations about femininity and masculinity (Shokym et al., 2023; Bakytzhanova et al., 2023). Against this broader background, the present paper focuses on the diachronic semantic trajectory of a single lexeme, *qatyn*, in Kazakh, thereby linking historical lexicology with contemporary debates on gender, language ideology, and linguistic correctness.

Against this background, recent Kazakh-language studies conceptualise gender stereotypes as a system of socially and culturally entrenched expectations which are lexicalised in everyday discourse and folkloric texts. Drawing on psycholinguistic and sociolinguistic data, Igissinova et al. (2024b) argue that gender stereotypes in Kazakh are encoded not only in lexemes referring to women and men, but also in evaluative collocations and metaphorical patterns which shape speakers’ interpretations of the “Kazakh woman” and related concepts.

## II. RESEARCH METHODS

The study primarily employs comparative, contrastive, and componential methods of semantic analysis. First, we compiled an empirical base from several types of sources: Old Turkic runic inscriptions, medieval lexicographic monuments such as *Dīwān Luġāt al-Turk*, dictionaries of modern Turkic languages, explanatory and etymological dictionaries of Kazakh, works of Abai and other authors of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Soviet-era prose, and contemporary Kazakh-language media texts. All occurrences of the lexeme *qatyn* (and its phonetic variants) were extracted from these sources and recorded together with information about date, genre, and type of discourse (religious, literary, colloquial, journalistic, etc.).

Given that the research focuses on word origin, etymological literature on Turkic and Persian was subjected to a detailed, critical review. Each proposed etymology for *qatyn* was examined individually, with phonetic and morphological analyses of the relevant forms, comparison with cognate items in other Turkic languages, and evaluation of their semantic development in historical context. On this basis, we systematized and grouped the hypotheses of previous scholars, identifying which of them are supported by data from Old Turkic inscriptions, medieval dictionaries, and modern dialectal and literary usage.

In analyzing the semantic development of *qatyn*, contextual and discourse-based methods were applied. All collected examples were coded according to their evaluative load (positive, neutral, or negative), typical collocations (e.g., *qatyn patsha*, *jas qatyn*, *qarataiyġan qatyn*), and syntagmatic environment (narrative description, proverb, invective, domestic dialogue, etc.). Particular attention was paid to passages from Abai’s poetry and the texts of Alash intellectuals, where *qatyn* functions as a key element of the kinship and ethical lexicon, as well as to Soviet-era fiction and contemporary media, where the word begins to acquire familiar, colloquial, and sometimes pejorative connotations. This multi-layered comparison makes it possible to link micro-changes in meaning and usage to broader sociolinguistic shifts in language policy, gender ideology, and Kazakh–Russian bilingual practices.

## III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

### A. Etymology of the Word *Qatyn*

According to the English etymologist Clauson (1972), the term *qatyn* derives from the Old Sogdian words *xwt’y* “king, khan” and *xwt’yn* “the khan’s wife, queen,” a hypothesis he substantiates with a high degree of reliability. In Kazakh explanatory dictionaries of Arabic and Persian loanwords, *qatyn* is likewise classified as a lexeme of Persian origin. A similar conclusion is presented in dictionaries compiled by Rüstemov and Oñdasynov, as well as in contemporary works by Mamyrbekova (2017), where *qatyn* is interpreted as a borrowing from Persian.

At the same time, given its ancient and stable usage in Kazakh, it seems methodologically reasonable to search for the root of this word within the native lexical system rather than attributing it entirely to foreign origin. Below, several hypotheses and arguments are presented.

1. Derivation from *qatyn* as (“connection, relationship”).

The word *qatyn* may be related to the lexeme *qatyn* as, meaning “the union of two lineages through a woman’s marriage.” This idea was voiced by M. Ādilov (with reference to a 2008 lecture by Professor Zhantas Zhaqypov), who noted that *qatyn* could plausibly derive from *qatynas* in the sense of “the one who establishes a bond between two families”.

2. Derivation from the verb *qat-* (“to join, to add”).

According to another viewpoint, *qatyn* is derived from the verb *qat-*, meaning “to join” or “to increase.” By marrying, a woman “connects” two clans and “increases” the human lineage by giving birth to children. The verb *qat-* is attested in modern Kazakh expressions (e.g., *sūt qatu* “to add milk”), although in the literary language it is less frequent than the synonymous *qos-*. Notably, in modern Oghuz languages, the word-formation model with *qat-* remains highly productive. This makes the hypothesis linking *qatyn* to *qat-* linguistically plausible. In a similar vein, the Kyrgyz Turkologist Useev (2012) argues that *kelin* (“bride, daughter-in-law”) derives from the verb *kel-* (“to come”), meaning “one who has come into the household”; by analogy, *qatyn* may be connected with *qat-* (“to join, to interact”) (p. 61). Moreover, in Old Turkic the verb *qat-* denoted sexual relations between spouses. In Mahmud al-Kashgari’s *Dīwān Luġāt al-Turk*, *qat-* (*qatyl-*) is glossed as “sexual intercourse between a man and a woman”: *er uraġutqa qatıldı* (“the man had sexual relations with a woman”) (Ercilasun & Akkoyunlu, 2015).

3. Connection with the noun *qat* (“layer, stratum”) and the adjective *qabat* (“multilayered”).

4. Some linguists assume that *qatyn* may derive from *qat* in the meaning “layer,” with the secondary meaning “spouse” developing metaphorically (“the person who is closest,” “the one who is beside”). Since *qat* can function both as a noun and as the base of the verb *qatu* (“to layer, to accumulate”), the semantic link between *qatyn* and *qat/ qatu* does not contradict linguistic patterns. According to a concept reflected in Islamic religious-canonical texts, a woman is created from a man’s rib, which resonates with Kazakh expressions such as *qabyrġammen aqyldasayn* (“I will consult with my rib”) and *keregemmen keġeseyn* (“I will consult with my support”). In this context, a semantic connection between *qat* (“layer, stratum”) and *qabyrġa* (“rib, wall”) can be established, based on shared notions of proximity, cohesion, and structural function within family and social hierarchies.

5. The interpretation as “the chief wife of the khagan”.

6. There is also an opinion that *qatyn* originally denoted the senior or principal wife of the khagan (ruler).

7. Association with the forms *qaġan* or *khan*.

8. A number of authoritative scholars in Turkic etymology, including Clauson (1972), consider *qatyn* to be etymologically related to the terms *qaġan* or *khan* (p. 602).

9. Derivation from the same root as *qaiyn* (“affinal relative”).

10. Given that many kinship terms in Turkic languages go back to the root *qa* (e.g., *qaŋ* “father,” *qadaŝ* “kinsman,” *qarındaŝ* “sister”), it is reasonable to hypothesize a common indigenous root for *qatyn* and *qaiyn* (“relatives by marriage”). According to Gülensoy (2018), author of an etymological dictionary of Turkish, *qatyn* derives from *qaiyn* (including *qaiyn ata*, *qaiyn ana* “father-in-law, mother-in-law”) (p. 71). The antiquity of this form is indicated by toponyms (e.g., *Katon-Qaraġai*) and hydronyms (the *Katun* River in Siberia), which preserve the archaic form *qatyn/qadyn*, correlated with *qaiyn* (“birch”). In this case, *qatyn* and *qaiyn* may be regarded as homonymous forms originating from a single root; the meanings *qaiyn jurt* (“wife’s relatives”) and *qaiyn ata* (“wife’s father”) can be logically explained through historical phonetic and semantic shifts.

The alternation of the consonants *d* and *y* is especially evident in the pair *qatyn* – *qaiyn* and was noted by Mahmud al-Kashgari, who observed that the dialects of the *Yaġma*, *Toqsı*, *Kipchak*, *Yabaqu*, *Tatar*, *Qay*, and *Chomul* tribes interchange *d* and *y* in words such as *qadyn* (“relative, kin”) (Useev, 2012, pp. 57–66). In particular, Oghuz speech characteristically uses the form *qaiyn* instead of *qadyn* in the meaning “relatives by marriage” (Mamyrbekova, 2017, p. 173). This is evidenced by the proverb: *Kadaŝ temiŝ qaimaduq, qadyn temiŝ qaimyŝ* (“They paid no heed to brothers, but showed respect to affinal relatives”), where *qadyn* is equivalent to *qaiyn* (“relatives by marriage”).

Thus, on the basis of the arguments and scholarly views considered above, it can be argued that the word *qatyn* has a highly complex etymology. It may have emerged within the Old Turkic lexical system at the intersection of several lexico-semantic trajectories: from the verb *qat-* with its meanings “to bind, to join, to add,” from the noun *qat* (“layer, stratum”), from the possible meaning “lady, chief wife of the khagan,” and through shared roots linking it to *qaiyn* (“affinal kin”). This multivector origin of *qatyn* reflects the overall complexity of lexical evolution and kinship concepts in the Turkic languages.

## B. The Meaning of the Word *Qatyn* in Old Turkic Written Monuments and Medieval Sources

An examination of Old Turkic written monuments and medieval artifacts shows that the word *qatun* was used exclusively with a positive meaning. In the Orkhon inscriptions, *qatun* is attested in the sense of “queen,” “princess,” or “empress.” In particular, the *Kül Tegin* monument contains the following line:

*Türk budunuŋ atı küsi yoq bolmazun tiyin, qaŋım qaġanıŋ, öġüm qatunuŋ kötürmiŝ Teŋri*

(“So that the name and might of the Turkic people should not perish, Tengri exalted my father—the khagan—and my mother—the khatun”).

In the valuable eleventh-century monument *Dīwān Luġāt al-Turk* (“Compendium of the Turkic Languages”), the word *qatun* likewise does not refer to an “ordinary woman,” but denotes “lady,” “woman of noble origin,” or “daughter of a distinguished lineage.” This is evidenced, for example, by the proverb:

Qan işi bolsa, qatun işi qalır

("If there is a matter for the khan, the lady's matter is postponed").

A similar meaning is recorded in sources from the Khwarazmian and Golden Horde periods, where *hatun* denotes "lady, queen; the wife of a bey or mirza; a woman, the mistress of the household." In the Kipchak monument Codex Cumanicus, the word *qatun* is glossed as "a noble woman; a lady." In Mamluk–Kipchak materials, it carries the meaning "lady." In the Anatolian epic The Book of Dede Korkut, the variants *qadun/hatun* occur with the meanings "lady," "beautiful woman," and "mistress of the house".

These data, presented in the dictionaries accompanying the above-mentioned monuments, consistently confirm the high social status and honorific meaning of the word *qatun* in the Turkic languages of the medieval period.

### C. The Meaning of the Word *Qatyn* in the Late 19th and Early 20th Centuries

#### The Semantics of *Qatyn* in Abai's Works

An analysis of Abai's oeuvre and texts from the early twentieth century, that is, prior to the Soviet period, demonstrates that during this historical stage the word *qatyn* retained a clearly positive connotation.

Researchers note that in Abai's time the word *qatyn* belonged to the literary norm and was used frequently, whereas the word *äiel* was only beginning to establish itself as a literary designation. According to quantitative data, in Abai's texts *äiel* occurs eight times, *urğasy* ("female") four times, while *qatyn* appears forty-one times (Syzykova, 1995, p. 63). This distribution clearly indicates that *qatyn* functioned as the normative lexical item, whereas the Arabic-derived *äiel* was only gradually entering the vocabulary of the literary language.

In Abai's works, the lexeme *qatyn* is not used in a derogatory sense but rather in the meanings "wife", "spouse", and "lady." Syzykova (1995) emphasizes that those Kazakh words which are commonly used today in formal contexts (such as *zaiyp*, *jubai*) were not employed by Abai himself; instead, in the meanings "wife" and "spouse," he consistently used *jar* (39 occurrences) and *qatyn* (21 occurrences) (p. 64). Such examples demonstrate that at that time *qatyn* carried a positive semantic load, corresponding to "beloved wife" or "lady" and was by no means perceived as rude or offensive.

This positive evaluation is clearly illustrated in Abai's poetry. Consider, for example, the following poem, in which the favorable characterization of *qatyn* is explicit:

Ақыл керек, іс керек, мінез керек,  
Ер ұялар іс қылмас қатын зерек.  
Салақ, олақ, ойнасшы, керім-кербез,  
Жыртаң-тыртаң қызылдан шығады ерек...  
Қатының сені сүйсе, сен де оны сүй,  
Қоржаң суық келеді кей сасық ми.  
Ері ақылды, қатыны мінезді боп,  
Тату болса, райыс үстіндегі үй.  
Жоқ болса қатыныңның жат өсегі,  
Болмаса мінезінің еш кесегі,  
Майысқан, бейне гүлдей толықсыған,  
Кем емес алтын тақтан жар төсегі...  
Құрбыңның тәуір болса өз мінезі,  
Абройлы қалжыңмен келсін сөзі.  
Сен оған мойын бұрып сөз айтқанда  
Қатыныңда болмасын оның көзі.

(English rendering:)

Wisdom is needed, deeds are needed, character too;  
A wise wife will never shame her husband.  
Slovenly, careless, playful, vain—  
Gaudy and noisy, she stands apart.  
If your wife loves you, love her in return;  
Coldness and rudeness come from a rotten mind.  
When the husband is wise and the wife well-tempered,  
A harmonious home is like paradise beneath a dome.  
If your wife has no чуж gossip,  
If her character bears no flaw,  
Graceful, like a flower in full bloom,  
Her marital bed is no worse than a golden throne.  
Let your friend be decent in character,  
Let his words be marked by honorable wit;  
But when you turn to speak with him,



Let your wife not cast her gaze upon him.

This poem vividly demonstrates that in Abai's ethical universe *qatyn* is associated not with vulgarity or aggression, but with a normative ideal of a morally upright, emotionally restrained married woman who guarantees the continuity and moral health of the household. The wife's modest behavior, loyalty, and self-control are presented as preconditions for male friendship and communal harmony. In other words, the lexeme *qatyn* here belongs to the positive, honorific layer of the kinship lexicon and indexes a culturally valued model of femininity rather than a coarse everyday label.

In Abai's poetic discourse, therefore, *qatyn* functions as a central and positively evaluated figure who embodies moral responsibility, restraint, and the well-being of the household. The following examples from his oeuvre further illustrate how this lexeme operates in everyday and family-related contexts.

In other poems by Abai, the lexeme *qatyn* likewise appears in consistently positive contexts:

1.

Біреу малма сапсиды салып иін  
Салбыраңқы тартыпты жыртық киім.  
Енесіне иіртіп шуда жібін  
Жас қатындар жыртылған жамайды үйін.

("Someone kneads hides in a tanning solution,  
Wearing loose, worn-out clothes.  
Having the mother-in-law spin camel wool,  
Young wives mend the torn yurt.")

2.

Махаббатсыз – дүние бос  
Хайуанға оны қосыңдар.  
Қызықтан өзге қалсаң бос  
Қатының, балаң, досың бар.

("Without love, the world is empty–  
Count it among beasts.  
If you are deprived of joy,  
You still have a wife, children, and friends.")

3.

Қайын бардық, қатын алдық,  
Енші тиді аз ғана  
Шаруа атандық,  
Енді ойландық  
Қала берді бозбала.

("We visited in-laws, took a wife,  
Received but a small share.  
We became householders,  
Then reflected–  
Youth was left behind.")

A comparison of modern editions of Abai's works with the St. Petersburg edition of 1909 reveals that the earlier version does not contain the spelling *qatyn*; instead, the form *hatyn* is used consistently (Kunanbaiuly, 1909). Apparently, later editors standardized this word in accordance with modern orthographic norms, replacing *hatyn* with *qatyn*. It is noteworthy that in Mürseit's manuscripts of 1907 containing Abai's texts, only the form *hatun/hatyn* occurs, corresponding to the usage found in Old Turkic written monuments.

To illustrate this, consider the comparison between modern editions and Mürseit's manuscripts. In contemporary publications one finds:

Тойдан да, топтан да, қатыннан да көңілі аз ба, көп пе жалығады  
("From feasts, from gatherings, from women as well–  
The soul grows weary, whether little or much.")

In Mürseit's 1907 manuscript:

Тойдан да топдан да хатүннан да көңіл аз ба көп пе жалығады (Petek, 2023, p. 41).

Similarly, in the eleventh Word of Edification in modern editions:

Құдайға жазып, жатпай-тұрмай салып жүріп басын, ауылын, қатын, баласын сатып жүр

“Appealing to God, without rest day or night,  
He sells his property, his home, his wife, and his children.”)

In the manuscript version:

Һұдайға жазып жатпай тұрмай салып жүрүп басынауылын һатүн баласын сатып жүр (GK 36/1) (Petek, 2023).

Comparable discrepancies are also observed in the Fortieth Word, where *qatyn* appears as *hatun* (GK 42/4) (Petek, 2023). In the poetic texts of the 1907 manuscript, the forms *hatyn/hatun* occur consistently (Jas hatunlar, Oinashchy hatun, Eri aqyldy, hatuny minezdi bop, Shekpen tiger hatuny, etc.), which confirms that during Abai’s lifetime the more archaic form of the word was in active use.

A comparison of the manuscript and modern versions reveals not only a graphic substitution of *hatun* with *qatyn*, but also certain differences in poetic meter, including the addition of an extra syllable. For example, in the modern version the line *Qatyñny seni süyse, sen de ony süy* is one syllable longer than in Mürseit’s original text.

It is therefore evident that in Abai’s usage *qatyn/hatun* preserved its original positive meaning of “wife” or “lady,” closely aligned with its semantics in Old Turkic texts. This is further confirmed by Kazakh proverbs and sayings:

Eki qatyñ alypsıñ, bir päläge qalypsıñ.  
 (“If you take two wives, you invite misfortune.”)

Qatyñ ötirik aitpaidy, qağys estidi.  
 (“A woman does not lie; she simply misheard.”)

Qazaq baiysa qatyñ alady, sart baiysa tam soğady.  
 (“When a Kazakh becomes wealthy, he takes a wife; when a Sart becomes wealthy, he builds a house.”)

Qatyñ alma, qaiyn al.  
 (“Do not choose a wife—choose your in-laws.”)

Bala – belde, qatyñ – jolda.  
 (“A child is at the waist, a wife is on the road.”)

Jaulıq kigeniñ bäre qatyñ emes, bōrik kigeniñ bäre batyr emes.  
 (“Not everyone in a headscarf is a woman, and not everyone in a cap is a hero.”)

Khan jarlyğynan qatyñ jarlyğy küşti.  
 (“A woman’s word is stronger than a khan’s decree.”)

Bir qatyñ syılaumen qatyñ, bir qatyñ qınaumen qatyñ. Nağyz sol qatyñ – är närseni oilaumen qatyñ.  
 (“One wife is a wife through respect, another through suffering; a true wife is the one who thinks of everything.”)

Toğyz qatyñnyñ tolğagy qatar keldi.  
 (“Nine wives went into labor at the same time.”)

Recent paremiological research based on 154 Kazakh proverbs and sayings demonstrates that *qatyn* has by no means disappeared from the linguistic picture of the world. In a large corpus of paremias, *qatyn* accounts for 24.02% of all female designations and is systematically opposed to other lexemes such as *kız*, *äiel* and *ana*, which confirms that the semantic evolution of *qatyn* should be analysed not only in isolation but also within the broader network of gendered terms in Kazakh paremiology (Igissinova et al., 2024a).

Taken together, these proverbs reveal a complex, far from one-dimensional image of the *qatyn* in traditional Kazakh culture. On the one hand, sayings such as “Bala – belde, qatyñ – jolda” underline the social vulnerability and mobility of a married woman, whose status depends on marital stability. On the other hand, expressions like “Khan jarlyğynan qatyñ jarlyğy küşti” and “Nağyz sol qatyñ – är närseni oilaumen qatyñ” foreground her agency, practical wisdom, and capacity to influence household and even communal decisions. In none of these cases does *qatyn* function as an insult; rather, it serves as a central term for a socially significant role that is evaluated through a spectrum of culturally specific expectations and norms.

Thus, examples from Abai and from early twentieth-century periodicals and publicistic texts show that *qatyn* still functioned as a socially central, largely positive designation for a married woman or lady of the household. In the following sections we trace how this evaluative profile is gradually reconfigured under the influence of Alash-era discourse, Soviet language policy, and contemporary media, leading to the coexistence of respectful and pejorative uses in present-day Kazakh.

#### D. The Meaning of the Word *Qatyn* in the Works of Alikhan Bökeykhan

The fact that Bökeykhan (2016) –the outstanding Kazakh thinker and leader of the national movement in the early twentieth century–actively used the word *qatyn* (while employing *äiel* only very rarely) indicates the continuity of this lexeme from the time of Abai. In Bökeykhan’s texts, *qatyn* occurs with comparable frequency and retains positive semantic nuances analogous to *hanım* (“lady”) or *aru* (“beauty”) as attested in Old Turkic. For example:

“Осы Дидро қатын патша Екінші Екатеринамен хат алысып, патша Дидродан көп ақыл алған” (Bökeykhan, 2016, p. 324).

(“Diderot corresponded with Empress Catherine II, who received much advice from him.”)

This passage clearly shows that *qatyn* patsha is understood as “a woman on the imperial throne,” carrying a positive, honorific connotation.

In Bökeykhan’s writings, *qatyn* is systematically used in contexts where today one would employ *äiel* (“woman”), both in formal and everyday usage: *qatyn* alu (“to marry”), *qatyn* bosatu (“to divorce”), *qatyn* qylu (“to take as a wife”), *qatyn* basu (“to have a wife”), *qatynyn* tartyp alu (“to take another man’s wife”), *qatyn* patsha (“empress”), *jükti qatyn* (“pregnant woman”). For example:

“Бақытжан, Садуақас қалың малсыз қатын аламыз деп сөйлеген күні, Жиһаншаһ ауырып сиезге бара алмаған еді. Қалың малсыз қатын аламын деп, шаңқай тал түсте жалтарып, мұсылман сиезін адастырғанмен жұрт ұстап отырған рәсім жоғала ма?”

(“...Before a tax was introduced on those who marry and those who divorce, what difference does it make if someone wishes to take a wife without paying bridewealth?”)

Another example reads:

“...Кім мықты болса, сол нашардың қатынын тартып алады: мисәлә, бір сарт бір қазақ қатынын неке қиғызып алып еді, осы қатынды бір қазақ болысы тартып алып, өзіне қатын қылып неке қиғызды”

(“...Whoever is stronger takes the weaker man’s wife away: for example, a Sart married a Kazakh woman according to the rites, but then a Kazakh volost administrator took this woman from him, married her, and made her his wife.”)

(Ghali Khan. The Muslim Congress. Qazaq, 1914) (Bökeykhan, 2016).

Such examples confirm that at the beginning of the twentieth century the word *qatyn* still preserved its traditional meaning and was not automatically perceived as negative. At the same time, Bökeykhan’s texts occasionally reveal usages with a shade of reproach or negligence, for instance: “Бұл қазақша жаман, олақ қатын істеген ірімшік, кесегімен жүрген қоспа болады” (“This poorly made Kazakh cheese, as if prepared by a clumsy woman, turns into a lumpy mixture”) (Bökeykhan, 2016).

In the works of Kudaiberdiuly (2003) of Semey, signs of an emerging negative coloration of *qatyn* become more noticeable:

Қарап жүріп қақтығып,  
Қатынша сөзбен шаптығып...

(“Walking calmly, he suddenly collided,  
Then rushed in with words like a woman...” (Kudaiberdiuly, 2003, p. 83);

Қаралы қатын, қыздары  
Дауыс қып әнге салады...

(“A woman in mourning, her daughters–  
They raise their voices and turn it into song...” (Kudaiberdiuly, 2003, p. 91).

Overall, in the language of the Alash movement figures, the words *qatyn* and *äiel* often occur in parallel. While *qatyn* had not yet become fully derogatory, its semantics were gradually shifting, as evidenced by contextual usage. In one of Bökeykhan’s articles, *qatyn* appears alongside *äiel* and *hanım*, suggesting that the author regarded them as largely synonymous, albeit with stylistic distinctions:

“Бекет батырдың қатыны артынан айдалған батырды қуып барып, қашуға көмек қылып, батыр қашып елге қайтыпты... Судя по преданию о Бекете, и казахская женщина достойна гордости” (Petek, 2023, p. 278).

In Bökeykhan’s works, *äiel* occurs significantly less frequently than *qatyn*, in contrast to later Soviet-era texts, where *äiel* gradually became established as the primary neutral term for “woman.” Consequently, an analysis of the linguistic practices of Alash leaders demonstrates the evolutionary nature of the semantic and connotational change of *qatyn*: in the early twentieth century it was still used in positive or neutral senses, while the parallel spread of *äiel* signals the beginning of a linguistic shift that would later become firmly entrenched.

#### E. The 1920s: The Period of the Establishment of Soviet Power

##### 1. The Meaning of the Word *Qatyn* in the Works of Sabit Mukanov.

After the Alash period, the word *äiel* (“woman”), oriented toward the Russian equivalent *zhenshchina*, began to enter active usage. In Sabit Mukanov’s novel *Ömir mektebi* (School of Life), the lexeme *äiel* occurs more than five hundred times. Even a single-page excerpt vividly demonstrates the intensification of this word during the Soviet period:

“...– Then bring him here,” said one of the women sitting by the hearth. Though I did not want to go, a young man almost forced me, pushing me toward the hearth. Among the gathered women, an elderly one said: “Pour broth into a

bowl and add some liver, lungs, and intestines.” One of the women poured broth into a rather large black bowl with a chipped edge, added some meat, and I began to eat. “So, whose son are you, my dear?” asked the same elderly woman after I had eaten and returned the bowl. “I am Mukan’s son,” I replied. “Oh, my poor child,” said the woman compassionately, “so you are the orphan left by Mukan? Your name is Sabit, isn’t it?” “How does this woman know me when I do not know her at all?” I wondered inwardly and nodded again. “How do you know this boy?” someone asked her. “How could I not know?” the woman replied. “Wasn’t he born in our house?” (Muqanov, 1970).

In Mukanov’s prose, the word *qatyn* generally appears in the speech of village residents and is found primarily in dialogues reflecting colloquial or vernacular usage. While the author himself more often employs *äiel*, characters in everyday conversation tend to prefer *qatyn*. For example:

“What are you saying? Are you the only young man in the world? Has no one else taken a wife besides you? Or is your bride somehow better than the others? There is nothing special about her to make her stand out... Except that she was not sold for livestock. Tomorrow she will become, like us, an ordinary housewife. That is the parents’ custom. We will walk to the aul laughing and joking,” he said, taking my fiancée by the arm (Muqanov, 1970).

Thus, in the Soviet period beginning in the 1920s, literary norms reflect a marked expansion in the use of *äiel*, while *qatyn* increasingly shifts into the domain of colloquial speech, appearing mainly in dialogues and acquiring a familiar or even coarse *оттежок*.

## 2. The Word *Qatyn* in Printed Periodicals.

With the appearance of the newspaper *Azat äiel* (“Free Woman”) in 1925 and, from 1926, the journal *Äiel* teñdigi (“Women’s Equality”), the Arabic-derived word *äiel* (“woman”) gradually began to displace the native Kazakh word *qatyn*. This process started in the 1920s, that is, during the formation of Soviet power. Under the influence of Soviet ideology, educated circles began to view *qatyn* as demeaning, coarse, and offensive, while *äiel* was perceived as more polite and positively connoted, emphasizing the woman’s status as an equal member of society. As a result of this ideological shift, the borrowing *äiel* became firmly established in the lexicon and actively used in the literary language, whereas the indigenous word *qatyn* lost its core semantic value, became less frequent, and gradually acquired a negative coloring.

## 3. Contemporary Media on the Meaning of the Word *Qatyn*.

Although mass media regularly raise the issue of semantic changes in the word *qatyn*, and scholars and members of the intelligentsia frequently discuss this problem on social networks, to date no separate academic article in the Kazakh language has been published that is devoted specifically to this topic. On information portals one can find materials with headlines such as “Whom Do We Call *Qatyn*?”, “What Does the Word *Qatyn* Mean?”, “Is It Correct to Use *Qatyn* Instead of *Äiel*?”, “Rejoice If You Are Called *Qatyn*”, “*Qatyn* Is an Honorific Word”, and “Which Is More Appropriate: *Qatyn* or *Äiel*?”. Alongside folk etymologies, these publications primarily focus on the issue of the appropriateness of using *qatyn* in relation to *äiel*.

At the same time, most media publications popularize various folk interpretations of the origin of the word *qatyn*. Among them are claims that in the “ancient Kazakh language” it allegedly meant *qutym* (“my fortune”), with subsequent sound changes transforming *qutym* into *qatyn*, or that *qatyn* arose through the compounding of *qağan* and *tun* in the sense of “the khagan’s spouse,” later shortened to *qağantun* and then to *qatun*. However, such explanations lack a convincing scientific basis and more often belong to the category of unsubstantiated conjectures.

## F. The Semantics of the Word *Qatyn* in Modern Turkic Languages

In most modern Turkic languages, the lexeme *qatyn* has largely preserved its basic meaning “woman, wife,” although in some idioms—particularly in Kyrgyz and several Siberian Turkic languages—it may, as in Kazakh, also carry negative connotations.

Within the Kipchak group:

- Kyrgyz: *qatyn* “woman, wife; sometimes ‘a bad wife’”;
- Karakalpak: *qatyn* “woman, wife”;
- Tatar: *hatyn* “woman,” *hatyn-qyz* “women, the female half,” *irle-hatynly* “spouses”;
- Bashkir: *qatyn* “woman,” *irle-qatynly* “spouses”;
- Karachay-Balkar: *qatyn* “woman, wife”;
- Kumyk: *qatyn* “woman.”

Within the Karluk subgroup:

- Uyghur: *hotun* “woman,” *hotun-qizlar* “women, girls”;
- Uzbek: *hotin* “woman, wife,” *hotin-qizlar* “women and girls,” *er-u hotun* “husband and wife.”

Within the Oghuz languages:

- Turkish: *kadın* “woman, wife, mistress of the household; mother; lady”;
- Azerbaijani: *gadin* “woman, married woman, lady”;
- Turkmen: *hatyn* “woman.”

Within the Siberian Turkic languages:

- Khakas: *hadyn* “woman, lady, mistress of the household; elderly woman,” *hat* “bad, old woman”;
- Altai: *qadyt* “woman, wife; sometimes ‘bad wife,’ ‘old witch’”;

- Tuvan: qada “elder sister, aunt,” qadai “woman, mistress; sometimes ‘bad wife’,” qat ie “mother-in-law”;
- Yakut (Sakha): hotun “woman, wife, lady; the ‘queen’ card in playing cards.”

Similar tendencies are observed in other Turkic languages. A comprehensive study of Tuvan proverbs and sayings shows that gendered paroemias overwhelmingly reproduce androcentric stereotypes and asymmetrical expectations towards men and women, thereby reinforcing a hierarchical model of gender relations (Egorova et al., 2020). The fact that in Tuvan paremias, as in Kazakh, pejorative shades cluster around certain female designations suggests that the negative re-evaluation of lexemes referring to women is part of a wider Turkic pattern rather than a uniquely Kazakh development.

It should be noted that in Turkish linguistics, studies specifically devoted to the historical evolution of the meaning of the word kadın (*qatyn*) have already been published. Among them are works such as Kadın sözcüğünün tarihsel süreç içerisinde değişen anlamları (Işık, 2018, p. 69) and Köktürk harfli Yenisey yazıtlarındaki kadını bildiren kelimelerin anlamına göre eski Türklerde kadın imajı (Useev, 2012), which analyze how the image of women was formed in Old Turkic monuments, particularly in the Yenisei inscriptions.

An examination of social media posts and Turkish-language articles devoted to this topic makes it possible to propose new hypotheses regarding the semantic evolution of *qatyn* in Kazakh. In the course of the present study, approximately ten existing etymological hypotheses concerning the origin of this word were systematized and analyzed individually. In addition, synonymous units—some of which have partially lost their original meanings—were identified and subjected to linguistic analysis in order to reveal their underlying bases.

#### IV. CONCLUSION

On the basis of written monuments and data from modern Turkic languages, it can be argued that in its earliest usage the lexeme *qatyn* carried a meaning close to the modern hanım (“lady”). In all sources examined, the word *qatyn* appears with a positive connotation. In the works of the great poet Abai, it is not used as a coarse term but as an expression corresponding to Old Turkic aru, hanım, jar, “a wise woman.” This is evidenced by Abai’s lines: Er uialar is qylmas *qatyn* zerek (“A wise wife will not commit a shameful deed”) and Qatıñy seni süyse, sen de ony süy (“If your wife loves you, love her in return”), which portray a respected and dignified female image.

A comparative analysis of Turkic languages shows that in some of them—primarily Kazakh, Kyrgyz, and certain Siberian languages—*qatyn* has acquired negative connotations, which may be explained by stronger influence from Russian, where a rough parallel exists in the word baba. In other languages, particularly the Oghuz and Karluk groups, which were less affected by Russian influence, the original “sacral” meaning of the word has been preserved to a much greater extent.

The pejoration of *qatyn* can also be viewed in light of cross-linguistic psycholinguistic evidence showing that gender-marked lexical items routinely trigger stereotypical inferences about social roles and personal traits. Jankowiak et al. (2024), for instance, demonstrate that even minimal differences in the gender marking of Polish and English sentences significantly affect readers’ expectations about the referent’s behaviour and attributes, which suggests that the diachronic re-interpretation of *qatyn* is likely to have had a tangible impact on how Kazakh speakers conceptualise female agency and status.

As the Arabic-derived word *äiel* (“woman”) spread actively, *qatyn* in Kazakh gradually lost its original positive nuances and came under the influence of Russian usage with its negative coloring associated with baba. The disapproval of notions such as “queen” or “empress” in Soviet discourse contributed to the association of *qatyn* with a derogatory meaning.

The analysis suggests that the Kazakh word *qatyn* entered Persian in the form hatun and later returned to Turkic languages (including Kazakh) in that same form. Thus, the lexeme exists simultaneously in two variants, reflecting differences in meaning and stylistic usage. The Persian form hatun is used in the sense of “the khan’s wife,” as in the Old Turkic period, while the more widespread form *qatyn* covers the semantics “woman, wife.” In Persian, the meanings “queen” and “princess” likewise point to the Old Turkic origin of this borrowing.

In Kazakh, Kyrgyz, and some other Turkic languages, the narrowing or negative reinterpretation of *qatyn* is likely connected with the active spread of *äiel* and with Soviet policies that regarded words associated with the pre-revolutionary era—such as bai, *qatyn*, and khan—as ideologically inappropriate. At the same time, the parallel existence of two near-synonyms (*äiel* and *qatyn*) often leads to one of them moving into the passive lexicon with a lower evaluative status. The influence of Russian, where zhenshchina and baba are clearly distinguished, further encouraged the selection of *qatyn* as an equivalent of baba with its negative connotations.

As a result, the indigenous word *qatyn* found itself in a disadvantaged position compared to the borrowed *äiel*. A similar process affected bai, which once carried an honorific meaning among Kazakhs but acquired a negative evaluation in the Soviet era. This tendency also extended to other native words associated with pre-communist realities (such as hanım, myrza, bek), which were replaced during the Soviet period by *äiel*, joldas (“comrade”), and azamat (“citizen”) in order to emphasize “equality” and “progressiveness.” In contrast, in Turkey—where such rigid ideological constraints did not operate—lexemes like bai and *qatyn* have continued to be used actively in their original positive meanings, without pejorative associations.

Thus, the evidence shows that prior to Soviet rule *qatyn* did not function as a systematically derogatory label; its wholesale reinterpretation as “offensive” is a relatively recent development that obscures its earlier positive and neutral meanings.

From a broader sociolinguistic perspective, the case of *qatyn* resonates with international research on gendered stereotypes and norms. A systematic review by Stewart et al. (2021) shows that interventions aimed at reshaping gender norms must simultaneously address entrenched linguistic patterns and the ideological frames that sustain them. In this sense, any attempt to re-evaluate the historical meanings of *qatyn* and to restore its earlier honorific connotations cannot be separated from wider efforts to challenge gender asymmetries in contemporary Kazakh society.

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# Analyzing Taboo Words in Tenganan Pegringsingan Village as Preliminary Insight Into Cultural Change

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**Abstract**—This study examines the use of taboo language within the Desa Tenganan Pegringsingan (DTP). DTP is a Bali Aga village known for strict customary norms. Traditionally, DTP's taboo lexicon carried strong moral, religious, and social sanctions, functioning as a linguistic boundary marker. Generational change, digital media exposure, and cultural contact have led to significant reinterpretations of the past. The research uses a descriptive qualitative approach with ethnolinguistic and socio-pragmatic orientations. Taboo words are analyzed as culturally embedded expressions reflecting transformations in social norms, generational values, and ritual practices. Data were collected from ten indigenous respondents across three age groups. Findings reveal widespread semantic bleaching. Formerly offensive terms such as *kawah*, *bangsat*, and *bedogol* are now used in humorous, hyperbolic, or solidarity-building contexts. Non-native borrowings, such as *jancuk*, have entered youth speech through media and tourism. Even once-unspeakable genital-related terms now appear in casual or online discourse. These shifts demonstrate pragmatic diversification, as taboo language expands from serving as an insult or source of anger to also function as humor, emphasis, and cultural indexing. Politeness norms in DTP are increasingly context-dependent, challenging classical universality claims in politeness theory. Traditional forms, such as *Samodana*, remain in ceremonial contexts, but the control of language has shifted. Instead of external customary enforcement, internal moral awareness now prevails. Ultimately, these changes represent not a regression of tradition but an adaptive strategy for preserving cultural identity amid modernization and globalization.

**Index Terms**—cultural shifting, intergenerational shift, linguistic change, socio-pragmatic, taboo words

## I. INTRODUCTION

Taboo words are often seen as impolite because they can threaten a person's face or self-image in social communication (Culpeper, 2005). People frequently use taboo language to attack or belittle others, directly threatening the listener's social face (Hasibuan, 2018; Pradnyani & Suastini, 2023; Sukarini et al., 2024). In many cultures, speakers employ taboo words to undermine the rights and status of listeners, showing the close relationship between taboo words and violations of politeness norms (Angkunsinthana & Lerlertyuttitham, 2019). Therefore, to avoid negative effects, people often use euphemisms to maintain relationships and protect their image (Crespo-Fernández, 2014). Studies of literature and film also reveal that taboo language can lead to conflicts in social interactions (Allan & Burridge, 2006; Mulana & Mahendrayana, 2024). Breaking taboos can also result in social exclusion or stigmatization, since taboo words often contradict cultural and moral values (Allan & Burridge, 2006). While these studies emphasize the negative and impolite functions of taboo words, fewer have examined how taboos shift toward socially acceptable or even polite usage. This gap leaves unexplored the question of how communities reinterpret and recontextualize taboo expressions in line with changing cultural values.

In this context, Desa Tenganan Pegringsingan (DTP) illustrates how taboo language is perceived as impolite and face-threatening. In DTP, speakers may intentionally violate cooperative principle by uttering taboo words for specific social effects (Sari et al., 2025). However, unlike urban communities such as Denpasar, where modernization and globalization drive the free use of taboo words as contemporary expression (Mahayana et al., 2024; Rahman et al., 2024), DTP

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represents a unique case because it has preserved a highly regulated linguistic system within a traditional cultural framework (Subawa et al., 2019). Studying taboo words in this setting reveals how deeply embedded cultural norms interact with new social influences such as tourism, social media, and external education (Pradnyani & Suastini, 2023).

These changes have triggered new impoliteness strategies, such as bald-on-record speech, and have reframed taboo expressions that were once deemed offensive. In some settings, taboo words are now accepted, even considered polite, especially in intimate peer interactions, social humor, or solidarity-building. Dynel (2012) asserts that swearing online does not inherently imply impoliteness; much depends on the speaker's intent and the norms of the community. Crespo-Fernández (2014) demonstrates that euphemisms can turn taboos into tools for social harmony. Allan and Burridge (2006) maintain that the meaning and effect of taboo language are highly context-dependent. Thus, examining DTP provides an opportunity to demonstrate how context mediates between impolite and polite functions of taboo expressions in a culturally specific environment.

The shift from taboo as impolite to acceptable, or even polite, reflects changes in societal values. Politeness is no longer absolute; it depends on context, speaker relationships, and changing norms. Among younger generations, previously avoided taboo words now signal solidarity, familiarity, or shared humor. This blurs the traditional lines between polite and impolite communication and challenges classical politeness theories, such as Brown and Levinson's, which assume that taboo expressions always threaten face.

In DTP, these dynamics are especially visible. The Bali Aga community bases its linguistic and social systems on customary norms and relational hierarchies. Historically, the use of taboo language was regulated. Words like *kling* 'male genitalia' were once avoided due to their perceived offensiveness. Now, young people often use them casually as greetings or jokes, signaling familiarity and shared cultural identity. This shift is influenced by social media, cross-cultural encounters, and changing intergenerational relationships. It also challenges Grice's (1975) maxims of manner and relation because previously forbidden expressions can now appear relevant and even polite in certain contexts.

Although numerous linguistic and pragmatic studies have explored the impolite uses of taboo language, research on their polite usage remains limited. Focusing on DTP provides a rare and valuable case because it is a traditional community negotiating between preservation of cultural heritage and exposure to modern influences. Investigating how taboo words lose their offensive force and acquire new functions in this context allows us to understand both the dynamics of politeness and the adaptability of language in shifting cultural landscapes. Ultimately, this study aims to describe the meaning and functions of taboo words and examine semantic and pragmatic shifts in the use of taboo language within the DTP community.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Taboo words have long been the subject of cross-disciplinary studies due to their complex functions in social and cultural life (Muscianisi, 2024). Taboo serves as a mechanism of social control that regulates linguistic behavior in accordance with moral and cultural norms. However, various studies have shown that the boundaries of taboo are shifting alongside modernization, globalization, and changing social values. Therefore, the analysis of taboo words can be used to understand the dynamics of cultural change, particularly within societies undergoing intercultural contact. According to Locher and Watts (2005), taboo is also understood as part of broader "relational work", wherein evaluations of linguistic behavior, including taboo, are contextually negotiated rather than universally fixed. This perspective emphasizes that taboo functions not merely as a prohibition system but as an index of social relations and identity.

According to Buffagni (2024), the use of taboo words functions to assert social identity and to represent the reality of modern urban communities that are increasingly permissive toward coarse language. This phenomenon indicates a relaxation of politeness norms and the emergence of new forms of expression that are more honest and spontaneous. A similar finding is reported by Alqahtani et al. (2022) in Saudi Arabia, who observed a shift from the use of euphemisms toward the explicit acceptance of taboo words, reflecting egalitarian and open values in modern society. Both studies demonstrate that changes in attitudes toward taboo correspond to shifts in communication patterns and value orientations within society. These examples align with discursive approaches to (im)politeness, which view politeness and impoliteness not as inherent properties of words but as the outcome of situated evaluative practices (Haugh, 2013). Such shifts highlight how speakers adopt taboo terms to index stance, perform identity, and align with particular communities of practice.

In the Indonesian context, Purba et al. (2022) found that most taboo words in the Simalungun language have been preserved across generations because they serve to uphold norms of politeness and customary values. However, some have lost their social function due to modernization and migration. Aziz et al. (2020) also noted that in Aceh, taboos function to maintain the community's religious and moral values. Violating a taboo may lead to social sanctions, demonstrating the strong role of taboo as a moral regulator. Both studies emphasize that taboo remains an integral part of local cultural systems, while also indicating that changes within the taboo system can reflect the level of social transformation within a community.

From a psycholinguistic perspective, Reilly et al. (2020) showed that the power of taboo words does not lie solely in their meaning but also in their phonological form and the emotional responses they evoke. Meanwhile, Khaghaninejad et al. (2020) revealed that foreign language learners tend to become more sensitive and cautious toward taboo words in their first language, suggesting that intercultural contact reshapes perceptions of politeness and linguistic prohibition. Alzubaidi

and Hatoss (2025) further found that bilingual speakers, particularly Saudi women, perceive taboo words in a foreign language as less offensive due to emotional distancing. The finding underscores that social context and linguistic identity play a key role in determining how taboos are perceived. Meanwhile, Yaacob et al. (2024) expanded this perspective by showing that taboo words can be recontextualized as an educational tool through the Taboo Word Game, which enhances students' motivation and vocabulary competence.

The previous studies above thus demonstrate that taboo words are dynamic and adaptive to changes in social values. In the context of traditional societies such as DTP, taboos remain closely linked to sacredness and customary systems; however, interaction with tourists and modern media may gradually weaken these boundaries. Therefore, changes in the use of taboo words in DTP can serve as an important indicator for predicting the direction of cultural transformation from traditional to modern orientations. This dynamism supports contemporary claims that (im)politeness is not universal but negotiated within specific cultural conditions; thus, shifting taboo practices may reflect emerging stances and the re-indexing of social identities.

Changes in how taboo words are used in traditional communities reveal the complexity of social and cultural dynamics. Taboo words are words that represent social rules. They are deeply rooted in a society's values and cover topics like sex, death, religion, bodily functions, and power structures (Wardhaugh & Fuller, 2015). Perangin-angin et al. (2024) demonstrated that children in rural areas don't use taboo words because they are naturally creative with language; instead, they do so because they are copying what they see and hear around them. This means that taboo language serves as a means for cultural norms to be passed down from one generation to the next (Ulfa et al., 2023).

Modernization and globalization are two key factors driving changes in how people perceive and use taboo words. Junxuan et al. (2025) noted that cultural friction, particularly between older and younger generations, has diminished the once-sacred significance of taboos, especially in areas increasingly exposed to global cultural influences. Balinese communities, such as *Menyali* and *Sesetan*, have also undergone similar changes. There, taboo expressions have been grouped into three areas: spiritual (Parhyangan), social (Pawongan), and environmental (Palemahan). This shows a shift from sacred meaning to more practical, everyday language use (Mahayana et al., 2023; Mulana & Mahendrayana, 2024). These shifting patterns further illustrate how taboo forms undergo pragmatic diversification, whereby their meanings and functions expand according to sociocultural context.

Young people's views on taboo language are a key sign of changing cultural norms (Khairullina et al., 2020). A study by Suha and Sudarwati (2021) on popular media reveals that younger generations increasingly view taboo words not as moral violations, but as means to express their feelings, shape their identities, and connect with others. In traditional Balinese villages, youth groups such as *Sekaa Teruna Teruni* in Bugbug and Pejeng Kangin demonstrate how young people preserve ritual language and cultural practices. This occurs despite their increasing exposure to modern values (Mayari, 2024). Changes in how taboo language is used reveal changes in attitudes and behavior. Viewed from a cultural psychology perspective, taboo language serves as a tool to express shared identity and beliefs. Salija et al. (2018) found that shifting attitudes toward taboo language demonstrate the flexibility of language and a community's changing worldview and moral compass. In indigenous Balinese contexts such as Bali Aga communities, these transformations raise critical concerns about cultural erosion. This concern is heightened by external forces, such as tourism, digital media, and urbanization, which introduce conflicting values that may displace local linguistic taboos (Dhanawaty et al., 2020; Kusumaningrum et al., 2024). These studies underscore that changes in perception and use of taboo language are not isolated phenomena. They are part of broader shifts in cultural identity, intergenerational values, and local-global dynamics. In-depth studies of linguistically and culturally unique communities such as DTP are essential. In sum, integrating discursive (im)politeness, relational work, and indexicality allows a more nuanced interpretation of how taboo forms are negotiated and re-functionalized, highlighting that such transformations challenge universal models of politeness and underscore the context-dependent nature of linguistic meaning.

### III. METHODS

#### A. Settings

This research was conducted in DTP, Karangasem, Bali, Indonesia. DTP, a Bali Aga village, is inhabited by indigenous Balinese people with distinct culture, customs, and traditions (Maria et al., 2007). These cultural differences, particularly the village's strict norms, provide the foundation for studying how local use and interpretation of taboo language have evolved.

This study employs a descriptive qualitative approach grounded in ethnolinguistics and socio-pragmatics (Abdel-Jawad, 2000). Taboo words are treated as culturally embedded expressions reflecting shifts in social norms, generational values, and rituals, rather than as isolated terms. Content analysis with an interpretive lens helps uncover sociocultural dynamics and the meanings of taboo expressions. Data come from ethnographic questionnaires, categorization of taboo word types and meanings, and thematic interpretation by socio-pragmatic category. Verification through cultural consultation and conclusions drawn from observed patterns form the final steps of analysis.

To support the analysis, the researcher interviewed ten native residents of DTP about taboo language: TR, AN, DS, WK, IM, NR, MT, GR, YD, and KS.

TABLE 1  
LIST OF RESPONDENTS

| No | Initials | Age | Gender | Education   | Role in Community   | Interview Date |
|----|----------|-----|--------|-------------|---------------------|----------------|
| 1  | TR       | 49  | Male   | High School | Krama Desa          | 29 May 2025    |
| 2  | AN       | 19  | Male   | High School | Truna / Truni       | 29 May 2025    |
| 3  | DS       | 46  | Male   | Bachelor    | Krama Gumi Pulangan | 29 May 2025    |
| 4  | WK       | 23  | Male   | Bachelor    | Truna / Truni       | 29 May 2025    |
| 5  | IM       | 30  | Male   | Bachelor    | Krama Desa          | 29 May 2025    |
| 6  | NR       | 28  | Female | Diploma     | Truni               | 30 May 2025    |
| 7  | MT       | 55  | Male   | High School | Krama Adat          | 30 May 2025    |
| 8  | GR       | 20  | Male   | High School | Truna               | 30 May 2025    |
| 9  | YD       | 36  | Male   | Bachelor    | Krama Desa          | 31 May 2025    |
| 10 | KS       | 42  | Female | High School | Krama Istri         | 31 May 2025    |

The selection of respondents above was based on several criteria: individuals who are indigenous to the DTP and represent three age groups: youth (15–29 years old), adults (30–49 years old), and elders (50+ years old); actively use the Balinese language in social, familial, or traditional interactions; possess sufficient understanding of regional linguistic customs, such as the use of taboo words; and are recommended by community networks and cultural advisors.

### B. Materials

This study employed structured interviews as the primary method for data collection. The interviews were conducted directly with selected respondents in DTP and were guided by a predetermined set of open-ended questions designed to explore the use and perception of taboo language. The interview guide included demographic questions such as age, gender, educational background, and the respondent's role within the adat community. In addition, participants were asked to identify and explain taboo words they were familiar with, describe the contexts in which those expressions were used or avoided, and reflect on their relevance in contemporary settings, particularly in relation to generational change and the impact of modern communication channels, such as social media. The interviews were conducted in the local language to maintain cultural authenticity and were recorded with the participants' consent. The primary material collected consisted of lexical items identified as taboo, while secondary materials included respondents' narrative explanations, usage examples, and sociocultural insights that provided a richer understanding of the meanings and functions of the taboo expressions in everyday life.

### C. Data Collection

The process of data collection began with an extensive review of existing literature concerning taboo language, Balinese sociolinguistics, and the use of ritual speech in traditional communities. This foundational step provided the theoretical grounding necessary to design culturally sensitive and contextually relevant research instruments. Subsequently, a structured questionnaire was developed, piloted, and distributed across generational cohorts, ranging from adolescents to elders, through established social and community networks within the DTP. The primary method of data gathering involved face-to-face interviews based on the structured questionnaire. In addition, informal interviews were conducted with selected key informants, regarded as custodians of cultural knowledge, to validate interpretations and clarify expressions that appeared ambiguous or context-dependent, particularly those linked to sacred rituals such as *meajar-ajar* and *nganyunang loka*. To complement the verbal data, non-participant observation was also carried out in various communal and ceremonial settings, allowing the researcher to unobtrusively observe the actual use of taboo expressions within natural social interactions. This method provided crucial insights into behavioral norms and pragmatic cues that might not have been articulated explicitly in interviews. The entire data collection process was conducted over the course of two months, from May to June 2025, ensuring sufficient time to reach a diverse and representative group of participants across generational lines.

### D. Data Analysis

A qualitative content analysis was conducted using an inductive coding technique, allowing patterns and themes to emerge directly from the responses. The analysis began by identifying the lexical frequency of taboo words mentioned by participants, followed by categorizing these expressions into distinct semantic domains, such as references to genitalia, religious taboos, animal comparisons, and curses. The contextual usage of each term was also examined, particularly in relation to its appearance in ritual settings, everyday domestic life, public interactions, and digital or online communication. The analysis further traced semantic shifts, capturing how the meanings of certain taboo words have evolved from traditional interpretations to more modern-day connotations shaped by generational and technological influences. Beyond lexical and semantic patterns, the study employed a socio-pragmatic approach, drawing on the frameworks (Al-Hamzi et al., 2024). This lens was used to analyze the functions of taboo expressions such as their roles in conveying insult, humor, resistance, or social solidarity, and to explore (im)politeness strategies, indexicality, and the cultural meanings embedded in the use of taboo language within the DTP community's communicative practices.

## IV. RESULTS

This study describes the meaning and the function of taboo language and also examines semantic and pragmatic shifts within the indigenous community of DTP, serving as a preliminary insight into cultural change. Through qualitative analysis of interview data, several sociolinguistic patterns were found that reflect generational dynamics, changing values, and external influences on the use of taboo words in DTP community.

## A. The Meaning and Functions of Taboo Language Found in DTP Community

TABLE 2  
TABOO WORDS FOUND IN DTP COMMUNITY

| DATA | TABOO WORDS                      | MEANING                                    |
|------|----------------------------------|--------------------------------------------|
| 1    | <i>kawah</i>                     | hell/cursed                                |
| 2    | <i>Sundel, panjak</i>            | bitch                                      |
| 3    | <i>bedogol</i>                   | Dumb, useless, inconsiderate               |
| 4    | <i>Bangsai, brengsek, sialan</i> | bastard                                    |
| 5    | <i>amah</i>                      | Eat that (serve you well)                  |
| 6    | <i>pantet</i>                    | Eat that (serve you well)                  |
| 7    | <i>banteran</i>                  | jerk/bastard                               |
| 8    | <i>Panak bojog</i>               | baby monkey                                |
| 9    | <i>jancuk</i>                    | F*ck (exclamative)                         |
| 10   | <i>Salang betare</i>             | I swear to God                             |
| 11   | <i>Kawah incuk/nas kawah</i>     | Damn (lebih kasar dari kata <i>kawah</i> ) |
| 12   | <i>dakinteli</i>                 | Vag*na (vulgar)                            |
| 13   | <i>lengget</i>                   | Pen*s                                      |
| 14   | <i>segaon</i>                    | eat greedily (expletive)                   |
| 15   | <i>ngamah</i>                    | Eating (impolite: eating like a pig)       |
| 16   | <i>manted</i>                    | To eat (impolite: eating like a pig)       |
| 17   | <i>Dakin jit</i>                 | Feces on the butt                          |
| 18   | <i>Naskeleng/kleng</i>           | D*ckhead                                   |
| 19   | <i>bajingan</i>                  | bastard/crook                              |
| 20   | <i>bojog</i>                     | monkey (used insultingly)                  |
| 21   | <i>Nas gon</i>                   | Expletive                                  |

Source: researchers

Table 2 above presents the taboo words used by the community of DTP. In general, these taboo words can be classified into several semantic categories: (1) Religious or cosmological-based curses, such as *kawah* (hell/cursed) and *kawah incuk/nas kawah* (damn, with stronger intensity), which reflect the influence of local belief systems on expressions of anger. (2) Animal-based insults, such as *bojog* (monkey), *panak bojog* (baby monkey), and *banteran* (jerk/bastard), which associate negative human traits with animal behavior. (3) Body and biological function-based insults, such as *dakinteli* (vagina), *lengget* (penis), *dakin jit* (feces on the butt), and *naskeleng/kleng* (dckhead), which are considered highly vulgar in politeness norms. (4) Negative social behavior-based insults, such as *bedogol* (dumb/useless), *bajingan* (bastard/crook), and *sundel, panjak* (bitch), which position the target as a person of poor character. (5) Expletives and oaths, such as *jancuk* (f\*\*k), *nas gon* (expletive), and *salang betare* (I swear to God), which serve to mark emotional intensity or emphasis in interaction. From a pragmatic perspective, these taboo words are not only used for direct insults but also serve as emotional expressions, markers of playful intimacy, or emphasis in social discourse. For instance, “*amah*” and “*pantet*,” although literally meaning “eat that,” can function as sarcastic mockery or responses to provocation (Culpeper, 2019). From an ethnolinguistic standpoint, the presence of this taboo word reflects the interaction between the strict traditional norms of the Bali Aga community and the dynamics of everyday language use. Semantic shifts may occur, in which words that were once sacred or highly offensive are now used jokingly among friends (e.g., *kawah*). These findings align with Allan and Burridge’s (2006) view that linguistic taboos reflect social values that continually evolve in response to cultural context.

## B. Semantic and Pragmatic Shifts in the Use of Taboo Language Within the DTP Community

To understand the changes in meaning in the taboo language above, the following is a clear explanation through sentences and interpretations of their meanings then and now.

## Data 1

*Kawah, bes liunan munyi cai* (Damn, you talk too much). The word *kawah* used to be taboo when directed at someone as an insult, but now it is more commonly used to express anger or even in a joking manner.

## Data 2

*goban caine care sundel* (you bitch). The word *sundel* used to refer to a profession that was highly despised, but now it is used as an insult, especially toward women.

## Data 3

*Nak metulung ye nongos care bedogol* (look, people are working, how could you just sit back and do nothing?). The word *bedogol* used to be highly offensive if mentioned carelessly, but now it has become a common term in conversations among the younger generation.

Data 4

*bangsat cai dadi jeleme* (curse you!). The word *bangsat* used to be considered disgraceful and shameful, but now it is used to express anger.

Data 5

*Amah kude!* (Serves you right!). The word *amah* used to be highly taboo for violating norms of politeness, but now it is used as an expression of annoyance, and even in informal or humorous contexts.

Data 6

*Pantet* (Serves you right). The word *pantet* used to be harsher than *amah* and violated norms of politeness, but now it is used as an expression of annoyance.

Data 7

*Banteran ko cai!* (you jerk). The word *banteran* used to be taboo to call fellow villagers, but now it is often used by young people either to attack or to joke.

Data 8

*Bane, jeneng ci ne care panak bojog* (I wonder you are like an infant). The word *bojog*, meaning “monkey,” used to be directly employed as an insult, but now it is used to mock someone’s physical appearance.

Data 9

*Jancuk!* (f\*ck it). The word *jancuk* was never used in the past because it originated from Javanese, but now it is used by young people in a humorous tone.

Data 10

*Salang betare wake sing ade nyemak* (I swear to God that I didn’t steal it). The expression *salang betare* used to be restricted because it could damage its sacredness, but now it has become a common phrase to convince the listener.

Data 11

*Pih, kawah incuk!* (god damn it). The phrase *kawah incuk* in this context used to be taboo when insulting someone, but now it is used to express anger or jokingly.

Data 12

*Kawah dakinteli* (what the fuck). The word *dakinteli* used to refer to female genitalia in a vulgar way, but now it is uttered as a spontaneous expletive or in moments of surprise.

Data 13

*Itendas caine care lengget* (You d\*ckhead). The word *lengget* used to be highly taboo because it referred to the male genital organ, but now it is used as a daily insult in emotional situations.

Data 14

*Segaon ko cai* (god damn it). The word *segaon* used to be used to insult or attack someone, but now it is employed to tease or joke.

Data 15

*Bane cai ngamah care kaung!* (you can just eat like a pig). The word *ngamah* used to be common, but now it is considered rude and uncivilized; however, it is now used jokingly among young people.

Data 16

*Manted kude cai malu* (eat that sh\*t). The word *manted* used to be highly taboo for violating norms of politeness, but now it refers to create disharmony.

Data 17

*Dakin jit ko cai* (You asshole). The phrase *dakin jit* used to be very vulgar and taboo because it referred to female genitalia, but now it often appears on social media.

Data 18

*Naskleng cai* (you d\*ckhead). The word *naskleng* used to directly insult someone’s intellectual capacity, but now it is used as friendly banter among friends, influenced by urban Denpasar culture.

Data 19

*Bajingan!* (bastard). The word *bajingan* was not commonly used in the past, but now it has become an expression of mild annoyance.

Data 20

*Sing nongos-nongos care bojog* (Stop behaving like a monkey). The word *bojog* used to equate humans with animals and was considered degrading, but now it is used in jest or to mock.

Data 21

*Nas gon cai* (damn you). The phrase *nas gon* did not exist or was not commonly used in the past, but now it is employed humorously or to express annoyance among young people.

The analysis of the 21 data items illustrates a clear semantic and pragmatic shift in the use of taboo language. Historically, these words and expressions were perceived as harsh, disgraceful, and offensive, often tied to violations of social, cultural, or religious norms. However, in contemporary usage, especially among younger generations, many of these terms have undergone a process of semantic softening, refunctionalization, and even humorous appropriation. For example, the word *ngamah* has undergone a change in meaning. As stated by TR:

*Kata ngamah tergolong tabu atau kasar saat digunakan dalam situasi tertentu. Sebenarnya, kata ngamah*

*dulunya tidak Tabu, bahkan sering digunakan dalam percakapan sehari-hari khususnya orang tua ke anak muda, misalnya “sube ngamah cai?” “Kamu sudah makan?” Namun, sekarang menjadi tabu dan memiliki makna negatif jika digunakan oleh. Setiap orang yang menggunakannya akan dianggap tidak santun karena di daerah lain kata ngamah digunakan untuk mengumpat atau mengutuk seseorang dalam konteks tertentu. Hal inilah yang memengaruhi bagaimana kata ini menjadi tabu, dan tentunya tidak bisa digunakan secara sembarangan, kecuali pada seseorang yang memiliki hubungan kekerabatan yang sudah saling mengenal satu sama lainnya dengan niat baik [The word ngamah is considered taboo or rude when used in certain situations. The word ngamah was not actually taboo in the past; in fact, it was commonly used in daily conversations, especially by older people when speaking to younger ones, e.g., sube ngamah cai? (Have you eaten?). However, it has now become taboo and carries a negative meaning when used by others. Anyone who uses it is considered impolite because, in other regions, the word ngamah is used to swear at or curse someone in certain contexts. This is what has influenced how the word became taboo, and it should not be used carelessly, except among people who share close kinship ties and are familiar with one another, with good intentions]. (Interview, May 29, 2025)*

The data show that taboo language in this community is experiencing a profound pragmatic and semantic evolution. What was once socially prohibited, vulgar, or religiously forbidden has now become normalized in everyday interactions, particularly among younger speakers. DS emphasized that:

*Kalimat Banteran ko cai yang biasanya digunakan oleh anak muda DTP tergolong tabu. Penggunaan kalimat ini memang menggambarkan kedekatan antara penutur namun tidak boleh diucapkan secara sembarangan karena bisa fatal akibatnya. jika diucapkan oleh penutur muda kepada orang tua, maka penutur muda dianggap sebagai orang yang tidak memiliki etika dan tidak mematuhi norma sosial yg berlaku. Hal ini pastinya akan mencederai dan mengotori kesakralan desa DTP [the expression Banteran ko cai, which is commonly used by the youth in DTP, is considered taboo. Although this expression reflects a sense of closeness between speakers, it should not be used carelessly, as it may have serious consequences. If it is uttered by a young person toward an elder, the young speaker will be regarded as someone lacking in ethics and failing to observe prevailing social norms. This, undoubtedly, would harm and desecrate the sacredness of DTP village]. (Interview, May 29, 2025)*

This change is driven by factors such as generational shifts, urban influence, peer-group solidarity, humor practices, and the desensitization of taboo through repeated use. KS emphasized that:

*Secara literal kata Dakin teli/Dakin jit memiliki arti sebagai “kotoran vagina” atau “kotoran pantat”. Namun kata ini memiliki makna konotasi negatif, khususnya apabila digunakan untuk mengumpat atau menyerang seseorang. KS menegaskan bahwa jika diucapkan sembarangan maka akan menimbulkan konflik, kecuali digunakan oleh teman akrab dengan tujuan bercanda. Kata ini dulunya jarang ditemui di DTP, namun dewasa ini umum digunakan oleh generasi muda [Literally, the words Dakin teli or Dakin jit mean “vaginal dirt” or “fecal dirt.” However, these words carry a negative connotation, especially when used to insult or verbally attack someone. if spoken carelessly, they could provoke conflict, unless used jokingly among close friends. In the past, these words were rarely heard in DTP, but nowadays they are commonly used by the younger generation]. (Interview, May 31, 2025)*

In conclusion, taboo words no longer function solely as markers of aggression or insult but also as linguistic tools of identity, humor, and relational bonding. This reflects a broader sociolinguistic trend where language adapts to the changing values and interactional norms of its speakers.

## V. DISCUSSION

A dynamic shift is occurring in how the DTP community interprets and uses taboo words. Traditionally, these words had strong negative connotations that were linked to moral, religious, or customary sanctions. Many were associated with violations of *karma*, the sanctity of speech, and social harmony, placing their use within the realm of verbal prohibitions. This supports Allan and Burridge's (2006) idea that taboo words act as linguistic markers of social boundaries. Their transgression risks moral and cultural sanction. While these findings are meaningful, it is important to note that the interpretations presented here are drawn from a small group of participants and thus should be understood as exploratory rather than conclusive. In line with contemporary discursive approaches, these prohibitions can also be viewed as a form of relational work (Locher & Watts, 2005), in which taboo functions not solely as prohibition but as an index of social alignment within the community.

Semantic bleaching of taboo terms in DTP has significantly shifted their communicative roles. Once strictly offensive, these words are now commonly used in casual, humorous, and solidarity-building contexts. For instance, *kawah* (curse/swearing) and *bangsat* (bastard) previously entailed karmic damage or shame but now appear in jest or hyperbole on social media. As stated by MT, a traditional *Krama* (customary community member), “Kata kawah sebaiknya tidak digunakan sembarang, namun masyarakat DTP khususnya anak muda sering mengungkapkannya dalam hal bercanda, terutama dalam situasi berkumpul santai sembari menikmati minuman tuak. Kata kawah dulunya dapat menimbulkan konflik, namun saat ini kata ini mulai kehilangan makna tabunya, sehingga sering digunakan untuk bercanda dan mencerminkan kedekatan sosial antar pemuda [The word kawah should not be used carelessly. However, the people of DTP, especially the youth, often use it jokingly, particularly in relaxed gatherings while enjoying *tuak* (palm wine). In the past, the word *kawah* could provoke conflict, but today it has begun to lose its taboo meaning. As a result, it is now

often used in jest and reflects social closeness among young people] (Interview, May 30, 2025). This transformation supports Crespo-Fernández's (2014) argument that context and intention can convert taboo language from impoliteness to a pragmatic tool for positive politeness. Similarly, *bedogol* (stupid/dumb), *bojog* (monkey), and *ndaskeleng/naskeleng* (empty-headed) have evolved from insults to playful banter among peers, reflecting Jay and Janschewitz's (2008) findings on the positive social uses of taboo words. Dynel (2012) observes that face-threatening expressions are increasingly reinterpreted within groups as closeness markers. The adoption of non-native taboo terms, such as *jancuk* from Javanese, further illustrates how cultural contact and media exposure facilitate linguistic borrowing. *Jancuk*, absent from DTP tradition, has entered youth speech via digital media and tourism, often with humorous rather than hostile undertones. Mahayana et al. (2023) note that modernization and globalization spur this lexical innovation and shift in Bali Aga communities. However, given the limited number of respondents, these observations should be viewed as preliminary trends that would benefit from comparative validation with other Balinese or Indonesian communities.

The evolving use of genitalia-related words (*pantet*, *dakinteli*, *dakin jit*) reflects a shift from previous unspeakable to their appearance on social media. This transition marks a breakdown of traditional taboos due to increased online exposure. As a result, tension now exists between ritual purity-based norms and the liberal expressive styles of digital platforms. The roles of these taboo words have diversified; previously used mainly to insult, shame, or express anger (clearly performing a face-threatening act, FTA), they now serve broader social functions. For instance, they are used for humor, solidarity, and to build in-group identity (*kleng*, *bojog*, *bedogol*). They can also intensify expressions of surprise, frustration, or excitement (*bangsat*, *brengsek*, *sialan*), and signal Bali Aga identity even humorously. The shift suggests that politeness norms in DTP are increasingly context-dependent. This supports the view that politeness is negotiated, not fixed (Al-Hindawi & Alkhazaali, 2016; Eelen, 2001). Nevertheless, this cultural-linguistic shift should be interpreted cautiously, as broader data across similar traditional communities would be needed to confirm whether this tendency represents a larger regional or generational pattern.

This linguistic transformation indicates an ongoing cultural shift within DTP. Taboo restrictions are weakening, reflecting a loosening of customary controls over language, influenced by generational change, media exposure, and external education. Older generations may still consider these words socially dangerous; by contrast, younger speakers increasingly treat them as elements of casual and creative linguistic play. From a cultural anthropology perspective, this shift signals a reconfiguration of value systems. Now, maintaining relational intimacy and peer solidarity may take precedence over traditional notions of ritual purity and hierarchical respect. Language serves as a sensitive barometer of cultural change, revealing shifts in social ideology before they become visible in other domains. In this respect, the present study provides an initial glimpse into how linguistic practices in a small, closely bonded community may indicate early stages of cultural transformation, though further comparative studies are recommended to substantiate this claim. Accordingly, this process can be viewed as pragmatic diversification, in which the functional load of taboo expressions expands beyond prohibition and becomes intertwined with identity performance, stance expression, and relational alignment.

These findings challenge the universality of classical politeness frameworks, such as supposed by Brown and Levinson (1988). While these frameworks assume that taboo language inherently constitutes an FTA, in DTP, the same lexical item can oscillate between impolite and polite functions, depending on context, speaker relationship, and intent. This variability underscores the importance of a context-sensitive, culture-specific approach to politeness and impoliteness research. This supports calls within relational work and discursive politeness study to treat (im)politeness as emergent, negotiated, and indexical rather than universally prescribed. However, the erosion of traditional taboo meanings raises concerns for cultural preservation. In Bali Aga society, these linguistic taboos have historically functioned as moral regulators and markers of collective identity (Tristiani et al., 2024; Wibawa et al., 2024). As these functions weaken, there is a risk that part of the community's intangible cultural heritage will be lost. If these changes are not accompanied by documentation and language education efforts, the cultural values embedded in traditional vocabulary may erode. This finding underscores the importance of language preservation, not only in formal forms but also in informal varieties such as taboo language.

## VI. CONCLUSION

This study reveals that the use and understanding of taboo words in the DTP have undergone a complex transformation due to the clash between traditional values and modern forms of communication. Taboo language was once sacred and forbidden, but its meaning and purpose have evolved to fit the social and generational context. Younger generations, especially the *truna/truni* group, tend to use taboo language only in certain situations, like when they're online or with friends. Changes in meaning occur gradually as social values and norms develop within a community (Traugott & Dasher, 2009). They don't completely stop using ritual forms like *Samodana*, which are still used in sacred ceremonies. Social media has become a key factor in normalizing taboo language, driving shifts in linguistic norms, and weakening the once coercive symbolic control of traditional customs. The findings also indicate that factors such as family environment, formal education, peer interaction, and globalization contribute to the acceleration of this change. However, most of the community still considers customs as regulators of verbal ethics, even though the form of control is now more internal and based on moral awareness. This demonstrates that taboo regulation increasingly operates through relational work, in which evaluations of appropriateness are negotiated within specific relationships and contexts. In this context, traditional

education is viewed as the primary mechanism for preserving cultural values, which need to be formally and informally imparted to younger generations so that these values can be passed down sustainably through language. Furthermore, the emergence of pragmatic diversification indicates that taboo expressions no longer function solely as prohibitions but as flexible resources for relational alignment and affective positioning. Changes in the taboo language system cannot be understood as a regression of tradition but rather as an adaptive process reflecting the community's strategies to maintain cultural identity amid the currents of modernization and globalization.

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# Theoretical and Practical Aspects of Developing Language Skills Through Teaching Literary Texts: Based on Selected Kazakh Novels Published in the Post-Independence Period

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**Abstract**—This research article examines the theoretical and practical significance of developing linguistic competence in the process of language teaching through literary texts, based on Kazakh novels published after the independence of Kazakhstan. The aim of the study is to scientifically substantiate the effectiveness of language teaching through literary texts, to systematize teaching methods based on literary works, and to formulate conclusions aimed at improving the development of language skills in modern educational contexts. In this research, particular attention is given to the structural, semantic, stylistic, and linguistic characteristics of literary texts and their role in the language learning process. Literary works are considered not only as objects of aesthetic study but also as effective pedagogical tools that contribute to the development of vocabulary, grammatical competence, communicative abilities, and cultural awareness of learners. The study also examines how literary texts help learners understand complex linguistic structures and interpret cultural meanings embedded in language. The scientific novelty of the research lies in the pedagogical and linguistic analysis of the novels *Akboz Ūy* by S. Elubayev, *Akorda* by D. Doszhan, and *Zharmak* by M. Magauin, which represent significant examples of Kazakh prose written during the period of independence. These works are analyzed in terms of their linguistic richness, stylistic diversity, and educational potential. Linguistic units from these novels are examined through specific textual examples, and methodological recommendations are proposed for the effective integration of literary texts into language teaching.

**Index Terms**—language skills, teaching literary texts, Kazakh novels, literary texts, stylistic

## I. INTRODUCTION

With the independence of Kazakhstan in 1991, the historical development of Kazakh society entered a new stage. Along with the formation of statehood, this process led to profound transformations in the social system. These changes were clearly manifested in the sphere of literary and cultural renewal, creating conditions for substantive and structural reorientation in the fields of creative activity and education. In this historical context, the role of Kazakh literature

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significantly increased as a key bearer of national culture and an important means of shaping national spirit and public consciousness.

During the period of independence, Kazakh literature – especially prose – played a leading role in consolidating national identity, revitalizing historical memory, and artistically interpreting social transformations. In the educational space, the importance of literary works has grown considerably: they function not only as a means of aesthetic education but also as an essential learning resource that contributes to the comprehensive formation of linguistic and cultural knowledge. Teaching literary texts enriches the language learning process with diverse linguistic material, implicit meanings, and cultural connotations, thereby expanding learners' linguistic and cognitive horizons.

This study aims to comprehensively examine the theoretical and practical issues of developing language skills through teaching literary texts, based on Kazakh novels published in the post-independence period. The main objects of the study are the novels *Akboz Ūy* by Symagul Elubayev, *Akorda* by Dukenbay Doszhan, and *Zharmak* by Mukhtar Magauin, which represent significant examples of Kazakh prose of the independence era in terms of ideological, artistic, and linguistic value. The texts of these works are employed as linguistic models, and effective ways of forming and improving language skills in the teaching process are analyzed.

The study identifies the use of linguistic units, stylistic features, semantic layers, and communicative potential of literary texts in the teaching process and proposes coherent methodological approaches aimed at enriching learners' vocabulary and enhancing their linguistic competence. From this perspective, the primary objective of the research is to determine scientifically grounded methods that contribute to increasing effectiveness in language teaching.

Following Kazakhstan's independence, large-scale reforms were implemented in the education system, the Kazakh language was designated as the state language, and special attention was given to strengthening its status in public and educational domains. At the same time, a policy of “trilingual education” was introduced, requiring the parallel acquisition of Kazakh, Russian, and English from primary school through higher education institutions (Ismaylov, 2011). While this multilingual education policy expanded the scope of teaching national literature, it also generated new methodological challenges related to the in-depth and high-quality mastery of literary texts.

In this context, the teaching of literary works occupies a central role in improving students' language proficiency, developing critical thinking skills, fostering text analysis abilities, and cultivating the capacity to express well-reasoned opinions. The findings of previous studies demonstrate that systematic instruction using literary texts significantly contributes to broadening students' cultural awareness, fostering patriotic consciousness, and enhancing academic achievement. Accordingly, the present study seeks to refine the theoretical frameworks for developing language competence through literary text instruction and to propose effective practical methods for their implementation.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

The research materials of this study consist of two main categories of sources:

*A. Theoretical and practical works addressing the development of linguistic competence through the teaching of literary text.*

*B. Literary studies devoted to Kazakh novels published after Kazakhstan gained independence.*

In the course of the research, these two thematic areas are examined as an integrated system, and their interconnections are analyzed. In particular, the novels *Akboz Ūy* by Symagul Elubayev, *Akorda* by Dukenbay Doszhan, and *Zharmak* by Mukhtar Magauin are selected as the primary research material. On this basis, the theoretical and practical aspects of enhancing linguistic and creative competence through the teaching of literary texts are comprehensively analyzed. This approach makes it possible to identify methodological innovations in the teaching process and to establish a scientific foundation for the effective use of literary texts in education.

At present, the development of linguistic competence through the teaching of literary texts is examined not only from a literary perspective but also through an integrated consideration of linguistic, aesthetic, and cognitive dimensions. For example, in *Using Literature to Learn and Teach Language: The L3 Approach* (2024), Carol Griffiths systematically analyzes the “L3 approach” to language teaching through literary texts. Covering a wide range of genres — from folklore to contemporary novels — the author presents the theoretical foundations for developing linguistic structures and proposes an innovative teaching framework that integrates theory and practice (Griffiths, 2024).

In the article “Combining CEFR and 4C CLIL Frameworks for Principled Literature in Language Teaching”, Redlich and Pattison (2024) propose a structured methodological framework for incorporating literary texts into language courses. The authors align CEFR “Can-do” descriptors with the 4C framework and describe learning activities designed for students at different proficiency levels (Redlich & Pattison, 2024). This study is oriented toward the development of a practical methodology for teaching literary texts.

Graham's (2024) study “Literature and Second Language Vocabulary Learning: The Role of Text Type and Teaching Approach” explores the development of language skills through the use of novels and other literary genres. By comparing the vocabulary acquisition outcomes of 160 language learners, the study demonstrates the effectiveness of improving linguistic competence through literary texts (Graham, 2024).

Scholars in Kazakhstan also regard the teaching of literary texts as an important area of research. For instance, T. O. Esembekov's book *Theory of the Literary Text* examines methods of literary text analysis and their application in

educational contexts (Konyratbayev, 2005). Nevertheless, language teaching through literary texts has not yet fully emerged as an independent and systematically established field of research.

Kazakh novels written in the early years of independence reflect the historical and social realities of the newly formed state. Scholarly studies analyze these works in terms of their thematic, ideological, and poetic features. For example, Symagul Elubayev's *Akboz Ūy* trilogy is a historical novel depicting the social tragedy of the Soviet period, including the famine and collective suffering of the 1920s–1930s. Dukenbay Doszhan's novel *Akorda* portrays significant events in the nation's history through the artistic image of the first President of the Republic of Kazakhstan, Nursultan Nazarbayev, reflecting the economic, political, and national challenges of the early years of independence. Mukhtar Magauin's novel *Zharmak* offers a profound representation of the political and social conditions of the newly independent Kazakh state, distinguished by innovative artistic techniques and notable stylistic transformations.

Based on these materials, the study addresses the following research questions:

1. What are the linguistic features and pedagogical value of novels written during the independence period?
2. What effective teaching methods can be employed to develop students' linguistic competence and creative potential?
3. What difficulties do teachers encounter in teaching literary texts, and how can these challenges be overcome?
4. How can the impact of teaching literary texts on vocabulary development be assessed?

To address these questions, the study analyzes the novels of S. Elubayev, D. Doszhan, and M. Magauin, formulates theoretical generalizations concerning linguistic development through literary text instruction, and offers practical methodological recommendations.

### III. MATERIAL AND METHODS

This research article examines Kazakh novels published after Kazakhstan gained independence as the primary research material and provides a comprehensive analysis of theoretical and practical approaches in the fields of literary text analysis, linguistics, education, and pedagogy. To ensure an in-depth evaluation of the use of literary texts in language teaching, an interdisciplinary research approach is employed, integrating linguistic, literary, and pedagogical perspectives.

The study applies the following methodological approaches:

1. Textual analysis method – the linguistic features, narrative style, and artistic structures of the novels *Akboz Ūy* by Symagul Elubayev, *Akorda* by Dukenbay Doszhan, and *Zharmak* by Mukhtar Magauin, published during the period of independence, are analyzed. This method enables learners to acquire the theoretical and practical foundations of systematic literary text analysis.
2. Analytical research method – based on the selected novels, the practice of teaching literary texts is examined in detail, and effective strategies and methodological guidelines for improving teaching quality are proposed.
3. Comparative research method – the effectiveness of traditional and innovative approaches to teaching literary texts in developing language skills is compared, and their respective strengths and limitations are identified.

These methodological approaches make it possible to establish a comprehensive scientific framework aimed at developing linguistic, creative, and cultural competencies through the teaching of literary texts.

The novels *Akboz Ūy* by Symagul Elubayev, *Akorda* by Dukenbay Doszhan, and *Zharmak* by Mukhtar Magauin were selected as the research material. The primary objective of the study is not to conduct a literary-critical analysis of these works. Rather, by examining the selected texts, the research seeks to identify the theoretical foundations of language teaching and to develop practical methodological approaches. In particular, the study addresses the following objectives:

- to formulate the theoretical foundations of teaching literary texts and promoting vocabulary development;
- to provide a comprehensive analysis of the textual features and pedagogical value of Kazakh novels published during the years of independence;
- to develop a teaching model for enhancing language skills based on the novels *Akboz Ūy*, *Akorda*, and *Zharmak*;
- to identify difficulties encountered in teaching literary texts and propose effective solutions;
- to evaluate the outcomes of developing linguistic competence through the use of literary texts.

Through these objectives, the study aims to establish a scientific foundation for the comprehensive development of linguistic, cultural, and pedagogical competencies in the process of teaching literary texts.

### IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The formation of a theoretical basis for developing language skills through the teaching of literary texts is a critical issue. In several countries, this aspect has been incorporated into curricula and is taught as a separate subject. For example, Kathleen McCormick supports this approach in the teaching of literary texts at New York College (Rivkin & Ryan, 2016). She examines the actions of Molly Bloom in James Joyce's novel *Ulysses* and highlights the contribution of literary texts to language skill development.

However, some language theorists and literary scholars have expressed opposing views. Researchers such as Stuart Hall, Paul Wellek, and David Morley, who analyzed the position of textual determinism, emphasized that readers are

not merely “subjects of the text,” but act as mediators of the fundamental social and historical themes embedded in literary works (Wellek, 1941). In this regard, as Paul Wellek and David Morley argue, “readers, living within a particular social formation, become representatives of cultural systems and, over time, the focus of literary texts” (Wang, 2019). Nevertheless, these conclusions do not diminish the interpretive advantages that literary texts provide.

Based on the perspectives of these theorists, this study examines the development of language skills in the teaching of literary texts from both theoretical and practical perspectives.

#### *A. Theoretical Foundations of Teaching Literary Texts and the Development of Language Structures*

##### *(a). Theories of Language Acquisition and Literary Teaching.*

The goal of the modern education system of Kazakhstan is to create a systematic teaching program in accordance with international standards and, on this basis, to prepare a competitive personality. To achieve this, it is necessary to simultaneously implement versatile opportunities such as speaking, writing, and analyzing complex problems, relying on various theoretical concepts and practices employed in reading literary texts.

V. Ya. Stoyunin remarked: “For us, the art of speech is not a science, but literature; its material should be literary works that are read, taught, and analyzed” (Stoyunin, 1864). To support this idea, he provided special analyses of Gogol’s story *The Overcoat* and Zhukovsky’s and Pushkin’s poem *The Sea*. Until now, in teaching, students have been guided using literary texts, analyzing their thematic content, stylistically crafted sentences, and poetic devices. This represents a classic methodology in literary teaching.

Compared to specially designed language textbooks, literary texts offer natural linguistic expressions, rich ideological content, and complex syntactic structures, making them particularly suitable for teaching. This enables students to understand and interpret literary works while mastering language rules more freely. For intermediate and advanced learners, literary texts also meet essential communicative needs, significantly supporting language acquisition and further development.

Literary theories empirically demonstrate the importance of interconnections in language learning. Literary texts function not only as linguistic materials but also as carriers of culture. By depicting the values or realities of a particular society, they influence ways of thinking and historical experiences (Taldaubek et al., 2024). For instance, Mukhtar Magauin, in his novel *Zharmak*, portrays the social conditions of Kazakh society in the early years of independence through a duality of consciousness. This illustrates the direct impact of social circumstances on human cognition and thought processes.

Through literary texts, students can acquire various techniques that enhance the cultural significance of language and foster intrinsic linguistic development. This process is particularly important in Kazakhstan’s multilingual environment, as Kazakh literary works extensively depict rural culture, daily life, and historical practices of the Kazakh people. Such texts contribute to the development of not only linguistic competence but also broader knowledge and understanding.

From a cognitive perspective, reading literary texts promotes students’ comprehension, analytical thinking, and creativity. This process spans several complex levels, from reading to writing, and cultivates abilities to interpret works of various genres, conduct analyses, and draw conclusions. Research indicates that teaching literary texts significantly enhances cognitive skills and language proficiency, particularly vocabulary acquisition and grammatical competence (Zhirmunsky, 1996). For learners of Kazakh, reading novels from the period of Kazakhstan’s independence and mastering their narrative style provides a valuable opportunity to understand the dynamic nature of the language system.

These theories can be systematically presented in a table as follows:

TABLE 1  
THE IMPORTANCE OF TEACHING LITERARY TEXTS IN TERMS OF THE THEORY OF LANGUAGE ACQUISITION

| Theoretical foundations                        | Main conclusions                                                                                         | Results of learning literary texts                                                      | Application in Kazakh literature                                                      |
|------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Input hypothesis                               | The use of literary texts in the process of language learning contributes to improved learning outcomes. | It provides students with abundant and natural language material.                       | Reading Kazakh novels enables learners to master language use in a natural context.   |
| The cultural transmission function of language | Language acquisition is a complex phenomenon that occurs through multifaceted processes.                 | Language is recognized as an effective tool for developing intercultural communication. | It allows students to gain an understanding of national history and spiritual values. |
| Cognitive theory                               | Language acquisition is considered a complex cognitive process.                                          | It develops the ability to understand, analyze, and interpret texts.                    | It provides deeper insights into the culture and arts of the Kazakh people.           |
| Practice-based theory                          | Language learning is aimed at revealing a learner’s internal linguistic potential.                       | It improves writing and speaking skills through literary texts.                         | It enables rapid development of language skills through practical engagement.         |

##### *(b). Study of Literary Texts from the Perspective of Developing Linguistic Abilities.*

The study of literary texts from the perspective of developing linguistic abilities aims to cultivate the multifaceted skills of learners, including language perception, deep comprehension, and critical analysis. In this process, literary texts are considered an essential tool that contributes to both the intellectual and personal development of students, as well as to the enhancement of their linguistic competence. The development of students’ linguistic abilities through teaching literary texts encompasses the following key areas:

Development of lexical skills – enriching vocabulary and mastering the meanings of literal and figurative expressions.

Improvement of grammatical skills – developing correct writing and competent speaking skills while adhering to language norms.

Strengthening stylistic competence – recognizing linguistic nuances, identifying artistic techniques, and appreciating the individuality of the author's style.

Development of communicative skills – conveying thoughts systematically, accurately, and effectively, and forming the ability to express opinions based on the text.

Enhancement of cultural and cognitive skills – understanding the national cultural code and historical and spiritual values through literary texts.

Development of interpretive skills – conducting multifaceted analyses, uncovering hidden meanings, and cultivating critical thinking.

(c). Evolution of Theoretical and Methodological Development of Methods for Teaching Literary Texts.

The theoretical and methodological study of methods for teaching literary texts allows for an in-depth exploration of the interrelationship between literature and language learning on a scientific basis. Research in this area enables literary texts to be considered not only as aesthetic objects but also as crucial tools for developing linguistic competence (Zerkina & Prokhorova, 2022). Identifying the theoretical foundations of the methods used in teaching literary works and systematizing their methodological potential contributes to enhancing students' language skills, deepening text comprehension, and improving critical analysis abilities. From this perspective, the scientific study of methods for teaching literary texts helps identify complex issues at the intersection of literature and language instruction and provides a basis for understanding integration processes in contemporary education.

Traditionally, a text-oriented approach has predominated in literature teaching. This approach primarily relies on systematically and carefully guiding students through classical works of art to analyze their content. Special attention is given to developing students' abilities to understand texts, examine content structures, and identify the author's ideas (Zunino et al., 2024). Consequently, the process of literary analysis serves as a primary tool for cultivating students' analytical thinking skills, while the literary text itself assumes a central role as a learning object.

Since the 1970s, the development of communicative language teaching methods has laid the foundation for a reader-oriented approach to literature instruction. In this approach, literary texts are viewed as cognitive spaces that activate students' personal perception and interpretation, making literature an effective tool for developing critical thinking and the ability to form independent opinions (Kabdolov, 1988). At present, the task-based approach and Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) have taken a leading role in literature teaching. These methods integrate the mastery of literary content with the development of language skills as a single process, enabling students to systematically enhance their linguistic abilities while analyzing literary issues through authentic and meaningful reading tasks.

In Kazakhstan, the development of literature teaching methods is characterized by specific features closely linked to the country's historical, social, and language policies. During the Soviet period, teaching Kazakh literature emphasized socio-historical analysis, with works interpreted primarily in terms of their socio-political content and ideological function (Taldaubek et al., 2025). After Kazakhstan's independence, educational reforms and the introduction of a multilingual language policy facilitated the gradual modernization and diversification of literature teaching methods. During this period, student-centered approaches, attention to cultural characteristics, and consideration of linguistic needs became central guiding principles in teaching.

Since the beginning of the 21st century, the use of digital and interactive technologies in literature lessons has expanded, giving new character to both the content and form of instruction. These innovative methods have not only enhanced the effectiveness of literary learning but also fostered students' language skills and strengthened their cognitive engagement with reading (Seyitova, 2023).

Since independence, a new methodological paradigm has emerged in teaching Kazakh novels, combining literary analysis with the development of national cultural identity. Innovative approaches based on reading novels by writers such as Mukhtar Magauin, Symagul Elubayev, Dukenbay Doszhan, and Tynymbay Nurmagambetov aim to cultivate students' national consciousness, civic responsibility, and patriotic values. This methodological framework treats literary texts as part of the national spiritual heritage and allows students to deepen their cognitive connection with traditional worldviews through comprehensive analysis of cultural codes and historical-symbolic meanings in the works (Freeman, 2017). Moreover, this approach organically integrates mastery of literary content with the development of language competence, creating conditions for systematically improving students' abilities to understand, interpret, and articulate ideas with academic rigor.

## *B. Textual Analysis of Kazakh Novels During Kazakhstan's Independence and Their Pedagogical Potential*

### *(a). Linguistic Features of Kazakh Novels During the Period of Independence.*

Kazakh novels written during Kazakhstan's independence deeply and multifacetedly reflect the historical consciousness of Kazakh society, socio-spiritual transformation, and contemporary realities. These novels clearly express the new worldview characteristic of independence, changes in the value system, and epochal features through



artistic language. Thematically, these works address pressing issues such as the revival of historical memory, reinterpretation of national identity, and the individual's internal struggle between freedom and responsibility.

The linguistic nature of independence-era novels is characterized by a harmonious continuity between the traditional artistic system and modern linguistic and stylistic innovations. Writers such as Symagul Elubayev, Dukenbai Doszhan, and Mukhtar Magauin, while preserving classical narrative techniques, extensively employ new lexical layers, contemporary discourse elements, internal monologues, and forms of psychological analysis in their works. This enriches the artistic language of Kazakh novels and deepens the harmony between content and form (Aksholakov, 2001). Consequently, Kazakh novels from this period are regarded as important artistic phenomena that reflect the spirit of the era and determine the trajectory of linguistic and ideological development in national literature.

The thematic system of independence-era Kazakh novels creates a complex artistic space aimed at reinterpreting national history and contemporary social realities. On one hand, these works provide fresh artistic interpretations of the historical fate of the Kazakh people and the stages of statehood formation; on the other hand, they critically portray the systematic oppression and spiritual wounds inflicted on national identity during the Soviet era, including the consequences of organized famine, political repression, and revolutionary violence (Maitanov, 1991).

Moreover, independence-era novels extensively depict socio-economic difficulties arising during the transition to a market economy, changes in social structures, and the moral choices of individuals in new social contexts. These issues are expressed through artistic language, highlighting internal psychological stress, shifts in value orientations, and processes of social adaptation.

From a linguistic perspective, these topics reveal a clear interplay between traditional cultural codes and modern discourse forms. Symbols characteristic of the national worldview, historical vocabulary, and ethnocultural concepts coexist with contemporary socio-economic terminology in the artistic language of these novels (Symakova, 2016). Through this linguistic synthesis, Kazakh writers, while striving for innovative development in the context of globalization, offer artistic models that preserve cultural traditions and national identity. As a result, independence-era Kazakh novels are recognized as significant spiritual and aesthetic phenomena that both contribute to the revival of national cultural consciousness and shape the direction of contemporary literary development.

TABLE 2  
LINGUISTIC ANALYSIS OF KAZAKH NOVELS DURING KAZAKHSTAN'S INDEPENDENCE

| Authors                                       | Works / Year of Publication | Linguistic Characteristics                                                                                                                        | Themes and Content                                                                                                               | Pedagogical Value                                                                                       |
|-----------------------------------------------|-----------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Mukhtar Magauin                               | <i>Zharmak</i> , 2007       | Complex narrative language combining historical and artistic stylistic elements; extensive use of internal monologue and philosophical reflection | Socio-economic challenges of the independence period, transformations in social structure, and the individual's spiritual crisis | Differentiation between literary and colloquial language; development of text analysis skills           |
| Dukenbai Doszhan                              | <i>Akorda</i> , 1997        | Extensive use of historical vocabulary and traditional artistic narrative techniques                                                              | Artistic interpretation of the historical destiny of the Kazakh people and ideas of national statehood                           | Analysis of cultural symbols and metaphors; enrichment of vocabulary                                    |
| Symagul Elubayev                              | <i>Akboz Ūy</i> , 2004      | Psychological analysis; synthesis of philosophical reflection and historical reality with artistic imagination                                    | Consequences of artificially induced famine, political repression, and revolutionary violence                                    | Mastery of the rich traditional Kazakh language; development of expressive speech and rhetorical skills |
| Young writers of the post-independence period | <i>After</i> 1991           | Renewal of narrative language; experimental styles; postmodernist writing practices                                                               | Representation of new-era features and contemporary realities through historical and artistic language                           | Identification of changes in linguistic structures; understanding of the contemporary literary process  |

(b). Criteria for Selecting Literary Texts and Principles of Evaluation.

To effectively use Kazakh novels published after Kazakhstan's independence in the process of language teaching, it is essential to establish clear criteria for selecting literary texts and appropriate principles of evaluation. When a literary text is employed as a tool for language instruction, it must meet not only aesthetic requirements but also didactic and methodological standards (Doszhanov, 1997). From this perspective, the selection of texts from Kazakh novels of the independence period requires a comprehensive consideration of several interrelated factors.

First, the level of linguistic complexity of a text should correspond to students' language proficiency. Excessive complexity in lexical content, syntactic structures, or stylistic features may hinder language comprehension, whereas overly simple texts reduce their cognitive and developmental potential.

Second, the cultural relevance of a text is regarded as one of the key criteria. Selected literary excerpts should provide meaningful information about the history, culture, national traditions, and worldview of the Kazakh people, thereby contributing to the expansion of students' cultural and cognitive horizons.

Third, the principle of thematic universality should be observed. The content of a text should not be limited to a one-sided perspective but should be multifaceted, addressing moral, social, historical, and spiritual issues and allowing for multiple interpretations.



Fourth, the pedagogical applicability of a literary text must be taken into account. It should be suitable for designing various learning tasks, for the integrated development of language skills (reading, speaking, writing, and listening), and for organizing creative activities.

In conclusion, the aesthetic and ideological value of a text is of particular importance. A literary work should be distinguished by high artistic quality, ideological depth, and a coherent system of artistic thinking, possessing the potential to encourage students toward deep analysis, critical thinking, and active exchange of ideas (Akhmetov & Shanbayev, 1996). Taken together, these criteria enable the scientifically grounded and effective integration of Kazakh novels from the independence period into language teaching practice.

### *C. A Model for the Development of Language Skills Based on Kazakh Novels*

#### *(a). Development of a Comprehensive Learning Model.*

The learning model aimed at developing language skills based on Kazakh novels published after Kazakhstan's independence represents a comprehensive pedagogical system that organically integrates elements of literary analysis, critical thinking, and language practice activities (Elubaev, 2004). Such a model enables the organization of multilevel and multidimensional learning activities grounded in literary texts. Its primary objective is the holistic development of students' listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills, as well as the creative enhancement of their language abilities.

The learning process typically consists of three interrelated stages. The first stage is the pre-reading stage, which focuses on identifying students' initial language proficiency and forming the necessary lexical and grammatical foundation. The second stage is the while-reading stage, during which students engage in in-depth analysis of the literary text, develop learning tasks and project-based activities, comprehend textual content, and enhance their skills of interaction with the text. The third stage is the post-reading stage, which is designed to expand the ideological, aesthetic, and cultural meanings of the text and to apply the acquired knowledge in practical and communicative contexts.

Thus, the model for developing language skills based on Kazakh novels functions as an effective pedagogical system that not only teaches students to master linguistic tools but also comprehensively fosters their critical thinking, cultural-cognitive awareness, and creative abilities.

#### *(b). Targeted Strategies for Developing Language Skills Based on Literary Texts.*

There are ample opportunities to design comprehensive curricula that integrate linguistic knowledge, literary analysis, and cultural awareness on the basis of Kazakh novels published after Kazakhstan's independence. Such curricula should primarily focus on the in-depth linguistic and semantic comprehension of literary texts. In this context, one of the key directions of the instructional process is the analysis of linguistic features (Magauin, 2007). Students learn to identify grammatical structures, lexical-semantic layers, stylistic devices, and national-cultural characteristics of the Kazakh language embedded in literary texts, as well as to interpret their artistic functions.

The second important direction involves the study of the novel's narrative structure. At this stage, the narrative perspective, the development of the plot, the organization of time and space, and the author's narrative techniques are systematically analyzed. Through examining narrative structure, students gain an understanding of how the ideological content of a literary work is revealed and how the author's position is conveyed through specific artistic means.

The third direction focuses on the analysis of the system of images and symbols within the text. Figurative expressions, historical and cultural symbols, and metaphors that reflect national identity – such as representations of nomadic life, customs, and traditions – are regarded as significant tools for deepening textual meaning in Kazakh novels. This type of analysis fosters students' literary thinking and facilitates their understanding of the national cultural code.

The fourth direction entails the application of the intertextual comparison method. Through this approach, Kazakh novels are comparatively analyzed alongside literary works from other historical periods or cultural traditions, allowing for the identification of diverse artistic interpretations of shared themes and ideas. Intertextual analysis broadens students' intercultural awareness and develops their ability to interpret literary phenomena within a global context.

#### *(c). Integration of Cultural Dimensions in Teaching Literary Texts and the Development of Intercultural Competence.*

The process of teaching literary texts should not be limited solely to the acquisition of linguistic knowledge and skills; it should also aim to expand students' cultural awareness and foster intercultural competence. Kazakh novels – particularly those written during the period of Kazakhstan's independence — serve as significant cultural resources that artistically reflect national history, social experience, worldview, and socio-psychological transformations (Tlegenova & Shukenay, 2026). Through engagement with such works, students gain deeper insight into the historical values, spiritual identity of the Kazakh people, and the evolution of national consciousness.

In this regard, teachers should purposefully guide students to analyze the cultural dimensions of literary works during the instructional process. National symbols, traditional values, historical and cultural contexts, and cultural codes manifested in characters' behavior should be examined through specially designed tasks. Such activities enhance students' cultural sensitivity and develop their ability to compare and critically evaluate their own culture in relation to others (Zheng, 2024). As a result, literature-based instruction becomes an effective pedagogical tool that integrates linguistic knowledge with cultural understanding and prepares learners for intercultural communication.

The integration of cultural dimensions in language education should be implemented systematically and purposefully. The main pedagogical measures in this area encompass several interrelated components.

First, a comprehensive exploration of cultural themes is undertaken. Key themes in literary texts – such as family values, national and historical awareness, and the relationship between individuals and the socio-cultural environment – are analyzed within an appropriate cultural context. Additionally, comparative examination of similarities and differences between various cultural systems broadens students' cultural perspectives.

Second, it is essential to organize learning activities grounded in the exchange of cultural experience. Based on literary texts, tasks aimed at acquiring cultural experience are designed. For instance, practical activities related to traditional crafts, national cuisine, customs and traditions, and etiquette norms enable students to connect cultural knowledge with real-life experience.

Third, the analysis of cultural values and ethical principles is emphasized. Moral positions, behavioral norms, and worldview orientations represented in literary texts are examined and interpreted in relation to the value system of Kazakh culture. This approach facilitates students' deeper understanding of the national cultural code.

Fourth, reflection on literary texts plays a crucial role. Students reflect on their cultural identity, value orientations, and worldview perspectives based on the content of the texts. Such reflective practices contribute to the formation of cultural consciousness and promote the development of intercultural sensitivity and critical thinking.

In conclusion, the integration of cultural dimensions elevates the teaching of literary texts beyond a mere tool for developing language skills, transforming it into a comprehensive pedagogical model for fostering intercultural competence.

#### *D. Challenges in Teaching Practice and Strategies for Overcoming Them*

##### *(a). Identification of Key Challenges.*

Despite the fact that Kazakh novels published after the independence of Kazakhstan are regarded as educational materials with high linguistic and cultural potential for language teaching, a number of challenges arise in their effective integration into educational practice.

First, the insufficient availability of adapted versions of many literary works from the period of independence – such as condensed, graded, or methodologically adapted texts – complicates teachers' selection of instructional materials and the design of course curricula (Bourgeois, 2025). In addition, the lexical, syntactic, and stylistic complexity of certain novels does not always correspond to learners' levels of language proficiency, which may hinder comprehension during the learning process and lead to a decline in learning motivation.

The second major challenge concerns the limited methodological support and the uneven level of teacher training. The effective use of literary texts as tools for language instruction requires not only a deep knowledge of language and literature, but also mastery of modern linguodidactic approaches, text-oriented teaching strategies, and integrated learning models. However, the scarcity of specialized instructional and methodological resources in this area constrains teachers' professional capacities.

Third, the heterogeneity of students' linguistic and cultural backgrounds presents a significant obstacle. Within Kazakhstan's multiethnic educational context, learners' linguistic experience and cultural background knowledge are developed at varying levels. Such disparities may cause difficulties in interpreting cultural codes, historical concepts, and implicit meanings embedded in literary texts, thereby hindering the full acquisition of linguistic and cultural information.

Fourth, the predominance of traditional assessment methods limits the adequate evaluation of integrated language skills and intercultural competence developed through literary text-based instruction. In particular, standardized testing and formal assessment tools are insufficient for measuring the depth of text comprehension, critical thinking, and cultural reflection, thus restricting a comprehensive evaluation of learning outcomes.

##### *(b). Ways to Overcome Difficulties and Recommendations.*

To address the methodological and organizational challenges identified above, it is necessary to implement comprehensive measures aimed at effectively integrating literary texts into the language learning process. First of all, one of the key tasks is to establish a system for developing, adapting, and evaluating educational texts. In this regard, educational institutions, methodologists, and teachers should collaborate to create high-quality learning resources that correspond to the proficiency levels of language learners.

To achieve this goal, it is important to systematically publish and introduce into educational practice:

Educational materials that have undergone official examination.

Simplified versions of classical works and novels from the independence period with high artistic value, adapted for teaching.

These texts should feature regulated linguistic complexity, preserve content integrity, and be structured to meet learning objectives.

Secondly, it is crucial to develop condensed and leveled versions of these texts and supplement them with reading exercises, vocabulary explanations, cultural references, and methodological guidelines. These additional tools not only facilitate comprehension but also enhance students' motivation and enable systematic development of their language skills.

Thirdly, creating small digital and multimedia libraries can ensure the multimodal nature of teaching. The combined use of audio recordings, video materials, interactive exercises, and visual resources enhances the effectiveness of literary text comprehension and addresses the needs of students with diverse learning styles.

Fourthly, the systematic introduction of comparative teaching methods is recommended. This involves expanding teaching materials that allow for the study of Kazakh novels from the independence period in comparison with other literary traditions or works from different cultural contexts. Special emphasis should be placed on works that simultaneously convey national identity, historical memory, and cultural values, as this broadens students' intercultural understanding and deepens their linguistic and cognitive potential (Syzdyqova, 1984).

The consistent implementation of these measures will improve the quality of language teaching based on literary texts and ensure the effective and sustainable use of Kazakh novels from the independence period in educational settings.

#### *E. Assessment Criteria and Long-Term Development of Language Skills*

##### *(a). Creation of a Multidimensional Assessment Framework.*

Assessment of the development of language skills in the process of teaching literary texts should be based on a comprehensive and multidimensional system, rather than on traditional, unidimensional methods. The assessment of language competence should not only determine learners' formal language knowledge but also evaluate their ability to work with texts, their depth of comprehension, and their conscious use of language tools. The main criteria for assessing language skills in literary text-based teaching include several interrelated aspects (Syzdyk, 1987).

First, lexical competence involves assessing not only the size of a student's vocabulary but also their ability to accurately understand word meanings and use them appropriately and flexibly in different contextual situations. This criterion allows teachers to evaluate the student's perception of linguistic and figurative devices in the text and their ability to apply them in their own speech.

Second, grammatical competence concerns the complexity of language structures, their semantic accuracy, and the ability to organize syntactic units correctly. The focus here is not on mechanical repetition of grammatical norms, but on their conscious application within the context of a literary text.

Third, discourse competence is determined by a student's ability to produce a coherent and logically structured text. This includes assessing the effective use of cohesive devices, maintaining the informational structure, and applying artistic techniques appropriately (Uali, 2007).

Fourth, pragmatic competence is defined as the ability to use language units appropriately according to the communicative situation. When working with literary texts, this competence develops through understanding the speech characteristics of characters, the author's stance, and the functional meaning of the text.

Using these criteria, teachers can comprehensively assess students' text responses, literary analyses, participation in discussions, and creative writing. Such a multifaceted assessment system enables a more accurate evaluation of language skill development and enhances the overall effectiveness of the teaching process.

##### *(b). Future Development Directions.*

The use of Kazakh novels published after Kazakhstan's independence in the language teaching process is guided by several strategic development directions in future educational contexts.

First, the integration of curricula and the strengthening of interdisciplinary connections will allow literary texts to be considered not only as linguistic materials but also in relation to disciplines such as history, cultural studies, philosophy, and sociology. This approach promotes students' comprehensive thinking skills and enhances the depth of their language knowledge.

Second, the widespread use of digital and technological teaching aids will modernize the forms and methods of teaching literary texts. Electronic platforms, multimedia resources, interactive tasks, and digital libraries increase students' engagement and ensure the multimodal nature of text comprehension.

Third, learning models aimed at developing multiliteracies are becoming increasingly relevant. In this context, literary texts serve as an effective tool for simultaneously developing information, cultural, and media literacy alongside traditional reading and writing skills.

Fourth, the development of project-based work that fosters connections with the community allows students to engage with real socio-cultural environments. Activities such as literary evenings, collaborative projects with local cultural centers, and meetings with writers strengthen the connection between literary texts and everyday life (Baitursynov, 1989).

Finally, reconsidering the role of the teacher is an important strategic direction. In the modern educational process, teachers should act not only as instructors but also as researchers, designers, and facilitators of reflection. This requires continuous professional development and active participation in scientific and methodological research.

The systematic implementation of these directions will lay a solid foundation for the effective use of Kazakh novels from the independence period in language teaching and for the integrated development of students' linguistic, cultural, and cognitive competencies.

## V. CONCLUSION

This study aimed at a comprehensive analysis of the theoretical and practical aspects of developing language skills in the process of teaching literary texts, taking Kazakh novels published after Kazakhstan's independence as the main source. Within the framework of the study, the analysis of literary texts from linguistic and cultural perspectives, the

development of teaching-adapted models, the introduction of contemporary pedagogical practices, and the expansion of the assessment system were considered in an integrated manner. These approaches facilitated the deepening of language acquisition and the establishment of a scientific and methodological foundation for teaching based on literary texts.

The results of the study showed that Kazakh novels published after independence possess a significant material potential for language teaching. In particular, the rich vocabulary, stylistic diversity, and national-cultural content of the works by authors examined in this study effectively contribute to the development of learners' language competence. For example, the linguistic features of Mukhtar Magauin's novels simultaneously foster historical consciousness and artistic thinking, creating conditions for the integrated development of cultural identity and language knowledge.

The comprehensive learning model proposed in this study is based on a text-oriented approach and aims to systematically develop students' listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills across pre-, during-, and post-learning stages. Considering the main challenges encountered in teaching practice, the model proposes strategic measures such as developing textual resources, enhancing teachers' professional development, implementing differentiated instruction, applying diversified assessment, and utilizing technological innovations. These recommendations are not limited to teaching Kazakh literature; they also have methodological significance for teaching literary language in other educational contexts.

The primary value of teaching literary texts lies in their integrative and humanistic nature: they foster cultural understanding, critical thinking, and personal development alongside language skills. In the context of multilingual education and cultural modernization in Kazakhstan, literary texts are particularly important as a means of mastering national cultural heritage, strengthening national identity, and promoting intercultural dialogue.

At the same time, the study has certain limitations: it is primarily based on theoretical analysis and only partially supported by empirical data; it prioritizes novels from the independence period and does not fully cover other periods or genres; and it mainly focuses on secondary and higher education levels. Future research can advance this area by employing empirical methods more extensively, broadening the range of literary periods and genres, and developing targeted teaching strategies for different educational levels.

In this regard, Kazakh novels from the independence period are evaluated as valuable educational material that allows for the comprehensive development of not only language skills but also cultural knowledge, critical thinking, and text analysis abilities. The findings of this study can serve as a theoretical and practical basis for enhancing literary text-based language teaching models and for guiding future methodological research.

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# The Impact of AI Tool Familiarity on the Reading Performance of Saudi EFL Learners

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**Abstract**—This study explored the impact of English as a foreign language (EFL) learners' familiarity with AI-driven tools on their EFL reading performance. Participants consisted of 30 EFL learners with different levels of AI familiarity, depending on whether they had used such tools a lot, sometimes, or never. They were given an authentic reading test demanding interactive, higher-order cognitive skills. The results were interpreted through SPSS, one-way ANOVA, and post hoc Tukey's HSD. Based on the results of multiple means comparisons (significant at  $p < .001$ ), the study rejected the null hypothesis that AI familiarity would have no positive influence on reading skills. The group that was the most familiar with these tools showed significantly higher improvement compared to the other two groups. In contrast, there was no significant difference between the groups with less AI familiarity ( $p = .067$ ). According to the findings, greater familiarity with AI tools could help EFL learners improve their reading performance, signaling a need for more professional training on AI integration in language education.

**Index Terms**—AI-driven tool, artificial intelligence, reading skills, Saudi EFL learner, technology integration

## I. INTRODUCTION

The growing integration of AI to enhance learning has garnered significant attention (Almusharraf & Alotaibi, 2021; Alshumaimeri & Alshememry, 2024; Yuan, 2023). A particularly promising application of such tools is to bolster the reading skills of English as a foreign language (EFL) learners. As the world becomes increasingly interconnected, proficiency in English has emerged as a critical asset, facilitating communication, collaboration, and access to opportunities. However, acquiring advanced English reading skills poses formidable challenges for EFL learners, from comprehension to vocabulary (Alghizzi, 2021; Alshammari, 2022, 2023; Alzamil, 2022). Traditional approaches have often struggled to address these challenges comprehensively. This problem can be seen, for example, in Saudi Arabia, where EFL learners consistently achieve below-average scores on standardized English proficiency tests targeting receptive and productive skills (Almusharraf & Almusharraf, 2021; Alshammari, 2022; Alzamil, 2021). However, by leveraging the capabilities of AI, such as natural language processing, machine learning algorithms, and adaptive learning systems, educators might be able to provide reading experiences that are more tailored to the individual needs and abilities of learners and thereby improve their reading performance.

Building on previous research (Adiguzel et al., 2023; Al-Khresheh et al., 2022; Chen et al., 2022; Hopcan et al., 2023; Kessler, 2018), this paper explores the potential benefits and challenges of integrating AI-driven tools to improve EFL learners' reading skills. In doing so, it sheds light on the mechanisms through which AI tools can enhance reading proficiency, foster engagement, and promote autonomous learning. To this end, the paper examined various AI-driven tools and platforms designed to facilitate reading instruction, including intelligent tutoring systems, interactive e-books, language learning apps, and virtual reading assistants, to provide insights into best practices for integrating them into EFL reading curricula.

Despite the centrality of reading in second and foreign language acquisition, EFL learners often experience persistent difficulties that impede their academic progress and overall language proficiency. Reading in a foreign language requires not only decoding written symbols but also activating linguistic knowledge, background schemata, and cognitive strategies simultaneously (Alshammari, 2023). For many EFL learners, limited vocabulary knowledge, insufficient grammatical competence, lack of exposure to authentic texts, and weak metacognitive awareness contribute to slow reading speed and poor comprehension (Alhaider, 2023; Alshammari, 2021; Shra'ah, 2021). These difficulties are often compounded by affective factors such as anxiety, low motivation, and lack of confidence, particularly in contexts where English exposure is largely restricted to the classroom. Consequently, traditional reading instruction methods, which frequently rely on uniform texts and teacher-centered approaches, may fail to address the diverse needs and proficiency levels of learners.

In many EFL contexts, including Saudi Arabia and other regions in the Middle East, reading instruction remains heavily textbook-driven and examination-oriented. Such approaches often emphasize surface-level comprehension questions and translation exercises rather than strategic reading, critical thinking, or learner autonomy. As a result, learners may become passive recipients of information rather than active constructors of meaning. Research has shown that this instructional mismatch can lead to disengagement and limited progress in reading development. Therefore, there is a pressing need for

innovative pedagogical approaches that can personalize instruction, provide immediate feedback, and support learners at different stages of reading development.

AI has emerged as a transformative force in education, offering new possibilities for addressing long-standing challenges in language learning. AI technologies are particularly well-suited to language education because they can process large amounts of linguistic data, identify patterns in learner performance, and adapt instructional content in real time. In the context of EFL reading, AI-driven systems can analyze learners' reading behaviors, detect areas of difficulty, and provide customized scaffolding that aligns with individual proficiency levels. This adaptive capability represents a significant departure from traditional one-size-fits-all approaches and aligns closely with contemporary theories of second language acquisition, such as the input hypothesis, interactionist perspectives, and socio-cognitive models.

One of the most significant advantages of AI-driven reading tools lies in their ability to personalize learning experiences. Adaptive reading platforms can adjust text complexity, vocabulary load, and task difficulty based on learners' performance and progress. For example, intelligent tutoring systems can recommend texts that match learners' reading levels while gradually increasing complexity to promote development. Similarly, AI-powered vocabulary support tools can provide contextualized definitions, synonyms, and usage examples, enabling learners to infer meaning without interrupting the reading flow. This individualized support is particularly beneficial for EFL learners who often struggle with unfamiliar lexical items and complex sentence structures.

Another critical contribution of AI to EFL reading instruction is the provision of immediate and formative feedback. Traditional classroom settings may limit teachers' ability to offer timely feedback to every learner, especially in large classes. AI-driven tools, however, can instantly analyze learners' responses to comprehension questions, summaries, or annotations and provide targeted feedback. This immediate feedback helps learners identify misunderstandings, refine reading strategies, and develop greater awareness of their strengths and weaknesses. Over time, such feedback can foster metacognitive skills, enabling learners to monitor and regulate their own reading processes more effectively. Engagement and motivation are also central considerations in EFL reading development, and AI technologies offer innovative ways to enhance both. Many AI-driven reading applications incorporate gamification elements, multimedia features, and interactive tasks that make reading more appealing and less intimidating. For instance, interactive e-books may include audio support, visual aids, and embedded quizzes that transform reading into a dynamic and multisensory experience. Virtual reading assistants and chatbots can simulate conversational interactions, prompting learners to reflect on texts, ask questions, and explore meanings in a supportive environment. Such features can reduce reading anxiety and encourage sustained engagement, particularly among learners who may otherwise perceive reading in English as challenging or monotonous.

The role of autonomy in language learning has been widely acknowledged, and AI-driven tools have considerable potential to promote autonomous reading practices. By enabling learners to access reading materials anytime and anywhere, AI-supported platforms extend learning beyond the classroom and empower learners to take greater responsibility for their own progress. Learners can select texts that align with their interests, track their reading performance, and set personalized goals. This sense of ownership can enhance intrinsic motivation and contribute to more consistent and meaningful reading practice. Moreover, autonomous engagement with AI tools can help learners develop lifelong learning habits that extend beyond formal education.

However, while the potential benefits of AI integration in EFL reading instruction are substantial, several challenges and concerns must be addressed. One major issue relates to the digital divide and unequal access to technology. Not all learners have reliable access to digital devices or high-speed internet, particularly in under-resourced contexts. This disparity may exacerbate existing educational inequalities and limit the effectiveness of AI-driven interventions. Therefore, policymakers and educational institutions must consider issues of accessibility and infrastructure when implementing AI-based reading solutions.

Another challenge concerns teachers' preparedness and attitudes toward AI technologies. Successful integration of AI tools into EFL reading curricula requires teachers to possess not only technical skills but also pedagogical understanding of how to align these tools with instructional objectives. Resistance to change, lack of training, and concerns about the reliability or appropriateness of AI tools may hinder adoption. Professional development programs that focus on digital literacy and pedagogical innovation are therefore essential to ensure that teachers can effectively harness the potential of AI in reading instruction.

Ethical considerations also play a critical role in the use of AI in education. Issues related to data privacy, algorithmic bias, and transparency must be carefully managed to protect learners' rights and ensure equitable learning experiences. AI systems often rely on large datasets to function effectively, raising questions about how learner data are collected, stored, and used. In EFL contexts, where learners may already feel vulnerable due to linguistic and cultural factors, maintaining trust and safeguarding privacy are particularly important.

Furthermore, while AI tools can provide valuable support, they should not be viewed as replacements for teachers. Human interaction remains a cornerstone of effective language learning, particularly in fostering critical thinking, cultural awareness, and nuanced interpretation of texts. AI-driven reading tools are most effective when used as complementary resources that enhance, rather than replace, teacher-led instruction. A balanced approach that combines technological innovation with sound pedagogical principles is therefore essential.

Given these opportunities and challenges, there is a growing need for empirical research that examines the effectiveness of AI-driven tools in improving EFL reading skills across different contexts and proficiency levels. Although existing studies have reported positive outcomes, findings are often context-specific, and further investigation is required to identify best practices and implementation strategies. In particular, more research is needed to explore how AI tools can support higher-order reading skills, such as inferencing, critical analysis, and synthesis, which are crucial for academic success.

In addition, cultural and contextual factors must be considered when integrating AI into EFL reading instruction. Learning preferences, educational traditions, and institutional policies can all influence how AI tools are perceived and used. In contexts such as Saudi Arabia, where educational reforms increasingly emphasize technology integration and learner-centered approaches, AI-driven reading tools may offer timely and relevant solutions. However, their effectiveness depends on thoughtful adaptation to local curricula, assessment practices, and learner needs. In light of these considerations, this paper positions AI as a powerful yet complex tool for enhancing EFL reading instruction. By examining a range of AI-driven platforms and applications, the present study seeks to contribute to a deeper understanding of how technology can support reading development in foreign language contexts. The discussion highlights both the pedagogical affordances and the practical challenges of AI integration, offering insights for educators, researchers, and policymakers alike.

Ultimately, improving EFL learners' reading skills is not only an academic objective but also a broader educational and societal goal. Reading proficiency enables learners to access knowledge, engage with global discourses, and participate more fully in academic and professional communities. As AI technologies continue to evolve, their thoughtful and ethical integration into EFL reading instruction holds promise for addressing long-standing challenges and creating more inclusive, adaptive, and effective learning environments. By situating AI within a pedagogically grounded framework, this paper underscores the potential of intelligent technologies to transform EFL reading instruction and support learners in achieving higher levels of language proficiency and academic success.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Alshumaimeri and Alshememry (2024) provided a foundational overview of the discourse surrounding AI's role in EFL education. Despite AI being present in educational contexts for decades, they observed that educators remained cautious about its pedagogical value. Their systematic review synthesized studies on diverse AI technologies—such as intelligent tutoring systems, chatbots, and adaptive learning platforms—focusing on their effects on students' language skills and perceptions. They also identified research gaps, noting that while AI tools demonstrated the potential to support personalized and interactive learning, empirical evidence regarding long-term outcomes and best practices remained insufficient.

Rad (2024) empirically investigated AI's impact on second language learners' speaking skills. Employing a mixed-methods approach, the study randomly assigned 66 participants to an experimental group, which used the AI voice coach Speeko, and a control group, which received conventional teaching methods. Data were collected through tests, questionnaires, and semi-structured interviews administered before and after the intervention. The experimental group showed significantly higher second language speaking proficiency, willingness to communicate, and perceptions compared to the control. This finding substantiated the claims made in broader theoretical literature that AI tools can create low-stress, personalized environments conducive to language practice. The results also aligned with constructivist principles, emphasizing learner autonomy and interactive engagement, and offered a critique of conventional pedagogical models, which often lack the responsiveness and interactivity that AI can afford. By quantifying these benefits, Rad supported AI's pedagogical value but also called attention to questions about scalability, teacher preparedness, and the potential replacement of human interaction with technological mediation.

Drawing on multi-modal blended learning theory and independent learning principles, Shi et al. (2023) proposed AI-driven models for integrating college-level English instruction with deep learning technologies. Their framework highlighted AI's role not merely as a supplementary tool but as a catalyst for rethinking pedagogical design. By combining big data analytics, cloud computing, and adaptive feedback systems, the authors suggested that educators could better tailor instruction to individual learners' needs. This approach exemplifies the shift from a teacher-centered to a learner-centered paradigm, underscoring AI's potential to facilitate autonomous and lifelong learning. The study also stressed the need for better teacher training and balancing technological integration with pedagogical intentionality.

Yuan (2023) investigated the efficacy of incorporating chatbots into EFL classrooms in a Chinese elementary school. Seventy-four students were divided into two groups, one using traditional teaching methods and the other utilizing chatbots. Pre- and post-tests measured students' oral English proficiency, while a questionnaire assessed their willingness to communicate. Interviews with teachers and students provided additional insights into chatbot usage and asked for their suggestions. Students using chatbots significantly outperformed the control in oral English proficiency and willingness to communicate. The qualitative findings revealed that students and teachers valued chatbots for their immediacy, individualized feedback, and non-judgmental interaction. Yuan also identified areas for improvement, such as customizing chatbot features for age-appropriate engagement and enhancing feedback precision. This finding highlighted a broader concern in AI-assisted language learning; while AI can replicate certain instructional functions, it must be aligned with learners' developmental and cultural needs.



Zhang et al. (2023) discussed this issue within the context of globalization and higher education reform. They argued that universities must help students attain strong linguistic skills and cross-cultural communication to meet market demands. The authors advocated for smart classrooms integrating AI technologies to create immersive, culturally rich learning experiences. They claimed that embedding AI into English language and literature classrooms could promote linguistic proficiency and cultural literacy. Their model emphasized personalization, real-time feedback, and active student engagement, echoing themes present in other studies mentioned above. However, they also highlighted a crucial dimension often overlooked in AI literature: cultural immersion and the humanistic side of language learning. They suggested that AI's true value lies not in replacing teachers but in amplifying cultural authenticity and contextual understanding through intelligently designed material.

The studies reviewed above (Alshumaimeri & Alshememry, 2024; Rad, 2024; Shi et al., 2023; Yuan, 2023; Zhang et al., 2023) revealed the promise and challenges of integrating AI into language learning. They examined AI's capacity to personalize learning, enhance engagement, and improve specific linguistic competencies, such as speaking proficiency and willingness to communicate, while also addressing pedagogical skepticism, infrastructure barriers, and ethical considerations.

Across this literature, a central question emerges. Can AI truly enhance the complex, human-centered process of language learning? The consensus appears cautiously optimistic. Empirical evidence (e.g., Rad, 2024; Yuan, 2023) has supported AI's efficacy in enhancing speaking proficiency and learner motivation, while theoretical frameworks (e.g., Shi et al., 2023; Zhang et al., 2023) have positioned AI as a driver of pedagogical innovation. Nevertheless, unresolved issues persist, including ethical concerns, lack of teacher readiness, inadequate infrastructure, and the need for longitudinal research (Alshumaimeri & Alshememry, 2024). Ultimately, these studies suggest that AI has the potential, when thoughtfully integrated, to help personalize, democratize, and enrich the EFL learning experience.

Beyond speaking-focused applications, a growing body of research has begun to examine AI's role in enhancing EFL learners' reading skills, which remain comparatively underexplored in the literature. Reading comprehension is a cognitively demanding process involving lexical access, syntactic parsing, background knowledge activation, and metacognitive regulation. Several scholars have argued that AI technologies are particularly well-suited to support these multifaceted processes because of their ability to provide adaptive input, real-time feedback, and data-driven personalization. For instance, AI-powered reading platforms equipped with natural language processing can analyze learners' interactions with texts, identify comprehension breakdowns, and adjust instructional scaffolding accordingly. Such affordances align with interactive and cognitive theories of reading, which emphasize the dynamic interplay between the reader, the text, and the learning context.

Recent studies have also highlighted the effectiveness of intelligent tutoring systems and adaptive reading environments in promoting reading comprehension and vocabulary development among EFL learners (Alharthi, 2024; Liu, 2024). These systems often incorporate automated glossing, text simplification, and comprehension checks that respond to learners' proficiency levels. Research has shown that contextualized vocabulary support and adaptive feedback can reduce cognitive load and facilitate deeper comprehension, particularly for lower-proficiency learners. Moreover, AI-driven analytics enable instructors to track learners' reading behaviors, such as time spent on tasks, error patterns, and strategy use, thereby informing more targeted instructional interventions. Another strand of literature has focused on the role of AI in fostering metacognitive awareness and strategic reading. Metacognition—learners' ability to plan, monitor, and evaluate their reading processes—is a critical predictor of reading success in EFL contexts. AI-based reading tools can prompt learners to reflect on their understanding, ask guiding questions, or suggest strategies such as skimming, scanning, or inferencing. By externalizing these cognitive prompts, AI systems help learners internalize effective reading strategies over time. Studies grounded in self-regulated learning theory suggest that such features can enhance learners' autonomy and confidence, especially when reading complex or unfamiliar texts.

Motivation and engagement also emerge as recurring themes in AI-assisted reading research. Traditional reading instruction is often perceived as passive or monotonous, particularly when texts are not aligned with learners' interests or proficiency levels. AI-driven platforms address this limitation by offering personalized content recommendations, multimodal texts, and interactive features such as quizzes, annotations, and gamified tasks. Empirical evidence indicates that these features can increase learners' reading frequency, persistence, and enjoyment, which are essential for long-term reading development. Importantly, increased engagement has been linked not only to improved comprehension outcomes but also to more positive attitudes toward reading in English.

Despite these promising findings, scholars caution against uncritical adoption of AI technologies in reading instruction. Concerns have been raised regarding overreliance on automated support, which may limit learners' ability to cope with authentic, unsupported texts. Additionally, algorithmic bias and limited transparency in AI systems may affect the quality and fairness of instructional recommendations. These concerns underscore the need for pedagogically informed design and teacher mediation to ensure that AI tools complement, rather than replace, effective reading instruction.

Collectively, the extended literature suggests that while AI has demonstrated considerable potential in enhancing EFL reading development, particularly through personalization, strategy support, and engagement, its effectiveness depends on thoughtful integration within broader pedagogical frameworks. The relative scarcity of longitudinal and reading-specific studies further highlights a gap in the literature, reinforcing the need for research that systematically examines how AI-driven tools influence EFL learners' reading skills over time and across diverse educational contexts.

### III. METHODOLOGY

#### A. Design

This quantitative study involved a three-month experiment during which EFL learners were exposed to AI-driven tools. These participants were divided into three groups: those who had used AI-driven tools a lot ( $n = 10$ ), those who had sometimes used them ( $n = 10$ ), and those who had never used them ( $n = 10$ ). Each group also contained students from three different EFL proficiency levels: (a) above average, (b) average, and (c) below average.

#### B. Research Questions

This study sought to answer four research questions:

- Does familiarity with AI-driven tools affect the reading performance of Saudi EFL learners?
- To what extent does familiarity with AI-driven tools affect the reading performance of Saudi EFL learners with above-average English proficiency?
- To what extent does familiarity with AI-driven tools affect the reading performance of Saudi EFL learners with average English proficiency?
- To what extent does familiarity with AI-driven tools affect the reading performance of Saudi EFL learners with below-average English proficiency?

#### C. Hypotheses

Based on the questions above, the study tested the following null hypotheses:

- Familiarity with AI-driven tools has no impact on the reading performance of Saudi EFL learners.
- Familiarity with AI-driven tools has no impact on the reading performance of above-average Saudi EFL learners.
- Familiarity with AI-driven tools has no impact on the reading performance of average Saudi EFL learners.
- Familiarity with AI-driven tools has no impact on the reading performance of below-average Saudi EFL learners.

#### D. Instruments

A reading post-test was created to measure the impact of length of exposure to (and thus level of familiarity with) AI-driven tools on learners. It assessed any between-groups significance through a one-way ANOVA. If a significant relationship was found, post hoc descriptive statistics were run to indicate the exact significance of differences between groups.

### IV. RESULTS

The statistical results were analyzed via SPSS to determine whether the null hypotheses should be rejected. The descriptive statistics and means comparison (see Table 1) showed that learners who used AI-driven tools “a lot” had mean scores ( $M = 88.56$ ) that outperformed those who only sometimes ( $M = 77.50$ ) or never ( $M = 71.55$ ) used such tools.

TABLE 1  
DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS FOR PARTICIPANTS BASED ON FAMILIARITY WITH AI TOOLS

|               | N  | Mean  | Std. Deviation | Std. Error | 95% Confidence Interval for Mean |       | Minimum | Maximum |
|---------------|----|-------|----------------|------------|----------------------------------|-------|---------|---------|
| A lot 100%    | 9  | 88.56 | 3.812          | 1.271      | 85.63                            | 91.49 | 85      | 95      |
| Sometimes 50% | 10 | 77.50 | 5.720          | 1.809      | 73.41                            | 81.59 | 71      | 87      |
| Never 0%      | 11 | 71.55 | 7.090          | 2.138      | 66.78                            | 76.31 | 65      | 88      |
| Total         | 30 | 78.63 | 9.031          | 1.649      | 75.26                            | 82.01 | 65      | 95      |

Moreover, the one-way ANOVA revealed a significant difference between participants according to level of familiarity with AI tools ( $p < .001$ ), as illustrated in Table 2.

TABLE 2  
ONE-WAY ANOVA RESULTS FOR POST-TEST SCORES BASED ON FAMILIARITY WITH AI TOOLS

|                | Sum of Squares | df | Mean Square | F      | Sig.  |
|----------------|----------------|----|-------------|--------|-------|
| Between Groups | 1451.517       | 2  | 725.759     | 21.452 | <.001 |
| Within Groups  | 913.449        | 27 | 33.831      |        |       |
| Total          | 2364.967       | 29 |             |        |       |

To explore the exact differences between these groups, post hoc Tukey's HSD was used, the results of which are presented in Table 3.

TABLE 3  
POST HOC TUKEY'S HSD RESULTS

| (I) Limit of AI-Driven Tools exposure | (J) Limit of AI-Driven Tools exposure | Mean Difference (I-J) | Std. Error | Sig.  | 95% Confidence Interval |        |
|---------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|-----------------------|------------|-------|-------------------------|--------|
| A lot 100%                            | Sometimes 50%                         | 11.056*               | 2.672      | <.001 | 4.43                    | 17.68  |
|                                       | Never 0%                              | 17.010*               | 2.614      | <.001 | 10.53                   | 23.49  |
| Sometimes 50%                         | A lot 100%                            | -11.056*              | 2.672      | <.001 | -17.68                  | -4.43  |
|                                       | Never 0%                              | 5.955                 | 2.541      | .067  | -.35                    | 12.26  |
| Never 0%                              | A lot 100%                            | -17.010*              | 2.614      | <.001 | -23.49                  | -10.53 |
|                                       | Sometimes 50%                         | -5.955                | 2.541      | .067  | -12.26                  | .35    |

\*. The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level.

Participants who reported having “a lot” of exposure to AI-driven tools showed significantly higher scores ( $p < .001$ ) than those who had sometimes (50%) or never (0%) been exposed to such tools. In contrast, there was no significant difference ( $p = .067$ ) between the latter two groups. The mean post-test scores for all three groups are plotted in Figure 1, illustrating the sharp divide in test scores.

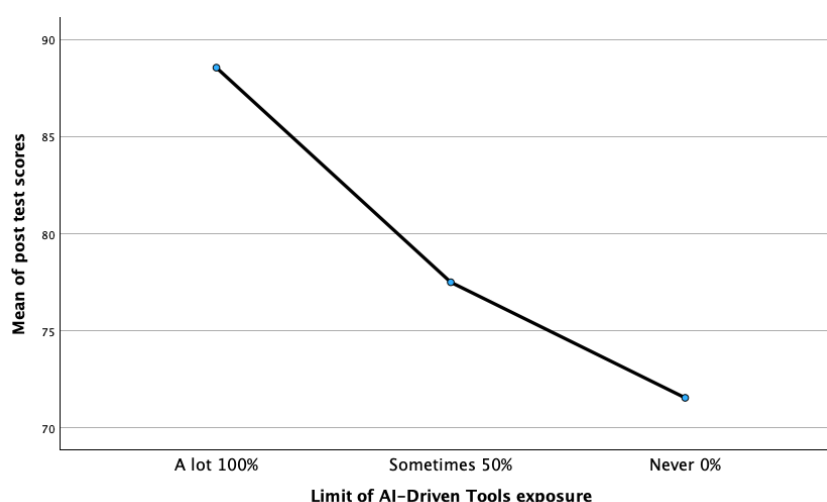


Figure 1. Post-Test Scores Based on Frequency of Exposure to AI-Driven Tools

## V. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Regardless of how much previous exposure they had to AI tools, participants generally expressed positive attitudes toward using AI to improve their language learning. However, several noted that they had limited access to AI due to living far from areas with sufficient internet speed. The first null hypothesis (familiarity with AI-driven tools has no impact on the reading performance of Saudi EFL learners) was rejected, as the group with more exposure to such tools scored significantly higher than the groups with less or no exposure. Thus, it would appear that familiarity with AI-driven tools could improve the reading performance of Saudi EFL learners. On the other hand, there was no significant difference between those who sometimes and those who never used such tools. The other three null hypotheses were likewise rejected, as more exposure to AI-driven tools appeared to benefit students regardless of their English proficiency level (above average, average, or below average). These findings supported those of previous studies (Adiguzel et al., 2023; Al-Khresheh et al., 2022; Chen et al., 2022; Hopcan et al., 2023; Kessler, 2018). Furthermore, they highlight the potential value of AI integration in language learning, specifically EFL reading skills. Greater familiarity with this technology appeared to help EFL learners interact with it more effectively, which resulted in higher reading skill development.

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# Vietnamese Personal Terms of Address Reflecting Family Cultures and Relationships Based on Halliday's Interpersonal Metafunction

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**Abstract**—The article analyzes the role of terms of address in Vietnamese family relationships through three basic elements of the interpersonal metafunction according to M.A.K Halliday's theory of Systemic Functional Grammar (SFG): (1) personal expression, (2) social distance, and (3) relative social status. Terms of address not only reflect feelings and mental states but also express social and cultural positions in the family. The paper uses descriptive and discourse analysis methodologies to clarify the communicative functions and cultural significance of the terms of address' system in the relationships between husband and wife, grandparents and grandchildren, parents and children, and siblings. These terms assist in maintaining family cohesion and affirm cultural values such as affection, respect, and family responsibilities. The preservation and adaptation of these pronouns in traditional ways can contribute to maintaining harmony and sustainability in Vietnamese family relationships.

**Index Terms**—personal expression, social distance, relative social status, terms of address, communication culture

## I. INTRODUCTION

In social communication, terms of address have played a vital role in connecting individuals, creating and maintaining unity in the community. Not only serving as addressing terms, terms of address also clearly reflect the cultural characteristics and typical behavior of each society in daily communication. In literature, terms of address have become even more expressive when they establish the relationships among the members in a family (husband - wife, grandparents - grandchildren, parents - children, brothers - sisters). In addition to that, they deeply depict feelings, mental state as well as their positions in conversations.

This paper focuses on clarifying how terms of address reflect the interaction and communication atmosphere among subjects, via three basic elements of the interpersonal metafunction according to the theory of Systemic Functional Grammar (SFG). These elements include:

- (1) The speaker's personal expression (combining modal elements, allowing the language user to express personal emotions, attitudes and opinions);
- (2) Social distance (reflecting the level of intimacy - intimacy, closeness - distance among the parties participating in the communication);
- (3) Relative social status (determining the equality or difference in power, age or position between the parties).

Thanks to these three elements, terms of address have become a tool to express interpersonal relationships, as well as a means to reflect profound cultural and social values in our mother tongue.

From that theoretical foundation, the article is going to examine the role of terms of address in family relationships, based on the three elements of the interpersonal metafunction mentioned above. The examination is based on Vietnamese literary works, aiming to clarify the communication characteristics and cultural significance of the pronouns' system in our language. Through that, the paper is expected to contribute to enriching the understanding of how the Vietnamese language expresses interpersonal relationships in a socio-cultural context. Simultaneously, the paper suggests further research on the application of SFG theory in Vietnamese language.

## II. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

### A. *The Interpersonal Metafunction in the Theory of Systemic Functional Grammar*

According to M. A. K. Halliday's Systemic Functional Grammar, languages actualize three key metafunctions: experiential (conveying content), interpersonal (establishing and maintaining social relations, expressing attitudes and positions), as well as textual (organizing messages). Each utterance conveys information and aims to achieve specific purposes in communication, as follows:

- Establishing and maintaining social relations
- Influencing the interlocutor's attitudes and behaviors

- Revealing personal perspectives on the world
- Encouraging or changing the listener's views
- Requesting information or actions from the interlocutor

All these above actions show that languages have played important roles in connecting people, promoting mutual understanding, and maintaining social harmony.

In the process of communication, interactivity is a key factor to achieve the purpose. Grammar, together with its constituent elements, contributes significantly to forming the interpersonal metafunction. According to M. A. K. Halliday, this metafunction is associated with the concept of “Atmosphere” (tenor) of discourse, also known as the interactivity among participants. Atmosphere is interpreted through three major elements: the personal expression of the speaker/writer, social distance, as well as relative social status (Halliday, 1985).

These three main elements are used to analyze how language constructs interpersonal relationships, as well as to clarify how Vietnamese pronouns reflect cultural values, such as the hierarchy in Vietnamese families. In literary works, these elements are used to portray characters, internal conflicts, attitudes, emotions and interpersonal relationships between the speaker, the listener, or the object being mentioned. The article specifically shows the elements in the metafunction through the following diagram:

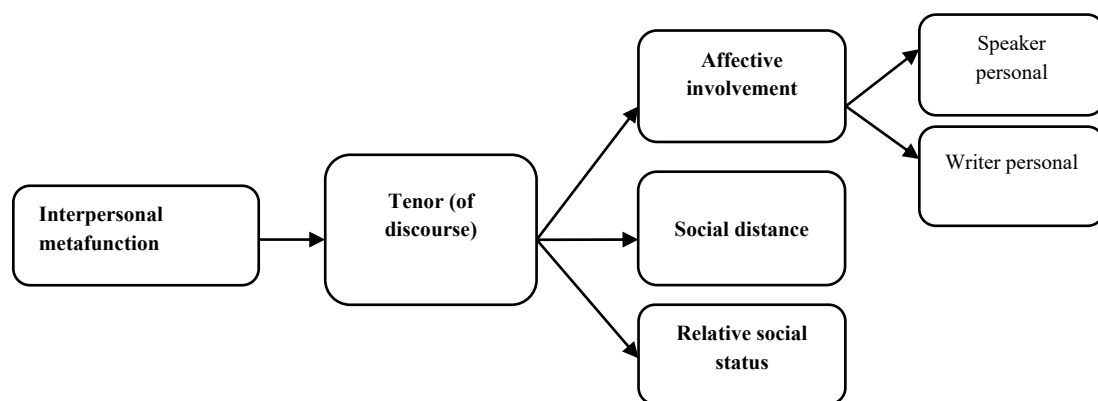


Figure 1. The Theory of Interpersonal Metafunction

#### B. Terms of Address, Tenor, Cultures: Concepts and Illustrations From Literary Works

To clarify the role of terms of address in expressing interpersonal relationships and communication cultures, the following concepts are built on the theory of Systemic Functional Grammar and applied to Vietnamese.

##### (a). Terms of address

According to Do Huu Chau, “Terms of address are not only a tool for the speaker to perform the unavoidable act of inserting themselves and their interlocutor into the discourse, but also a tool whereby the speaker constrains (or binds) themselves and the other into a specific type of interpersonal relationship” (Chau, 2003). Therefore, terms of address represent the type of interpersonal relationships among communicative objects.

It can be seen that terms of address are a linguistic means that the speaker (first person) uses to express themselves and refers to the listener (second person) in communication activities. These words include proper personal pronouns (I, you...), common nouns for people (kinship terminologies, proper names, words referring to positions, occupations...) or temporary word combinations in address (demonstrative pronouns, nominalized adjectives...) to emphasize the direct relationship between two communicative objects.

The terms of address used to refer to the speaker and the listener have played a vital role in the interpersonal metafunction of Systemic Functional Grammar. In Vietnamese, terms of address not only perform the function of determining communication status but also reflect cultural and social values, especially in the literary context.

##### (b). Communicative Atmosphere (Tenor)

The communicative atmosphere (tenor) is a core concept within the interpersonal metafunction of Systemic Functional Grammar (SFG). It refers to the social context of interaction as it is shaped by linguistic choices, with terms of address playing a particularly important role. According to M.A.K. Halliday, tenor is analyzed through three main components that clarify how these terms express interpersonal relationships and communication culture.

Specifically, according to M.A.K. Halliday's Systemic Functional Grammar (Van, 2005), the interpersonal metafunction expressed through tenor includes these three components:

- Personal expression: this reflects self-image, emotions, and attitudes through grammatical features like modality, polarity, and appraisal (e.g., the pronoun “em” conveys humility, while “anh-em” conveys intimacy);
- Social distance: this indicates the degree of intimacy or distance between participants, revealed through address forms (e.g., “anh-em” creates closeness; “thầy nó - mẹ nó” emphasizes connection through their children, reflecting cultural shifts in literature);

- Relative social status (difference in power/role, through respectful forms of address such as “cha-con”, changing according to life stages and regions, maintaining flexible hierarchy).

These factors structure family relationships, serving as a means to reflect Vietnamese culture through address forms and contributing to the creation of social harmony.

#### (c). Communication Culture

The concepts of culture and communication can be defined as follows: "Culture is the sum of material and spiritual values created by humans throughout history" (Hoang Phe, 2014, p. 1421). According to Berge (1994), "Communication is the process of exchanging information between at least two objects, taking place in a specific context and situation" (Ban, 2012, p. 18).

These two concepts are closely related: culture defines patterns, and communication is where those patterns operate in social life and education.

Communication culture is a system of norms, rules and values that govern the use of terms of address in Vietnamese, particularly within literature. In Vietnamese culture, terms of address are not merely a communicative tool; they are symbolic expressions which reflect core cultural values.

These values are evident through three basic elements:

(1) Respect for Hierarchy (Respect Order): This is shown through the use of kinship terms (e.g., ông, bà, chú, cô...) to indicate status and power distance.

(2) Stratification of Formality: This involves using honorifics and familiar language (e.g., thưa, dạ or mày, tao...) to adjust the level of formality and intimacy based on the relationship and context.

(3) Emphasis on Community (Communitarity): Vietnamese terms of address highlight communal ties, especially in family relationships. In artistic (literary) texts, the shift between address levels frequently accompanies changes in the relationships and the psychological state of the characters.

### III. METHODOLOGY

This article uses the descriptive method and discourse analysis to explore how terms of address in Vietnamese families express family relationships and culture, as defined by M.A.K. Halliday's interpersonal metafunctional theory.

- Descriptive method: Based on the data collected from literary works and language researches, the descriptive method is employed to categorize and present in detail the phenomena of pronoun usage across various family relationships: husband-wife, grandparents-grandchildren, parents-children, and siblings. This method helps clarify the role and function of terms of address in communication, while also highlighting the influence of cultural and social factors on their use. This approach serves as the primary analytical framework throughout the research, offering an overview of the expression and communicative function of this word class within the texts.

- Discourse analysis method: This method is applied to interpret the function of words and forms of address as they are used in specific utterances. The choice of forms of address is analyzed in relation to factors including personal expression, social distance, relative social status, and communication culture. This approach helps to clarify the relationship between language and social factors, thereby enabling an understanding of how address forms reflect power, emotions, and roles within Vietnamese family relationships.

These two methods, combined with M.A.K. Halliday's interpersonal metafunctional theory, are used to analyze factors such as participation, emotions, and power inherent in the forms of address, thereby clarifying social and cultural relationships within the family.

To identify and analyze address terms within the framework of M.A.K. Halliday's interpersonal metafunctional theory, the article followed the steps outlined below:

- Selecting data from Vietnamese literary works containing family dialogues, ensuring diversity across communicative relationships (husband-wife, grandparent-grandchild, parent-child, and sibling) and a reasonable level of representativeness of family interaction.

- Identifying and extracting utterances containing address terms in the interactions between characters.

- Classifying and analyzing the address terms based on interpersonal parameters, including personal stance, social distance, and relative social status.

- Analyzing the findings and drawing conclusions about the role of address terms in constructing interpersonal relations in Vietnamese family communication.

### IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Families have been considered as fundamental units of society, a system that includes parents and children, and can be extended to grandparents, uncles, and siblings, all linked by biological relationships. Family communication often follows hierarchical rules, clearly reflecting biological relationships and the intergenerational bonds. From the perspective of Systemic Functional Grammar (SFG), this article applies three elements of the interpersonal metafunction — the speaker's personal expression, social distance, and relative social status — to explain the role of pronouns in Vietnamese family life.

#### *A. Terms of Address Expressing the Relationship Between Husband and Wife*

Terms of address used between husband and wife do more than just define communicative roles; they also convey respect, affection, and mutual responsibility. The specific pairs of address terms are chosen based on regional culture, age, occupation, backgrounds, and popularity. They are also reflected through the three elements of Tenor (Interaction) within the interpersonal metafunction.

(a). Common and Typical Terms of Address

In Vietnamese, the words for "husband" and "wife" are used to refer to a man and a woman in a marital relationship. When communicating with each other, the couple has a variety of address terms to choose from:

For young couples, the pair "anh - em" is the most common, as seen in this example:

(Ex 1). - Em có muốn anh lên đường không?

- Không, em không muốn. Nhưng em biết, nếu anh không đi thì lòng anh sẽ day dứt mãi. Anh cứ đi, em sẽ ở nhà chăm sóc con và lo việc nhà.

- Anh cảm ơn em. Em là hậu phương vững chắc của anh. Anh sẽ sớm trở về với mẹ con em (Thi, 2023).

The interaction in this marital communication is clearly demonstrated through the three elements of the interpersonal metafunction.

First and foremost, the personal expression is revealed through the address forms. The wife uses "em" to convey humility, support, and concern, while the husband uses "anh" to express responsibility and gratitude. Additionally, social distance is significantly reduced by the "anh-em", which reflects the closeness and intimacy inherent in the marriage. This choice creates a natural, barrier-free dialogue and deep understanding between the two parties. Finally, relative social status, despite the division of tasks (the husband as the "breadwinner" and the wife handling "childcare"), still conveys consensus and emotional equality. Thanks to this, the "anh-em" address pair makes the conversation gentle and deeply emotional, clearly showing mutual love and respect.

In different situations, particularly once they become parents, their forms of address may shift to kinship-based pairs like his father and his mother (or variants like his teacher).

(Ex 2). Ông nói gần giọng:

- Mẹ nó không phải lo. Cả thằng U'ông, thằng Ngạc cũng không phải lo, có gì tao sẽ chịu tất.

- Tôi nói thế là lo cho thầy nó, chứ tôi thì... (Truong, 1990).

In this dialogue, personal expression is evident in the wife's clever use of "thầy nó" combined with the pronoun "I" to assert her responsibility and concern. In contrast, the husband's harsh tone combined with "tao" underscores his determination, psychological pressure, and role as the family's main provider. In terms of social distance, the address pair "thầy nó - mẹ nó" links the couple through their shared identity as parents, but the husband's harsh tone simultaneously introduces psychological distance. Regarding relative social status, while "thầy nó" and "mẹ nó" establish equality as co-parents, the husband's use of the pronoun "I" still emphasizes his authority, particularly in moments of stress or dissatisfaction.

When the couple is older, they may use "ông - bà", "ông - tôi", or "bà - tôi" often replacing the titles used earlier ("anh - em" "thầy nó - mẹ nó"). This practice conveys both respect and closeness.

(Ex 3). Rồi ông Ham quay sang bà vợ đang gấp quần áo trên chiếc giường Đức nâu bóng: - Bà xuống rang cho tôi đĩa lạc (Truong, 1990).

In (3), Mr. Ham addresses his wife as "bà" and refers to himself as "tôi," creating a tone that is both respectful and intimate when making his simple request to "roast peanuts." Although the "tôi - bà" reflects the husband's active position in making the request, the relationship remains founded on emotional equality, making the family communication feel warmer and more connected.

Alternatively, the choice of address terms between husband and wife may depend on the profession or task one is currently engaged in.

(Ex 4). Tối Tam Ngải, anh chạy vội về nhà... Vợ anh la:

- Không có đạn đồng chí ơi!

Anh cười:

- Công đồng chí cũng có công tôi chứ. Tuy hai là một, đồng chí à! (Thi, 2023).

The work "Người mẹ cầm súng" reflects the nation's resistance war against the U.S. In this wartime setting, the soldier and his wife address each other as "đồng chí," instantly establishing a unanimous and respectful tone that signifies a close spiritual bond, emphasized by their smiles and the phrase "we two are one." This form of address deliberately blurs personal boundaries, emphasizing the atmosphere of shared hardship and suffering in their common mission. Simultaneously, it asserts their absolute equal position given their shared ideals, responsibilities, and decision-making power in the context of war.

The relationship between husband and wife in Vietnamese family culture is richly expressed through terms of address. These terms are not just a communicative necessity but a reflection of the diversity and depth of feelings and relational dynamics across different life stages (from youth to parenting to old age) and during shared tasks. The careful selection of each address pair fits the specific situation, demonstrating mutual love and respect. Ultimately, the choice of address form strengthens the husband-wife relationship while clearly defining their roles and responsibilities to each other and their family.

(b). Regional Terms of Address between Husband and Wife



In addition to the common address pair “anh – em”, spouses across Vietnam’s three regions also employ region-specific forms that carry distinct nuances: the North (anh–em, mình–mình, mình–tôi, mình–tôi, bố nó/thầy nó – mẹ nó...), the Central region (mình–tôi, ông–bà...), and the South (tôi – anh, tôi – má nó, ba sắp nhỏ – má sắp nhỏ, mình – tôi...). These differences reflect each region’s culture and traditions, and they may shift across communicative situations to reveal attitudes and psychological states.

#### Northern Families' Contexts

In Northern families, the terms “anh” and “em” are the most frequently used address forms between spouses, signifying respect and mutual affection. However, members in this relationship also employ other pairs, such as “mình – tôi”, “mình – mình” and “bố nó – mẹ nó”, “thầy nó – em,” which generally reflect intimacy, closeness, and emotional equality. However, address forms can change depending on the communication context to express each individual's attitude and mental state.

(Ex 5). - Thầy nó có đói đi ăn cơm thêm? Buổi tối cậu Lưu cho thịt vịt em vẫn để phần đấy.

- Ăn rồi. Sáng mai không được gọi tôi đấy nhé! (Truong, 1990).

In Example (5), regarding social distance, the wife uses “thầy nó” and “em” to express concern and maintain a close, warm atmosphere; the husband’s curt “tôi” creates psychological distance and “tilts” the intimate mood. Regarding relative social status, “thầy nó” evokes the husband’s role as the family’s pillar, whereas “em” indexes the wife’s deference within the traditional Northern family hierarchy.

Another example:

(Ex 6). Chị Hoàng thu dọn đồ đạc, đóng cửa, rồi đem một cây đèn to lại chỗ cây giường chúng tôi,... Anh Hoàng trông thấy, hỏi:

- Mình thấp đèn to đấy à?

- Vâng, tôi đổ thêm dầu đã (Nam Cao, 2017).

(Ex 7). Chị Hoàng chạy lại bếp lấy một quyển sách bìa dày, gáy da, đem lại.

- Mình đọc hay tôi đọc?

- Mình đọc đi (Nam Cao, 2017).

In examples (6) and (7), “mình – tôi” and “mình – mình” are used flexibly: “mình – mình” creates a tender sense of closeness and equality; “mình – tôi” remains intimate yet more formal, fitting the discreet, polite communicative style often associated with an educated couple. Taken together, (5), (6), and (7) show how spousal address terms shift with everyday contexts.

#### Central Region's Terms of Address

In the Central region, common spousal pairs include “mình – tôi” and “ông – bà”, which sound rustic yet emotionally rich. In disagreement, these pronouns still keep the marital frame, though the interaction can “heat up” through tone.

(Ex 8). - Ông ơi, con nó đã nát như ra rồi!

- Nát như cái gì! Nó nói dối như thế mà bà còn bênh!

- Thì nó còn nhỏ, ông đánh nó đau, tội nghiệp! (Anh, 2008).

In example (8), “ông – bà” conveys both respect and heightened emotion in a tense exchange: the wife addresses “ông” in a pleading tone, while the husband replies “bà” with strong objection. Even as the argument intensifies emotional opposition, the pair still anchors the family relationship. In terms of relative social status, “ông – bà” is relatively symmetrical on the surface, yet the husband’s forceful utterances suggest momentary control over the situation.

#### Southern Families' Contexts

In the South, address forms tend to be simple and flexible, fostering a friendly communicative environment. Beyond “anh – em”, couples may use “tôi – anh”, “tôi – cô”, “tôi – má nó”, “mình – tôi”, etc. Notably, “tôi” appears frequently as a neutral self-reference.

(Ex 9). Út về nói với chồng:

- Tôi nhứt định lấy cái bát này, nhưng lỡ phải đem cái thân ra cho nó giỡn hớt, giày vò anh chịu không.

Anh Tịch nói:

- Em làm sao được cứ làm (Thi, 2023).

In example (9), “tôi – anh” allows the wife to emphasize seriousness and determination while maintaining respect; the husband’s gentle “em” signals trust and support. The addressing sustains connection and also suggests a more equal, independent stance for the wife.

(Ex 10). Ba mập nghiêm trang chìa tay ra trước mặt vợ nói như ra lệnh:

- Tiền tôi đưa má nó hồi hôm đâu?

- Trời ơi! - Chị Ba Mập liếc qua (Truong, 1990).

Here, “tôi” helps maintain respect and a certain formality between spouses, even within intimacy. “Má nó”, used after having children, is both affectionate and role-defining, highlighting the wife as a mother in the family. The combination “tôi – má nó” in Southern culture can signal closeness and equality while still preserving seriousness in interaction.

Or in (Ex 11): Vợ Thủ rón rén lại bên giường gọi nhỏ:

- Thầy em dậy đi, có chú Sửu đến (Truong, 1990).

“Thầy em” in (11) underscores a respectful, more hierarchical nuance than “tôi – anh” in (9): it elevates the husband as the family’s support, while “em” marks the wife’s modesty.

It can be affirmed that terms of address are not only a part of the Vietnamese language but also a highly representative of the culture and communication styles across the three regions: North, Central, and South. The differences in address usage examined by this article, drawn from literary works, only reflect certain aspects of the cultural characteristics of each region. Nevertheless, this analysis helps to illustrate the diversity and richness of the Vietnamese language and culture to some extent.

(c). Terms of Address Used between Husband and Wife in Different Emotional States

In Vietnamese communication culture, terms of address are not merely a means to define the communicative roles of the speaker and listener; they also powerfully reflect their emotional states. This class of words is highly diverse and rich, meaning that choosing and applying the correct and appropriate pairs of terms helps to convey the emotions and attitudes of the communicators deeply across various situations.

Emotional and Humorous Ways to Address Husband and Wife

(Ex 12) Lúc chuẩn bị đánh thấy chồng không nói gì mình, nói:

- Anh tính không cho tôi đi sao?

- Em đi để đi dạo đường à?

Út nói nửa cười, nửa mỉa:

- “Đồng chí” đã hại người ta, giờ lại cần nữa (Thị, 2023).

The address pair “đồng chí” – “người ta” in the example (12) conveys a humorous tone, creating a light-hearted and playful dynamic in the conversation. When Út refers to her husband as “đồng chí,” it shows signs of closeness, intimacy, and a touch of teasing. Út’s statement, “đồng chí đã hại người ta, giờ lại cần nữa” might initially suggest irony or conflict due to the juxtaposition of “đồng chí” and “người ta.” However, when considering the conversation as a whole, this choice of address reflects the humor and ease within their marital relationship, effectively reducing tension and fostering a close, affectionate atmosphere.

Terms of Address between Spouses under Different Emotional States

(Ex 13) Người đàn bà bỗng thở dài. Tràng quay lại khẽ hỏi:

- Buồn à?

- Không.

- Gớm sao lúc này nói chuyện dai dẳng, đợi sót cả ruột.

Thị lườm hần không trả lời. Hần xích lại cười cười:

- Thôi khuya rồi đây, ngủ đi. (Kim Lan, 2023).

In this example, Mr. Trang and his wife omit terms of address. This is also a common practice among young couples or couples at the same age to express their feelings.

In the dialogue between Mr. Trang and his wife, the omission of address terms contributes to creating a natural and emotional communication tone. The choice not to use a formal address has become a modal sign, reflecting the comfort and closeness in their newly formed relationship. From the perspective of social distance, this omission conveys a casual, simple atmosphere, erasing all boundaries between two young people with the same background. In terms of relative social status, the lack of need to establish the speaker or listener through a form of address demonstrates absolute equality, ensuring no element of power or seniority exists in this marital relationship.

(Ex 14) Vẫn cái giọng rì rầm, rì rầm thường ngày.

- Này, thầy nó ạ.

Ông Hai nằm rũ ra ở trên giường không nói gì.

- Thầy nó ngủ rồi à?

- Gì!

Ông lão gắt lên:

- Biết rồi! (Kim Lan, 2017).

In the dialogue between the husband and wife, Mrs. Hai uses “thầy” in a gentle tone, conveying concern and self-sacrifice. However, Mr. Hai’s abrupt responses (“Gì!”, “Biết rồi!”) reveals his frustration and disrupt the intimacy. While “thầy nó” fosters closeness through their shared identity as parents, Mr. Hai’s attitude simultaneously creates psychological distance. In terms of relative social status, “thầy nó” emphasizes the husband’s central role, yet his brief, proactive replies also reveal his inner turmoil.

Addressing Husband and Wife Based on Comradeship

(Ex 15) Út cười nói với chồng:

- Tôi “chia lửa” cho “đồng chí chồng” rút đố, ghen! (Thị, 2023).

The way the character Út addresses her husband using “tôi” and “đồng chí chồng” is delivered in a cheerful, humorous, and affectionate tone. This choice not only expresses pride but also vividly depicts the spirit of unity and solidarity between two individuals who share the same revolutionary ideals. The word “ghen!” at the end of the sentence further emphasizes the intimacy and sincere support in the couple’s life, which is tied to their political missions. In terms of social distance, “đồng chí chồng” is both formal and intimate. It helps dissolve class boundaries, replacing them with a spirit of solidarity and equality among people of the same rank. Regarding relative social status, this form of address affirms absolute equality, as neither gender nor power is distinguished. Instead, they stand on the same fighting ground, sharing responsibility and revolutionary belief.

(d). Terms of Address used when Communicating about a Third Person

Dialogue between spouses typically involves only two participants: the speaker (who addresses) and the listener (who is addressed). When the communication expands to include a third person — who is absent from the immediate conversation — the specific address form chosen depends on the context and the third person's relationship with the speaker or listener.

Communicating with Elders in the Family

(Ex 16) Trảng nhắc mẹ:

- Kia nhà tôi nó chào u.

Thấy mẹ vẫn chưa hiểu, hấn bước lại gần nói tiếp:

- Nhà tôi nó mới về làm bạn với tôi đây u ạ! Chúng tôi phải duyên phải kiếp với nhau... (Kim Lan, 2023).

Trang uses the term “nhà tôi” to refer to his wife when conversing with his mother (whom he addresses as “u”). This form is used to affirm Trang's marital relationship to his family. This address is delivered in a very gentle and casual manner while still conveying deep emotion.

Communicating with Children in the Family

(Ex 17) Thăng bé vừa đứng trước mặt, Ba Mập xoay ngoắc người nó trở lại và vỗ mạnh vào đít:

- Lẹ đi, kêu má ra ba có việc cấp cứu nghe con (Kim Lan, 2023).

When speaking to his child, Ba Mập (the speaker) refers to his wife (the absent character) using the word “mom”. This choice of address demonstrates Ba Mập's respect for his wife and simultaneously affirms her position within the family hierarchy.

Communicating with Older People Outside the Family

(Ex 18) Đến cả chú mà cũng nghĩ như thế à? Ôi giờ đất ơi! Vợ tôi ốm, con tôi đói. Tôi cũng cần phải làm ăn, phải uống như mọi người. Các người có còn muốn cho tôi sống nữa không?... (Tran Đăng Khoa, 2020)

Communicating with Close Friends

(Ex 19) Anh Ba Mập vênh vang hãnh diện, nhận tiền từ tay vợ, cố ý giơ cao tay thả thật thật nhẹ vào cái mũ do một thủy thủ tinh nghịch dâng tận nơi.

- Tính cả tinh thần má sắp nhỏ nhà tôi nghe anh em (Tuan, 2020).

The terms used by the husband to refer to his wife, such as “vợ tôi” (18) or “má sắp nhỏ nhà tôi” (19), serve not only to reference her but also carry a nuance of care and affection (personal expression). They demonstrate respect, love, and attachment, particularly in everyday life. In terms of social distance, they foster a feeling of closeness and intimacy, affirming an informal relationship suitable for Southern communication styles. Regarding relative social status, both terms project balance, showing a respectful attitude from the husband and highlighting the wife's role as a mother without emphasizing his personal power.

In short, terms of address in the husband-wife relationship play a vital role in the interpersonal metafunction according to M.A.K. Halliday. Through personal expression, they reveal attitudes, emotions, and psychological states such as respect, love, teasing, or frustration. Through social distance, they reflect the level of closeness or formality, ranging from absolute intimacy (“mình - mình”) to temporary distance during arguments. Through relative social status, they determine hierarchy and roles, shifting from the husband's dominance in the traditional family to equality in contexts like the resistance movement. Depending on the region and circumstances, terms of address function not only as communication tools but also as powerful expressions of culture, emotion, and family responsibility.

*B. Terms of Address Expressing the Relationship Between Grandparents and Grandchildren*

Bonds between a husband and wife primarily expresses interpersonal relationships connected by marriage. Within the family structure, however, there are other relationships connected by blood, such as those between parents and children, siblings, or grandparents and grandchildren. The clear and specific expression of these blood relationships relies heavily on terms of address, alongside other linguistic tools. In particular, the terms used between grandparents and grandchildren are crucial for reflecting traditional values, filial piety, and family cohesion.

(a). Common and Typical Terms of Address

The terms of address used for the grandparent-grandchild relationship originated within the feudal family system, where family rank and seniority were the standard for cultural norms.

In Vietnamese, the terms used to address grandparents and grandchildren are exceptionally rich and diverse, often varying based on both gender and family status. The terms “ông” (used for both paternal and maternal grandfathers) and “bà” (used for both paternal and maternal grandmothers) refer to the elders of the family. The term “cháu” refers to all grandchildren, regardless of gender, demonstrating the younger generation's respect for their elders. Thus, these terms are not simply labels but carry the deeper meaning of respect and establishing the proper relationship framework within a multi-generational family.

(Ex 20). Bà hỏi cô cháu: - Cậu đây là người thế nào?

- Cháu phải biết rõ hơn về quá khứ của anh ta và những quan hệ rất phức tạp của anh ta với nhiều hạng người (Tuan, 2020).

In “Xung hô trong gia đình người Việt”, Bui Minh Yen comments on the reciprocal address used by grandparents and grandchildren:

In essence, this way of addressing is reciprocal, which means one addresses oneself using their own role to the addressee, vice versa. In other words, each person refers to themselves and the other party strictly by their respective positions in the reciprocal relationship. (Yen, 1994, pp. 31-40)

In conversations between a grandmother and her grandchild, it highlights the grandmother's care and responsibility, and the grandchild's filial piety and attachment. This pair of terms fosters a close atmosphere, effectively removing emotional barriers within the family. In terms of relative social status, "grandmother" emphasizes the leading role of the elder, and "grandchild" denotes politeness. Yet, the open nature of the dialogue itself demonstrates the sharing and closeness that are key traditional cultural aspects of the grandparent-grandchild relationship.

#### (b). Regional Variations in Terms of Address

The specific address terms used between grandparents and grandchildren may vary slightly by region, though the core meaning remains consistent. However, based on the corpus surveyed, we noted that these address terms of grandparents-grandchild relationship do not have consistent usage or broad coverage across all three regions, and regional differences are minor.

##### Northern Region

In the North, the terms "ông" and "bà" are the most common address forms. The grandfather or grandmother refers to themselves as "ông" or "bà" and addresses their grandchildren as "cháu". Conversely, grandchildren refer to themselves as "cháu" or "con" and address their grandparents as "ông" or "bà".

Additionally, Northern Vietnamese also uses terms that specify the paternal or maternal lineage combined with the core titles, such as "ông nội" - "cháu", "bà nội" - "cháu", or "ông bà ngoại" - "cháu".

(Ex 21) "Ông ơi, cháu thích ăn món này." (Kim Lan, 2017)

(Ex 22) "Cháu ơi, rót cho bà miếng nước nhé." (Kim Lan, 2017)

The terms "cháu - ông" and "cháu - bà" are familiar expressions in family communication, signifying the close bond between grandparents and grandchildren. These terms are not only popular in the North but are also widely used across the Central and Southern regions, reflecting the underlying unity in Vietnamese family culture.

Central Region: addressing grandparents and grandchildren in the Central region remains as common as it is in the North. However, in some areas, people may use alternative terms for grandparents, such as "ông" or "bà", while the grandchildren refer to themselves using "cháu" or "con".

(Ex 23) - Cháu của ông ngoan lắm.

- Cháu thích được ngủ cùng với cụ cơ (Tuan, 2020)

Southern Region: in the South, people commonly use "ông/bà nội", "bà/ông ngoại", similar to the North and Central regions. They may also use the simpler pairs "nội - con" and "ngoại - con". Some areas use the construction "grandparent + grandparent's name" to clarify the relationship further. Parental or maternal grandchildren, however, consistently refer to themselves as "cháu", making no distinction from other regions.

(Ex 24) Thấy Phi suốt ngày thui thủi một mình, ngoại biểu đi hàng xóm chơi, Phi lắc đầu, "... Con với ông nước lã, người dưng mà, ngoại?" (Tuan, 2020)

These specific address forms clearly define the roles and positions of grandparents and grandchildren within the family while simultaneously conveying closeness and affection.

It is clear that in Vietnamese culture, the way grandparents and grandchildren address each other primarily emphasizes affection and intergenerational connection. Terms of address ("ông - cháu" across all three regions, "ông - con" in the South, or regional variants) express the care and love of the grandparents and the filial piety of the grandchildren. This dynamic creates an intimate atmosphere, effectively bridging the generation gap. Terms like "ông", "bà", "nội", "ngoại" emphasize the leading role of the adults, while "cháu" and "con" denote the necessary politeness of the younger generation. Even though the variations are not extensive, this form of address remains a crucial linguistic tool, reflecting fundamental Vietnamese family values across all regions.

### C. Terms of Address Expressing the Relationship Between Parents and Children

In Vietnamese families, the way parents and children address each other is not merely a way to define communicative roles; it holds multiple layers of meaning, simultaneously reflecting affection, respect, and emotional bonds within the families. The system of address terms used in this relationship is quite diverse in both literary works and daily life.

#### (a). Common and Typical Terms of Address

- Parents often use terms of address that are loving and affectionate when speaking to their children. However, the most common and typical terms remain "cha", "mẹ", and "con". Other common terms include "con", "bé", "em", "em bé", or simply the child's name, sometimes accompanied by gender modifiers like "con trai" or "con gái".

(Ex 25) - Cha thương con phận đàn bà. Không may lấy phải thằng quỷ dữ cộng sản. Nó theo Việt Minh vào rừng ăn rêu đá, đã mọc đuôi dài, lông lá gớm giếc (Chu Van, 2016).

(Ex 26) - Con ơi, mai mẹ lại đưa con về mẹ con ta phải chết trước mũi chúng nó?

(Ex 27) - Ba ơi! Ba! Con đây.

- Ba đây...Ba thắng lợi trở về đây ha...ha...Em bé đâu? (Tuan, 2020).

In the three examples of "cha - con", "mẹ - con" and "ba - con", Vietnamese families' affection is clearly depicted across diverse contexts. In terms of personal expression, these address pairs carry intimate emotional nuances, conveying anxiety and sorrow (examples 25, 26) or joy and pride (example 27). This reflects the deep thoughts of the parents and

the respect and attachment of the children. Regarding social distance, the use of “cha,” “mẹ,” “ba,” and “con” creates a familiar space, emphasizing empathy and understanding inherent in the biological relationships, whether in times of adversity or reunion. In terms of relative social status, the terms “cha,” “mẹ,” and “ba” affirm the leadership role of the parents, but the sincerity and emotion in the child’s reciprocal use of “con” reduces the hierarchy, fostering closeness.

- Children’s Terms of Address for Parents:

When speaking to their parents, children consistently use respectful and polite terms of address. The words “con” and “cha,” “mẹ” remain the primary terms used by children. Nevertheless, depending on the communication situation and the region, the terms used to address parents can vary widely. Common alternatives include “bố,” “mẹ,” “ba,” “má,” “mạ,” “ông,” “bà,” “thầy,” “u,” “tía,” “bà,” “cha”. This diversity in address terms reflects the richness of the Vietnamese language and highlights regional differences. For instance, in the North, children often call their parents “bố mẹ,” while in the South, the words “ba má” are more commonly used.

(Ex 28) - Bây giờ mẹ tôi lại ở với mấy đứa em gái tôi bên nó, năm nay chúng cũng lớn rồi, bộ đội đâu mà gả, không biết mẹ tôi nghĩ ngợi ra rằng (Tuan, 2020).

(Ex 29) Đường như đứa con gái đang chết, chỉ đôi mắt là rung rúc chớp mở không thôi. Câu đầu tiên nó hỏi:

- Không biết con bị có con không, hả cha? (Tu, 2006).

(Ex 30) Thắng Thành nói:

- Con không đành lòng để tía ở lại một mình (Tu, 2006).

(Ex 31) Con Tùn giận dỗi:

Nếu mẹ không tôn trọng con thì mẹ còn hỏi ý kiến của con làm gì (Anh, 2008).

The three examples of “mạ – tôi,” “cha – con” and “mẹ – con” affirm that terms of address both reflect personal attitudes and preserve traditional biological relationships and hierarchy. In terms of personal expression, the use of “tôi” in “mạ – tôi” is laden with worries and anxieties for the mother and siblings, while “con” in “cha – con” sounds vulnerable, signaling a need for help and protection, thereby creating distinct emotional nuances. Regarding social distance, the “mạ – tôi” pair balances intimacy and formality thanks to the use of the pronoun “tôi,” while “cha – con” removes all barriers when the child is insecure, emphasizing unconditional attachment. In terms of relative social status, “mạ” and “cha” assert their leadership roles, while “tôi” and “con” express politeness. However, the anxious tone in both examples blurs the lines of power, instead demonstrating deep empathy and sharing between generations.

(b). Regional Variations in Terms of Address

In Vietnamese culture, the terms of address used by children for their parents are highly diverse and rich, with clear distinctions across the three regions: North, Central, and South. Each region has a typical way of addressing parents that reflects its local customs, culture, and communicative habits.

Northern Region

In the North, children typically address their parents using “bố” and “mẹ”. These terms are also widely used in daily communication. Additionally, children in this region may call their parents by terms such as “thầy,” “cậu,” “me,” “bu,” “đề,” “mợ” (terms often found in rural areas).

(Ex 32) Ông lão ôm thằng con út lên lòng, vỗ nhẹ vào lưng nó, khẽ hỏi:

– Húc kia! Thầy hỏi con nhé, con là con ai?

– Là con thầy mấy lị con u. (Kim Lan, 2017).

Central Region

In the Central region, the most common pair of words used to address parents is “ba” and “má”. This usage reflects the warmth and closeness characteristics of the people and culture here. Beyond this core pair, local variations include calling mothers “mạ” or “mệ,” “u,” “bà” and sometimes addressing the father as “thầy”.

(Ex 33) Bà Đức quần quai trên đường như muốn chồm dậy mà không dậy nổi, nước mắt đầm đìa trên khoé mắt, miệng ú ớ:

- Nghe má, đừng đi nữa con (Tuan, 2020).

Southern Region

In the South, children often call their fathers “ba,” “tía,” and their mothers “má,” “vú,” or “bà,” among others.

Each Vietnamese region features its own specific variations in address forms: North (“thầy – con,” “u – con”); Central (“má – con,” “mạ – con”); and South (“tía – con,” “ba – con”). All these variations aim to express the three elements of the interpersonal metafunction. First of all, they carry characteristic emotional nuances — from affectionate care to urgent concern — reflecting the speaker’s feelings and responsibilities. Secondly, despite the different terms, all forms create an intimate communicative space, with psychological distance only temporarily appearing when asserting authority through a harsh tone or command. Finally, the words used for parents emphasize their superior position, but the children’s reciprocal address and emotional responses soften the gap, affirming sharing and a flexible hierarchy in Vietnamese families.

(c). Terms of Address Used in Different Emotional States

In typical daily conversations, parents commonly refer to themselves as “ba,” “bố,” or “mẹ” and address their children as “con,” and vice versa. This represents the standard, traditional way of addressing used by most Vietnamese families. Nevertheless, this pattern can shift significantly in situations involving different emotional states.

- When children are young, parents often use affectionate terms like “cúng com” to convey closeness and intimacy. Other personalized terms used for young children often attach their names to personal characteristics or traits for distinction, such as Tùn, Tí sún, Hím, Đực (boy), Bẹp (girl), Hải cò, Tuấn xoắn, etc.

(Ex 34) - Hải cò đâu?

- Dạ ba gọi con (Anh, 2008).

The terms parents use often combine their children's names with specific characteristics or personality traits to create a distinctive and identifying form of address.

- To command attention or express a degree of dissatisfaction, parents might refer to their sons as “thằng”, and their daughters as “con” or “cái”.

(Ex 35) - Thằng Phi đâu?

- Con nó sẽ tới bây giờ đó. Bà đau lắm hả? (Tuan, 2020).

(Ex 36) - Con Tí đâu bố gọi sao không trả lời?

- Dạ, con đây ba (Truong, 1990).

When there are conflicts or disagreements, which typically occurs only when children have grown into adults and disappointed or challenged their parents, parents may use the terms “anh” and “chị” towards their adult children to emphasize authority.

(Ex 37) Ông hỏi Phi: - Chắc anh quan hệ với nhiều phụ nữ? (Tuan, 2020).

Occasionally, parents call their children by name only, omitting any other form of address to signal closeness, intimacy, and a temporary removal of age or status distinctions within the family.

(Ex 38) Ông Hàm lên nhà trên mở toang cửa, rồi gọi với giọng rất sang:

- Nước sôi chưa Hoa?

Một tiếng dạ từ dưới bếp, rồi đứa con gái út hơn mười tuổi bỏ dở bài đang học, xách siêu nước lửa vẫn còn cháy nhấp nháy quanh âm nhôm đi lên (Truong, 1990).

The address pair “tao – mày” is not strictly reserved for peers. In family relationships, the term “tao” appears when parents address their children, reflecting comfort and sincerity in family communication. However, children cannot use “tao” to address their parents, as this violates the family order and the cultural norm of respecting elders.

(Ex 39) Bà lão nói toàn chuyện vui, toàn chuyện sung sướng về sau này:

- Trảng ạ. Khi nào có tiền ta mua lấy đôi gà. Tao tin rằng cái chỗ đầu bếp kia làm cái chuồng gà thì tiện quá....

Bà lão đặt đĩa bát xuống, nhìn hai con vui vẻ:

- Chúng mày đợi u nhá. Tao có cái này hay lắm cơ (Kim Lan, 2023).

(Ex 40) Sáng nay khi nó đang thiếp đi nặng nề, thì bà Son lay lay người, gọi:

- Dậy ăn cơm còn đi học chứ.

- Hôm nay con vẫn đi học hả u?

- Thế mày không đi học thì đi đâu? (Truong, 1990).

Thus, when aiming for intimacy and casualness, parents may refer to their children as “mày” and address themselves as “tao”. However, children must always be respectful and polite when addressing their parents. This embodies the polite principle of “respectful address” inherent in Vietnamese communication culture.

When a rift occurs in the parent-child relationship, sometimes leading to the abandonment of blood relations, the address pair “mày – tao” may be chosen. Notably, the neutral pronoun “tôi” also appears, explicitly signaling a distant and formal attitude.

(Ex 41) Đến lượt mình, Phúc bước ra, mở đầu bằng câu hỏi:

- Địa chủ Đại, mày có biết tao là ai không?

Ông bố đã trả lời thế này:

- Dạ thưa tôi có biết ông, vì tôi đã trót đẻ ra ông! (Truong, 1990).

The “mày – tao” in the excerpt depicts the complete breakdown of the relationship between Phúc and his father, Đại. Phúc’s use of “mày – tao” is highly rude and disrespectful, treating Mr. Đại as a class antagonist rather than his biological father. Conversely, Mr. Đại’s reply using “tôi – ông” conveys deep pain and sorrow. While still confirming the blood relationship the exchange is marked by a sarcastic tone and the loss of father-child affection.

The analysis above demonstrates that the shift in pronouns between parents and children reflects the diverse emotional spectrum within the family. When close, they use “ba-mẹ” or affectionate names like “cúng com” or “Tí sún”. When in conflict or disappointed, they switch to rude forms (“mày – tao”) or distanced formality (“tôi – ông”). However, Vietnamese culture fundamentally maintains the principle of respect, requiring children to always address their parents with deference.

(d). Pronouns Used When Communicating About a Third Person

Addressing a Spouse or Child to a Third Person

When parents speak to each other and mention their children, they use appropriate pronouns depending on the content and context.

(Ex 42) - Con nó sẽ tới bây giờ đó. Bà đau lắm hả?

- Tôi mơ thấy thằng Phi nghe tụi xấu rù lái tàu vượt biên (Tuan, 2020).

In example (42), the parents refer to their child as “con nó” and “thằng Phi” while speaking to each other. This is a common pattern in Vietnamese families. It shows the close relationship between the spouses while potentially expressing dissatisfaction or worry regarding the subject (the child).

When children speak to their father or mother about their parents (often talking about the absent parent), they frequently use common terms of address such as “thầy”, “cha”, “bố”, “má”, “mẹ”, “u” ... They might also use the term “cha mẹ” + “con” to convey respect and affirm the biological relationship. Conversely, when the listener is the parent, the speaker often refers to the other parent using a combination like: thầy (thầy)/cha/bố + mày or má/mẹ/u + mày (referring to the listener as their child).

#### Communicating with a Third Person Who Is Not the Parent

When addressing a third person who is older or of the same age as themselves, parents often refer to their child as cháu hoặc con tôi, thằng, cái...

(Ex 43) Các đồng chí thông cảm. Nó là con tôi, để tôi nói chuyện riêng với nó (Tuan, 2020).

When children communicate with an older person (whether a relative or an outsider) or even with someone their own age or younger, they must maintain a respectful, polite, and courteous tone. Common terms children use to refer to their parents when speaking to a third person include bố/ mẹ, ba/ mẹ, thầy/ mẹ, thầy/ u, bố/ mẹ + tôi, bố/ mẹ + cháu, bố/ mẹ + em, cụ ông/ cụ bà nhà em, ông bà (when the child is already grown or married, speaking on behalf of their own child).

(Ex 44) - Chẳng ai quan tâm em trên thế giới này, bố mẹ em cũng như thế, cho em tiền và đi, chỉ trở về khi em cần tiền... đơn giản thế... (Gao, 2014).

(Ex 45) - Lúc đi thầy có nói gì với u không?

- Những chuyện riêng của thầy mày có bao giờ tao được biết? - Bà Son nói ầm ức - Lúc mấy người kia đến, thầy mày còn không cho tao ngồi gần sợ nghe thấy. Chả nhẽ việc như thế ông Thủ lại không biết? (Truong, 1990).

(Ex 46) - Hồi chiều má con không nấu cơm...

- Vậy sao?

- Má con nằm trên giường thờ dài...

- Vậy hả? Thờ ra làm sao? (Tuan, 2020).

Conversely, when a third person is speaking to a child, and the subject is the child's parents, they also use appropriate communicative terms to show respect to the elders and the youngers. However, alongside standard titles like bố, mẹ, má, thầy... they may use terms that frame the parent in relation to the child, often with an expressive nuance, as seen below.

(Ex 47) Chị ngó trần vào cha, rồi dạy qua tôi, chị để rớt từng lời:

- Má cưng ác một, nhưng người cha này của cưng ác tới mười (Tu, 2006).

In example (47), even though the speaker is negatively evaluating the parents of the character “tôi”, they maintain politeness by referring to them as má cưng, cha cưng when speaking to the character. “Cưng” is a term Southern Vietnamese (particularly those in the Western provinces) often use affectionately.

#### D. Forms of Address Expressing the Relationship Between Siblings

The forms of address used between siblings in Vietnamese families are typically intimate and close. They serve both to establish the hierarchy (anh (older brother), chị (older sister), em (younger sibling)) and to convey closeness, respect, or emotional state. Common pairs of terms include: “chị – em,” “anh – em,” “tao – mày” (I – you), or simply calling the other by their first name, depending on the context and level of intimacy. The following examples illustrate how these address forms express the three elements of the interpersonal metafunction (Personal Expression, Social Distance, and Relative Social Status).

(Ex 48) Đào đang nghĩ cách, thì vừa lúc cái Hoa đi học về: Đào bảo nó như đồ dành: - Chị nấu cơm sắp chín rồi, Hoa sang chị Minh bảo lúc nữa chị ấy ăn cơm xong, sang đây chị nhấc cái này nhá (Truong, 1990).

In Conversation (48), Đào addresses herself as “chị” (older sister) and her younger sister as “Hoa,” using intimate words with a gentle, coaxing tone that shows concern and care. Calling the younger sister by her proper name “Hoa” and the phrase “as if to coax” creates a warm, close communicative atmosphere between the two sisters. The address pair “chị – Hoa” not only signals intimacy but also reflects the social status in the family, with Đào being the eldest sister and playing a leading role. While calling the younger sibling by name still maintains hierarchy, the coaxing tone reduces the status difference, fostering closeness and harmony in the relationship.

(Ex 49) Biết chị về, cái Hoa nằm trong buồng hỏi ra, giọng tỉnh như sáo:

- U chưa về hả chị Đào?

- Ở tao tưởng u sang bá Cả về rồi.

Cái Hoa vực dậy đi ra, mặt mũi:

- Em tưởng chị cũng sang đây.

- Tao đi họp đoàn cơ mà (Truong, 1990).

In the conversation between Đào and Hoa, the mutual addressing of “chị Đào – em” (older sister Đào – younger sibling) and “tao – em” (I – younger sibling) highlights their close sisterly bond. Hoa addresses herself as “em” and uses the title “chị Đào” in a natural, comfortable voice, while Đào responds with the casual “tao” and “em,” creating an intimate, informal atmosphere. However, their shared concern about their mother, expressed through Hoa’s “restless face” and Đào’s reply, emphasizes their strong connection. This pair of addresses both reflects absolute closeness and maintains the family hierarchy: “chị Đào” and “chị” affirm Đào’s position, while “em” shows Hoa’s deference. Yet, the natural and

casual tone blurs the difference in status, creating a feeling of closeness and emotional equality in everyday communication.

In general, in examples (48) and (49), the sisterly relationship between Đào and Hoa is built through address pairs such as “chị – Hoa” and “chị/tao/chị Hoa – em.” These terms demonstrate both the close family bond and respect for the traditional hierarchy. Nevertheless, the use of informal pronouns and the natural tone indicate comfort and closeness in their communication, free from social barriers. This reflects a core tenet of Vietnamese family culture, where members prioritize closeness, mutual care, and respect, creating a warm and harmonious atmosphere in all relationships.

## V. CONCLUSION

In summary, drawing on Halliday’s interpersonal metafunction, this article has clarified the role of the Vietnamese address system in constructing and regulating interpersonal relations in family communication, specifically across husband–wife, grandparent–grandchild, parent–child, and sibling relationships. The analysis shows that address forms function not only as mechanisms of calling and responding but also as resources for encoding personal stance, social distance, and relative social status, thereby reflecting and shaping power dynamics, degrees of intimacy, and interactional positioning among family members. At the same time, these forms embody core cultural values such as respect, responsibility, and family cohesion. These findings contribute to extending the interpersonal functional perspective in the study of Vietnamese address terms. However, the study is limited by its reliance primarily on literary data, which may not fully capture naturally occurring interaction. Future research should therefore expand the empirical basis to include authentic conversational data, integrating sociolinguistic and corpus-based approaches, and conduct comparative analyses across broader social domains such as occupational, educational, and religious contexts in order to further elucidate the role of address terms in structuring and negotiating interpersonal relations in contemporary Vietnamese society.

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# Reflections on Taboo Symbols in Tamkesi Sacred Spaces

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**Abstract**—The purpose of this study was to examine the symbols in taboo expressions in the sacred places of the Tamkesi traditional village. The symbols in taboo expressions were examined through an ethnosemiotic lens to explore the deep cultural meanings that represent the cultural values of the Tamkesi community. By implementing a qualitative method with an ethnographic approach, this study utilised meticulous reading to reveal the meaning and cultural values of symbols in taboo expressions of the Tamkesi community. Data were collected from *usif* (king) and tribal chiefs, through in-depth interviews and continued with in-depth observations of the lives of the Tamkesi community to obtain a deep and comprehensive understanding of culture. Data were analysed through a structural systematic approach comprising data reduction, presentation, and conclusion. The results revealed that the taboo symbols of the Tamkesi community in sacred places were full of meaning, both literal or denotative meaning and cultural or connotative meaning that represent the cultural values of the local community in building harmonious relationships with God, nature, society, fellow human beings, and themselves. The existence and belief in this sacred place emphasised spiritual values that support human behaviour in building relationships with nature, society, fellow human beings, and oneself. The findings of this study contribute to the fields of ethnosemiotics, linguistic anthropology, and several data user authorities such as village governments, the Department of Tourism and Culture, language institutions and field of education to archive and formulate policies related to taboos as part of local wisdom.

**Index Terms**—cultural meaning, cultural values, taboo symbols, sacred places

## I. INTRODUCTION

In recent decades, taboo as a socio-cultural phenomenon has been the object of heated discussion in various parts of the world. Studies on taboo have been highlighted from various perspectives, such as sociolinguistics (Chu, 2009), psycholinguistics (Rosenberg et al., 2017), neuro-linguistics (Hansen et al., 2019), socio-pragmatics (Gabriel & Charlotte, 2021), psycho-sociolinguistics (Alqahtani et al., 2022; Silva-Nasser, 2023), and natural Semantic Metalanguage (Ulfa et al., 2024). However, studies that specifically examine the meaning and value of taboo symbols from an ethno-semiotic perspective are still rare. On the other hand, this information is greatly needed by several data user authorities to design public policies such as village government, tourism and cultural offices, language centres, and education offices. This information vacuum is an obstacle in the context of preserving culture or formulating policies related to local wisdom. As stated by Arianto et al. (2024), taboo studies can contribute to the preservation of cultural heritage, maintenance of the natural environment, and preparation for facing contemporary environmental challenges. In addition, taboo studies through an ethno-semiotic perspective can contribute to the field of education, namely as a strengthening of character, as stated by Ulfa et al. (2024) that taboos can be used as the basis for moral and ethical education.

Taboo is defined as a form of prohibition on uttering and carrying out actions related to social, religious, and cultural aspects that must not be violated by members of society (Wardhaugh, 2006; Smith, 2007). This prohibition is referred to as a cultural norm that has been believed in and inherited from generation to generation (Junaidi & Wardani, 2019). A person who violates a taboo will receive a punishment according to the type of taboo violated (Aziz et al., 2020). Violation of taboos is believed to lead to illness, death, or other disasters (Jay, 2009; Menke et al., 2020; Menke & Menke, 2024; Wardhaugh, 2006). Taboos include verbal prohibitions, such as a prohibition on speaking a language, as well as nonverbal prohibitions, such as a prohibition on carrying out an action (Freud, 2024; Wardhaugh, 2006; Macaulay, 2020; Junaidi & Wardani, 2019). Studies on taboos related to prohibitions on saying certain words are of more interest to researchers, such as the taboo on saying certain words in the Karo language (Barus et al., 2018), Kerinci language (Trimadona, 2017), Javanese language (Nuryantiningsih & Pandanwangi, 2018), Nepali (Niraula et al.,

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2022), and Acehnese language (Junaidi & Wardani, 2019). Taboo studies related to prohibitions on actions are often ignored, even though prohibitions on saying and doing these actions have an important role in regulating human life in building harmonious relationships with God, nature, society, fellow human beings, and even with oneself.

This study focused on taboo expressions in the Tamkesi indigenous community. Taboo expressions referred to in this study are expressions that contain prohibitions on saying and doing actions based on custom. In taboo expressions, there are symbols that contain deep meanings, so that they become the reason for a statement or an action to be taboo. Symbols are something that can be expanded without limits in social life, that have the potential to create new forms of meaning and interpretation (Parmentier, 2014). Symbols are used to connect concepts, demonstrate shared understanding, and convey meaning (Livingston, 1989). Symbols in taboo expressions can be words, phrases, clauses, sentences, discourses that represent the ideology of a society that is full of cultural values. Thus, the interpretation of taboo expressions must take into account the symbolic dimensions contained therein. These taboo symbols form a social order, moral code, and psychology that regulates individual behaviour in the life of a cultured society, maintains social order, and forms cultural identity (Niraula et al., 2022).

Taboo symbols that embody deep meaning represent the cultural values of a particular society. Soepono et al. (1999) state that cultural values are abstract concepts regarding fundamental and valuable bases to be used as guidelines for behaving in a cultural community. Yayuk et al. (2022) emphasised that taboos contain cultural values that are relevant to national values that can be applied in the era of modernisation. Arianto et al. (2024) found that the prohibition of cutting down sacred trees, picking leaves, and defecating around trees, is an ethic in environmental maintenance that represents the cultural values of the community that are rooted in harmonious interactions between humans and nature. Djamaris et al. (1996) classified cultural values based on human relationships with several elements, namely human relationships with God, nature, society, fellow human beings, and oneself.

Taboo is a rule in culture (Chu, 2009; Ulfa et al., 2024). Words that are considered taboo in one culture may not be considered taboo in another culture (Alqahtani et al., 2022) so that it can lead to misunderstanding, obstacles, and conflicts in cross-cultural communication (Junxuan et al., 2025). Therefore, knowledge of cultural differences is crucial in cross-cultural communication (Yin, 2009). However, cultural knowledge, such as understanding the meaning of cultural symbols, is not very common among today's young generation (Nursalam et al., 2024; Auni & Nidawati, 2023). In fact, by understanding the meaning of cultural symbols, the younger generation will appreciate local wisdom, social norms, and their cultural principles as a guide to life. This is in accordance with Ofori et al. (2023), who state that the ability to interpret symbolic meaning is a means to maintain one's identity in a cultural context. This study will provide a solution to this gap by providing cultural knowledge related to the meaning of taboo symbols that represent the cultural values of the Tamkesi indigenous community.

Tamkesi is one of the areas that is famous for its commitment to preserving its culture, located in North Central Timor Regency, East Nusa Tenggara Province, Indonesia. Thus, cultural heritage is manifested in tangible and intangible heritage (one of which is taboo) owned by Tamkesi, making it an attraction for local and foreign tourists (Taolin & Nugroho, 2016). The rich cultural assets in these areas are the reason behind the decision of the government of North Central Timor regency to inaugurate Tamkesi as a traditional village on May 9, 2005. Tamkesi traditional village has been the centre of the Biboki Kingdom Imperial Palace since 1865 and is popular as a megalithic and sacred village. In the centre of Tamkesi Traditional village, there is a traditional house located on the back of two stone hills, namely Tapenpah hill and Oepuah hill. In the western part of the Traditional house, there is also a spring, namely Haunenis spring and Haunenis forest. These places are believed to be sacred places, thus giving rise to various rules, such as taboos on saying and taboos on actions when interacting with these places.

By considering the urgency of the research described above, this study aims to explore the meaning and cultural value of taboo symbols in sacred places of Tamkesi through ethnosemiotic studies. Ethnosemiotics is the study of the interpretation of signs' meanings in a certain culture (Galofaro, 2020; Wissang & Pratiwi, 2023; Mensah et al., 2024). Ethnosemiotics is utilised to investigate the sign system or process of forming meaning in a culture (Galofaro, 2020). Voigt narrows down the ethnosemiotic study to traditional culture (Wissang & Pratiwi, 2023). This study not only analyses the sign form but also explores the sign's meaning by referring to the cultural elements of certain communities. Hence, in the context of this study, ethnosemiotics can supply a framework for a deep understanding of taboo symbols' meaning in the Tamkesi sacred place that represents cultural values in forming the identity of the Tamkesi community.

In general, semiotics is the science that studies signs and meaning (Chandler, 2002; Wiley, 1994). In other words, semiotics refers to everything that is interpreted as a sign (Atoofi, 2015; Elleström, 2022; Chandler, 2002). The science of sign in semiotics was formerly introduced by Ferdinand De Saussure, who classified it into two parts. They are the signifier and signified (Hoed, 2014). The form of a signifier is language, picture, speech or utterance, sound, and letters in writing, while the form of the signified is the concept, idea, or meaning contained in the signifier (Asriningsari & Umay, 2010). Barthes developed Saussure's semiotics concept which stops at the denotative level (Hoed, 2014). He continued Saussure's semiotic concept by separating the meaning of signs into two levels, namely denotation as the primary meaning system and connotation as the secondary meaning system (Barthes, 1968; Tohir et al., 2023). Denotation is a primary meaning system that produces true, explicit, direct, and definite meaning (Barthes, 1968; Fatimah, 2022; Piliang, 2004). Connotation is a secondary meaning system that produces meaning based on cultural, political, ideological, and emotions or feelings. Ideology shows values and cultural interests (Sériot, 2016). Thus, the

ethnosemiotics approach allows studies to reveal how taboo symbols have deeper meanings and represent cultural values that form the behaviour, identity, and social structure of the Tamkesi community.

## II. METHOD

This study utilised a qualitative method with an ethnographic approach. Ethnography allows researchers to be directly involved in the situation in the Tamkesi traditional village, interact directly with participants, and understand the socio-cultural context of the Tamkesi traditional community that shapes their life experiences. The data were focused on symbols in taboo expressions that contain meaning and cultural values of the Tamkesi traditional community. The data came from key informants who met several requirements, namely 1) people born in the Tamkesi Traditional Village, 2) 50 years old and over, 3) live permanently in the Tamkesi Traditional Village, 4) physically and mentally healthy, 5) actively involved in traditional events, 6) have knowledge of taboos. Based on these criteria, the researcher obtained seven key informants, namely *Usif* (king) and six tribal chiefs. Next, the researcher conducted interviews with the informants to obtain information related to the forms of taboos that are usually expressed to members of the community in the context of interactions with sacred places in Tamkesi, namely Haunenis Spring, Haunenis Forest, Tapenpah Hills, and the Tamkesi traditional house. To strengthen the data, the researcher conducted observations of various activities of the Tamkesi indigenous community, especially events that occurred in these sacred places. Data analysis was carried out using the data analysis procedures recommended by Miles and Huberman, which consist of data reduction, data presentation, and formulation of conclusions (Miles & Huberman, 2007). Data reduction was used to simplify and categorise information, data presentation was used to organize findings for analysis, and formulation of conclusions was done to interpret data and generate insights into the meaning and cultural values of Tamkesi indigenous people's taboos in sacred places through an ethnosemiotic approach within the framework of sign analysis proposed by Roland Barthes.

## III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### A. Taboo Expressions in the Haunenis Spring

Haunenis Spring is one of the springs located in Tamkesi Traditional Village, which is designated as a sacred spring. This spring is believed to be one of the places where The Divine, a figure who is believed to be an entity that has the power of life over the Tamkesi people. Because of its sacred nature, this water cannot be used carelessly. This water can only be taken during the first harvest season for ritual purposes, used as an ingredient for cooking the first harvest (usually occurs in March-April), and as a sprinkling material for the Tamkesi people. Various taboo expressions regulate the procedures for interacting with this water source. These expressions are usually spoken from generation to generation of the Tamkesi people to maintain their existence.

#### ***“Jangan mengotori Mata Air Haunenis.” (“Don’t pollute the Haunenis Spring”)***

Denotatively, “polluting the Haunenis spring” refers to an act that causes the Haunenis spring to become dirty, polluted or unclean as it should be. Connotatively or in cultural meaning, the symbol of “polluting the Haunenis spring” contains a much deeper meaning than just physical pollution. In the culture of the Tamkesi people, the Haunenis spring is a sacred place that is guarded and revered as the place where The Divine dwells. The symbol of “polluting the Haunenis spring” connotatively or in cultural meaning is interpreted as an act of tarnishing the sanctity of the Haunenis water. If the Haunenis spring becomes dirty, then the sacred nature of the water, which is believed to be a source of blessings, will vanish. Therefore, the Tamkesi people believe that they no longer receive blessings from The Divine because dirty water does not have its spiritual power. They also believe that by polluting the water, they will experience disaster or calamity. Not only in Tamkesi, but violating taboos in other cultures is also believed to bring illness, death, and/or other disasters (Jay, 2009; Menke et al., 2020; Menke & Menke, 2024; Wardhaugh, 2006). The Tamkesi community maintains the cleanliness of Haunenis water as an absolute obligation to achieve success in every aspect of life, especially in the fields of agriculture and animal husbandry, as the main livelihood of the Tamkesi community.

The prohibition on polluting the Haunenis spring has a cultural value that reflects the relationship between humans and God and nature. The cultural value that reflects the relationship between humans and God is the value of belief. Maintaining the sanctity of the Haunenis water is rooted in the belief in the presence of the spirit of The Divine in the Haunenis Spring. The Tamkesi community believes that the presence of this spirit makes the water holy so that it can be a blessing for the community. This belief strengthens Mircea Eliade's statement that mentions several examples of symbols of the presence of God or the Holy One in everyday objects of human life, namely stones, trees, water, and forests (Adon & Avi, 2023). For humans who have spiritual faith, God or what Mircea Eliade calls the Holy One is the center of human life and experience (Susanto, 1987). This belief leads humans to grow a harmonious relationship with God to get the blessings.

About nature, the prohibition of polluting the Haunenis Spring contains the value of maintaining natural resources, in this case, water resources, so that their quality is maintained for the sake of the survival of the Tamkesi community and future generations. The main factor in supporting human life is clean water, or water that is free from pollution. The customary rule of the Tamkesi community not to pollute the Haunenis Spring is an effort by the community to maintain water resources so that their quality is maintained. Water whose quality is maintained is certain to provide a better and

healthier life. The value contained in the prohibition of polluting the Haunenis Spring plays an important role in water conservation efforts. In the end, it is clear that the belief in the presence of the spirit of The Divine at Haunenis Spring supports the maintenance of clean water quality. A study of Saraswaty et al. (2022) found that spiritual values, such as local belief values, can support the conservation of water resources that can be utilised by all living things. Thus, this prohibition reflects the cultural values of the Tamkesi community in building harmonious relationships with God and nature.

***“Jangan mengambil air Haunenis secara sembarangan.” (“Don’t take Haunenis water carelessly”)***

Denotatively, “taking Haunenis water carelessly” refers to the act of taking Haunenis water by disobeying certain rules of time and process. Haunenis water may only be taken during the main harvest and is carried out in a ritual process. Connotatively or in cultural meaning, “taking Haunenis water carelessly” is a symbol of human greed for natural resources that should be managed fairly and wisely. The Haunenis spring is located at the head of the river, so that if it is taken carelessly, it can disrupt the flow of water downstream. This can affect the water needs of the wider community in various activities such as household activities, agricultural activities, livestock, and other activities. The act of taking water uncontrollably is seen as a symbol of greed because it inhibits the flow of water for the wider community. This action creates injustice for the entire community that depends on the availability of water. This prohibition is a manifestation of the Tamkesi community's efforts not to exploit water resources for personal interests that can disrupt the ecological balance. Hence, this prohibition motivates human awareness to change the shallow anthropocentric view (Hilmanto, 2010).

The prohibition on taking Haunenis water carelessly has a cultural value that reflects the harmonious relationship between humans and nature, themselves, and society. In relation to nature, the prohibition on taking water carelessly at the Haunenis spring contains the value of protecting and preserving nature. This prohibition is a form of control by the Tamkesi community not to exploit water resources excessively for personal purposes. Water that is taken uncontrollably in the upper reaches of the river can disrupt the ecological balance and environmental sustainability. Ecomodernist Fremaux (2019) provides an affirmation of the importance of prioritising ethical aspects in dealing with all events in the era of modernisation for environmental sustainability. Fremaux recommends handling ecological issues, ensuring social justice, and being responsible for the environment amidst the challenges of modernization. Therefore, the cultural values in this prohibition teach the importance of respecting nature by not accessing natural resources carelessly, but must maintain a balance between utilisation and preservation.

About oneself, the prohibition on taking Haunenis water carelessly contains a crucial value of self-discipline in utilising water. The community is taught to have a high level of discipline by only taking water at a predetermined time (namely during the first harvest season). The time specified in this prohibition teaches the community to practice a disciplined attitude in terms of utilising water. In addition, in the harmonious relationship between humans and society, the prohibition on taking water contains a value of justice. This prohibition teaches the Tamkesi community to ensure that the limited availability of water can be utilized fairly and evenly by the entire Tamkesi community. This prohibition also regulates the fair distribution of water from upstream to downstream of the river so that it can be used by the entire Tamkesi community. This rule shows an effort to uphold justice for the entire Tamkesi community so that they can obtain water as one of their vital needs. This prohibition provides important environmental education in the lives of the Tamkesi community. Li et al. (2022) promoting this kind of environmental education can shape behavior that obeys conservation rules.

***B. Taboo Expressions in the Haunenis Forest***

Haunenis forest is one of the forests in the Tamkesi Traditional Village, located around the Haunenis spring. This forest is composed of various species of large, lush, towering trees. For the Tamkesi indigenous people, Haunenis forest is also considered a sacred place, believed to be the abode of The Divine. Because of its sacred nature, various taboos have emerged that govern how to interact with the forest.

***“Jangan menebang pohon di Hutan Haunenis.” (“Don’t cut down trees in Haunenis Forest”)***

Denotatively, “cutting down trees in the Haunenis Forest” refers to the activity of cutting, destroying, or uprooting trees growing within the Haunenis Forest. Connotatively, or in its cultural meaning, “cutting down trees in the Haunenis Forest” is a symbol of banishing the presence of The Divine, a God believed by the Tamkesi people who manifests himself in nature such as water, hills, and trees in the Haunenis Forest. This prohibition demonstrates the very strong spiritual dimension of the Tamkesi people. This is in line with the cultural taboo of cutting down trees in Bumbum Suci, Kampung Tua Nongsa Batam, which believes that trees are intermediaries between humans, nature, and God (Arianto et al., 2024). Violation of this prohibition can damage the relationship between humans and God and nature and is believed to bring disaster to society.

The prohibition on cutting down trees in the Haunenis Forest has cultural value that reflects the relationship between humans and God and nature. In this relationship between humans and God, this prohibition contains religious values. Cutting down trees in the Haunenis Forest is seen as an act of expelling The Divine, which can bring anger or curses from The Divine in the form of disasters or calamities. This reflects the Tamkesi people's belief that The Divine is a spirit that has spiritual power over the Tamkesi community. Similarly, in Manggarai, Indonesia, there is a sacred forest called “Puar,” whose use is restricted. The Manggarai people only enter the “Puar” when they need a piece of solid

wood for house construction, preceded by a ritual (Sanubarianto et al., 2025). This also describes that there are spirits believed to be in the forest who have spiritual powers for the people who believe in their existence.

In relation to nature, the prohibition on cutting down trees in the Haunen Forest contains the value of protecting and preserving nature. The prohibition on cutting down trees in the Haunen Forest represents an effort to shift the paradigm from anthropocentrism to ecocentrism, where nature is made the centre of reality. The anthropocentric view, which places humans at the center of life, makes many people feel innocent of actions such as cutting down trees and deforestation (Mantiri & Handayani, 2020). The trees growing in the Haunen Forest play a crucial role in maintaining ecological balance. This kind of taboo on maintaining ecological balance also exists among the Badui people (Juansah, 2019). Trees in the forest play a role in regulating water availability, increasing soil moisture, improving soil fertility, supporting biodiversity, and creating microenvironments that benefit humans. The prohibition on cutting down trees is a very wise customary rule for environmental sustainability so that it can be enjoyed from generation to generation. This prohibition demonstrates the intelligence and ecological awareness of local communities as a form of local wisdom that is maintained and passed down from generation to generation. This rule occurs similarly to the traditional rule in North Buton, which prohibits cutting down trees to reduce the risk of disasters (Basri, 2021). This prohibition demonstrates the Tamkesi people's efforts to build a harmonious relationship with nature, thus embodying a highly valued cultural value. This cultural value reflects the understanding that humans should not exploit nature recklessly but must instead preserve it to support a stable ecological system.

***“Jangan mengeluarkan kata-kata makian di Hutan Haunen.” (“Don't use swear words in Haunen Forest”)***

Denotatively, “swearing in the Haunen Forest” means uttering vile, inappropriate, or insulting words to express anger or irritation in the Haunen Forest. Connotatively, or in its cultural meaning, “swearing in the Haunen Forest” is a symbol of desecrating or polluting the sacred nature of the Haunen Forest and a form of insult to The Divine. For the Tamkesi people, swearing is considered dirty. Swearing as a form of dirty speech is believed to pollute something considered sacred, such as the Haunen Forest, and insult The Divine. According to Arianto et al. (2024), in every sacred space, swear words carry negative energy that can disturb spirits, leading to undesirable consequences. Therefore, uttering swear words in Haunen Forest is a violation of spiritual values, not simply a violation of social etiquette.

The prohibition on swearing in the Haunen Forest has cultural significance, reflecting the relationship between humans and God and fellow humans. In relation to God, obedience with this prohibition conveys respect for The Divine. In the Tamkesi community's view, swearing in the Haunen Forest is seen as a form of desecration of the sacred place, reflecting an insult to a higher power. Swearing is generally prohibited in religion, so swearing constitutes an insult to the God worshipped (Asrif & Evi Olivia Kumbangsila, 2017). This prohibition teaches the Tamkesi people to respect The Divine, the entity with power over them. This cultural rule requires people to be mindful of their language to maintain harmonious relationships with the entity they trust.

In relationships with others, this prohibition embodies the cultural value of respecting others in communication activities. This prohibition teaches the Tamkesi people to respect others by not expressing anger or irritation with swear words. This prohibition indirectly regulates human behavior and speech in building harmonious social relations. Therefore, efforts to avoid swear words in the Haunen forest contain valuable values related to respecting fellow humans for the sake of maintaining social harmony. “When the community forms a harmonious social life, they support one another in kindness and serve as a reminder that relationships with others are also a key factor in determining one's level of happiness” (Andriyanto et al., 2025). In many cultures, swear words are inappropriate and considered detrimental to interpersonal harmony. According to Asrif and Evi Olivia Kumbangsila (2017), a culture of mutual respect must be maintained, including appropriate language and behaviour. By refraining from swearing, the Tamkesi community demonstrates its commitment to spiritual values and moral ethics that uphold respect for God and fellow human beings.

***“Jangan berburu hewan di Hutan Haunen.” (“Do not hunt animals in the Haunen Forest”)***

Denotatively, “hunting animals in the Haunen forest” refers to the activity of chasing, capturing, or killing animals that live in the Haunen forest. Connotatively, or in its cultural meaning, “hunting animals in the Haunen Forest” symbolises severing communication with nature. The prohibition on hunting animals in the Haunen forest is closely related to the idea of spiritual communication between humans and nature. The Tamkesi people consider animals in the Haunen forest as intermediaries for spiritual communication between humans and nature. Certain animals are believed to be able to convey certain messages about nature, such as birds that can give signs of rain, drought, and even natural disasters. In the context of the Haunen forest, the Tamkesi people believe that the song of the turtledove is believed to convey a message that people who enter the Haunen forest are welcomed, the Kowak bird is believed to convey a message that rain will soon fall, the Nusa bird is believed to convey a message that there is a thief, the Murai bird is said to convey a message that there will be a disaster, and the deer is said to convey a message that they will receive good fortune. Animals are not passive observers but active participants in the communication of natural events (Efendi et al., 2025). In South America, Asia, and Africa birds are considered divine messengers and symbols of spiritual power (Aticho et al., 2024). This belief reflects the deep connection between humans and nature and gives animals a special status in communication between humans and nature.

The prohibition on hunting in Haunen forest has cultural significance, reflecting the relationship between humans and nature, specifically the protection and preservation of wildlife. It also demonstrates how humans must protect and

preserve nature, particularly fauna. This prohibition teaches the Tamkesi people to live harmoniously alongside each other while respecting the existence of other living creatures, as it impacts ecological balance. Like the taboo that exists in the Dayak Meratus tribe in Kiyu village which refers to sacred forests, it has a positive impact on preserving vegetation diversity (Hamidi et al., 2022). In Tamkesi, this prohibition fosters the understanding that the Haunenis Forest is inhabited by other living creatures that should not be exploited, as each has its own function and role, mutually supporting a stable ecological system. Forests provide habitat for various species, so maintaining biodiversity is essential for ecosystem resilience (Luque & Iverson, 2018). This customary prohibition plays an important and effective role in protecting natural resources such as a study conducted by Pattiselanno et al. (2024) which highlights how customary law (customary prohibitions) in Papua is more effective in protecting wildlife than formal government law.

### C. Taboo Expressions on Tapenpah Hill

Tapenpah Hill is a rocky hill located east of the Tamkesi traditional house, which is the center of the Tamkesi traditional village. For the Tamkesi community, Tapenpah Hill is a symbol of masculinity, believed to be the guardian spirit of the Tamkesi region and a manifestation of the Divine. Therefore, this hill is considered sacred by the Tamkesi traditional community. Due to its sacred nature, there are rules in the form of taboo as listed in the following data.

#### **“Jangan naik ke Bukit Tapenpah.” (“Don't climb Tapenpah Hill”)**

Denotatively, "climbing" refers to the act of moving toward a higher position, or moving one's position from a lower to a higher place. Connotatively, or in its cultural meaning, "climbing Tapenpah hill" symbolises rebellion against existing authority. This is seen as an attempt to challenge, or even undermine, established authority by attempting to assert one's power within the structures established by the traditions and social systems of the Tamkesi people. According to traditional rules in the Tamkesi traditional village, only kings and tribal chiefs are permitted to ascend Tapenpah hill to perform rituals in the event of drought, crop failure, natural disasters, or repairs to traditional houses. This occurs in the Saur Matua ritual of the Toba Batak people, where only traditional elders are authorised to lead the ritual (Sihombing et al., 2024). This role reflects the social and spiritual structures shaped by traditions and social systems within indigenous communities. Therefore, any ordinary citizen who attempts to violate this prohibition by climbing Tapenpah Hill is considered an act of rebellion against existing authority and is believed to incur a curse.

The prohibition against climbing Tapenpah Hill except for kings and tribal chiefs embodies cultural values that emphasise the relationship between humans and society, namely social awareness and respect for existing social structures. In Tamkesi society, each individual has a clear role and responsibility according to their status and position within the social order. As community leaders, kings and tribal chiefs lead not only in socio-political aspects but also in spiritual aspects that influence collective life. The study of Adon and Avi (2023) indicates that the person authorised to lead traditional rituals is the tribal chief, also known as a traditional elder. This prohibition serves to raise awareness that every individual must respect recognised authority to maintain social and spiritual balance within society.

### D. Taboo Expressions in the Tamkesi Traditional House

The Tamkesi traditional houses are traditional houses in the Tamkesi region, the centre of the Biboki kingdom. These traditional houses are an important symbol of the social and spiritual structure of the Tamkesi people. There are seven traditional houses standing solidly in a round shape with towering thatched roofs resembling cones. These traditional houses are located on the ridges of the Oepuah and Tapenpah hills. These traditional houses are the residences of the king and his family, as well as several tribes. In addition, these traditional houses are used to store sacred objects and serve as spiritual spaces for the king and tribal chiefs or traditional elders to lead important ceremonies, such as ritual offerings to The Divine and the ancestors. These traditional houses are considered sacred by the Tamkesi people, so there are things that are considered taboo, as shown in the following data.

#### **“Jangan merusak/mencuri benda budaya di Rumah Adat Tamkesi.” (“Do not destroy or steal cultural objects from Tamkesi Traditional House”)**

Denotatively, "destroying and stealing objects in a Tamkesi traditional house" encompasses the physical act of destroying or removing objects within the house. Connotatively, or in its cultural meaning, "destroying and stealing objects in a Tamkesi traditional house" symbolises the loss of identity and history. Cultural objects in traditional houses, such as household utensils, carvings, or traditional jewelry, have symbolic meanings that hold historical stories and community identity. Therefore, destroying or stealing cultural objects in a Tamkesi traditional house means erasing the directional traces and identity of the Tamkesi indigenous community. Cultural objects in a Tamkesi traditional house serve as guardians of stories from the past. Handcrafted objects are testimonies of the history, events, beliefs, and struggles of ancestors who existed in the past. These objects serve as a link between the past and the present. By destroying or stealing these objects, someone is also severing the connection between the past and the present, ultimately losing their understanding of their history and origins. The act of damaging or stealing cultural objects can threaten the preservation of cultural heritage, which has high historical and spiritual value (Utama, 2023). Any individual who violates this prohibition is believed to be cursed by The Divine and the ancestors.

The prohibition on destroying and stealing objects in the Tamkesi traditional house contains cultural values that reflect the harmonious relationship between humans and themselves. In relationships with others, this prohibition contains the value of respect and honor for the property rights of others, in this case, ancestors. This prohibition contains the value of respect for those who have struggled to maintain Tamkesi cultural traditions. This prohibition

teaches the Tamkesi people to respect and honor the property rights of others, both living and deceased, by protecting and caring for their objects or inheritance. This action is part of the effort to preserve culture (Tahiru et al., 2023). About oneself, this prohibition teaches the values of honesty and integrity. Taking another person's belongings, especially those of cultural and historical value, is dishonest (Safitri & Saraswati, 2020). Honesty is a highly valued principle among the Tamkesi people, as it serves as the foundation of trust and the foundation for building good relationships with God, others, and oneself. Not taking other people's belongings signifies maintaining one's integrity and avoiding cheating or deceitful behavior.

The above review demonstrates that taboo symbols in Tamkesi society in sacred places are not merely normative prohibitions but represent a complex cultural system. Taboo symbols in Tamkesi society contain more than a single meaning, but rather additional meanings that are dynamic and contextual. This aligns with Roland Barthes' theory, which continues Saussure's concept of semiotics by separating the meaning of signs into two levels: denotation as the primary meaning system and connotation as the secondary meaning system (Tohir et al., 2023). In this study, the profound meaning contained in taboo symbols involves elements of the Tamkesi people's beliefs or ideology regarding sacred places believed to be the abode of The Divine and their ancestors. Therefore, the Tamkesi people strictly adhere to taboos in these sacred places to avoid disasters as curses from The Divine.

This finding also confirms the fact that taboo symbols represent the cultural values of the Tamkesi people. This finding is relevant to previous research that identified the values behind taboos (Yayuk et al., 2022; Arianto et al., 2024). The cultural values contained in taboo symbols reflect a harmonious relationship between humans and God, nature, society, fellow humans, and oneself, according to the classification of cultural values stated by Djamaris et al. (1996). These are cultural values that reflect human relationships with God, nature, society, fellow human beings, and oneself. The Tamkesi people live their lives by upholding cultural values through taboo symbols. The findings of this study also indicate that a taboo symbol in a sacred place can represent more than one cultural value, as shown in the following graph.

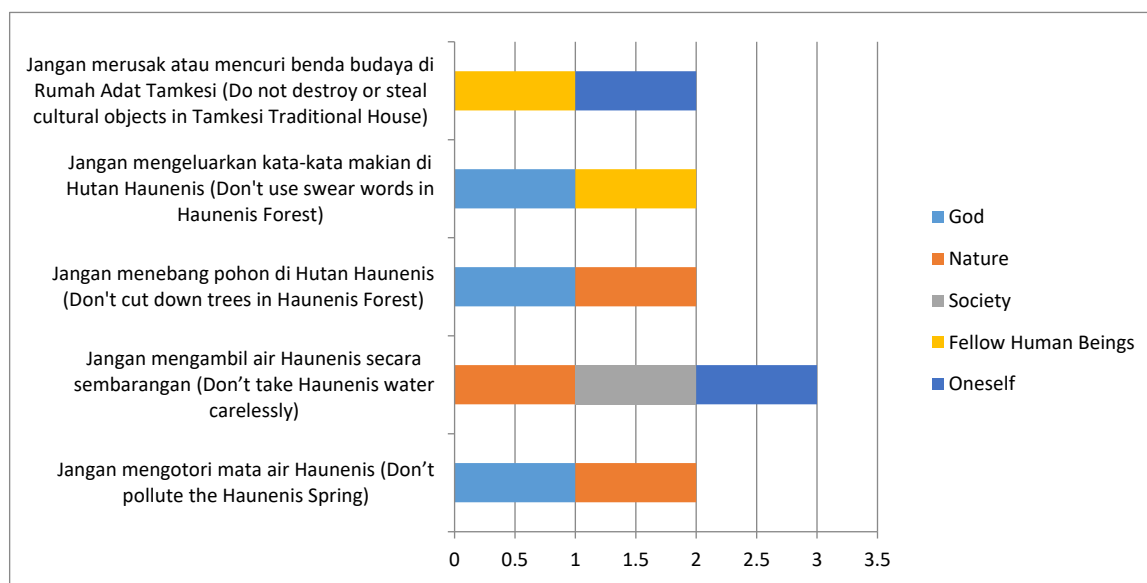


Figure 1. Cultural Values in Taboo Symbols at Tamkesi Sacred Places

This graph demonstrates the Tamkesi community's holistic perspective, where customary rules do not have a singular impact but rather address multiple dimensions. The sacred places used in this research illustrate the spiritual dimension that plays a vital role in the lives of the Tamkesi people. The spiritual dimension in these sacred sites supports other dimensions, such as ecological, moral, and social dimensions. In this regard, belief in the presence of The Divine and ancestors in sacred sites supports human behavior in establishing harmonious relationships with nature, society, others, and oneself. This enhances the understanding that cultural values are not isolated but mutually supportive within a community's cultural symbols.

The complex and precious values of these taboo symbols motivate the Tamkesi indigenous people to continue preserving their cultural heritage, especially sacred places. Preserving these cultural symbols is crucial because taboos are part of local wisdom that serve as guidelines for the Tamkesi people in building harmonious relationships with God, nature, society, fellow human beings, and themselves. In the modern context, Yayuk (2010) states that taboo values are relevant to national values and can therefore be applied in the modern era. This is a recommendation for preserving taboos in a modern context.

## IV. CONCLUSION

Sacred places in the Tamkesi Traditional Village are spiritual spaces that regulate harmonious relationships with The Divine, the God who has power over the Tamkesi community. To create a harmonious relationship with The Divine, there are various rules in interacting with these sacred places, in this case, rules such as taboos. Taboos are spiritual and social rules used to control the words and actions of the Tamkesi community in interacting with sacred places, namely the Haunenis spring, Haunenis forest, Tapenpah Hills, as well as the Tamkesi traditional house. These sacred places are symbols of the transcendent presence of The Divine and the spirits of their ancestors. Through these sacred places, the community feels close to God and their ancestors. Each taboo expression that regulates the procedures for interacting in these sacred places has a deep meaning. The meaning contained in each taboo expression does not only have a literal or denotative meaning but also has a cultural meaning or connotation, as stated by Roland Barthes that the meaning of a sign is not singular, but has additional meanings according to the cultural context of the place where the sign or symbol is used. Within the taboo symbols of the Tamkesi indigenous community, there are also deep-rooted cultural values. The cultural values within a taboo are not singular but can encompass several, reflecting the harmonious relationship between humans and various elements, such as God, nature, society, fellow humans, and themselves. Furthermore, each value within the taboo supports one another; for example, the belief in the presence of The Divine in sacred places supports human behaviour in building relationships with nature, society, fellow humans, and oneself. This reflects the richness and value of taboo symbols in the context of spiritual, ecological, social, and moral education.

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# Determining and Systematizing the Grammatical Minimum Required for a Lexicogrammatical Dictionary of the Kazakh Language

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**Abstract**—This article examines the theoretical and methodological foundations for identifying the grammatical minimum to be included in a lexico-grammatical dictionary designed for teaching Kazakh as a foreign language. The study is grounded in the communicative needs of foreign language learners (non-native speakers) and adopts frequency, structural simplicity, and cultural-cognitive significance as the key criteria for selecting grammatical material. The grammatical categories of the main parts of speech in Kazakh (nouns, verbs, adjectives, numerals, pronouns, adverbs, particles, and interjections) are systematized and presented through a contrastive analysis with English. Grammatical forms are introduced not through direct translation but via functional explanation and descriptive equivalents. Grammatical units that lack direct equivalents are explained through examples that reveal their semantic and pragmatic functions. The results demonstrate that presenting lexis and grammar as an integrated system enhances learners' communicative competence and increases the practical value of the dictionary. The article provides a theoretical foundation for instructional and lexicographic works aimed at teaching agglutinative languages as foreign languages.

**Index Terms**—grammatical minimum, Kazakh language, lexico-grammatical dictionary, contrastive grammar, non-native speaker

## I. INTRODUCTION

In the contemporary context, the growing interest in the Kazakh language is directly linked to globalization processes, the expansion of international academic and cultural exchanges, and Kazakhstan's increasing role in the global arena. The number of learners of Kazakh continues to grow annually due to foreign diplomats, business professionals, students, researchers, and ethnographic tourists. In addition, the increasing amount of Kazakh-language content on digital platforms such as YouTube, TikTok, Instagram, and others contributes to the international visibility and attractiveness of the language. As a result of these trends, the development of high-quality, scientifically grounded teaching materials tailored to the communicative needs of learners of Kazakh as a foreign language has become a pressing issue.

In recent years, Kazakh language teaching programs have been launched at foreign universities, and specialized centers have been established. One of the most significant developments in this direction was the launch of a Kazakh language teaching program at Oxford University in 2024. In parallel, leading universities in Kazakhstan have been opening centers abroad to promote the Kazakh language and culture. In particular, L.N. Gumilyov Eurasian National University has established Abai Centers for Kazakh Language, History and Culture in Turkey, China, Belarus, and Uzbekistan.

However, most existing lexicographic resources for learning Kazakh as a foreign language are translation-oriented and primarily adapted for Russian-speaking audiences. Dictionaries designed specifically for English-speaking learners that

present grammar and lexis as an integrated system are extremely limited. This situation often leads learners to acquire lexical items only at the semantic level, while experiencing difficulties in using them correctly within grammatical structures. To address this gap, researchers at the A. Baitursynuly Institute of Linguistics are developing a Lexico-Grammatical Dictionary of Kazakh for English-speaking non-native learners. This project represents a novel and strategically significant initiative in Kazakh linguistics.

The present article focuses on providing a scientific and methodological justification for the grammatical minimum to be included in this dictionary.

#### *Research Aim and Objectives*

The main aim of this study is to scientifically and methodologically substantiate and systematize the grammatical minimum to be included in a lexico-grammatical dictionary intended for effective use in teaching Kazakh as a foreign language.

To achieve this aim, the following objectives were identified:

- to determine the key criteria for selecting a grammatical minimum by taking into account the communicative needs of non-native learners of Kazakh;
- to analyze the structural, semantic, and functional characteristics of the main parts of speech in Kazakh (nouns, adjectives, numerals, pronouns, verbs, adverbs, particles, interjections, and onomatopoeic words);
- to conduct a contrastive comparison of the grammatical systems of Kazakh and English;
- to describe the semantic, pragmatic, and cultural-cognitive functions of grammatical forms that lack direct equivalents;
- to demonstrate an effective lexicographic model for presenting the grammatical minimum.

The proposed aims and objectives ensure the theoretical and practical relevance of the study within applied linguistics, pedagogical lexicography, and foreign language teaching methodology, and provide a scientific foundation for developing modern lexico-grammatical resources for teaching Kazakh as a foreign language.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

The practice of compiling lexico-grammatical dictionaries is widespread in global lexicography and occupies a significant position within foreign language teaching methodology. Since the late twentieth century, learner-oriented lexicography has increasingly adopted an approach in which lexical units are presented not only in terms of their semantic content, but also in close connection with their grammatical behavior, collocational potential, and typical contextual patterns of use. This shift reflects a growing recognition that effective language acquisition requires an integrated understanding of vocabulary and grammar as mutually interdependent components of linguistic competence.

Among the earliest and most influential works in this field are Oxford Learner's Wordfinder Dictionary, compiled by Hugh Trappes-Lomax (Trappes-Lomax, 1997) as well as Longman Language Activator and Longman Collocations Dictionary (Longman, 2002) and Thesaurus (Mayor, 2013). These dictionaries represent a methodological departure from traditional definitional lexicography by organizing lexical items into semantic fields and by systematically illustrating their grammatical patterns, syntactic environments, and authentic usage in speech and writing. Through this structure, learners are provided not only with information about word meaning, but also with guidance on how words function within larger linguistic units. Consequently, this lexicographic approach is specifically designed to support the development of learners' productive language skills, enabling more accurate, fluent, and contextually appropriate language use.

In English-language lexicographic theory, it is emphasized that learner dictionaries should take into account learners' cognitive characteristics, linguistic interference, and processes of grammatical assimilation. The works of Rundell (2015, pp. 425-445), Atkins (2001, pp. 23-44), Tono (2011, pp. 124-153) and Dziemianko (2022) provide comprehensive analyses of dictionary structure, methods of presenting grammatical information, and the role of visualization. In particular, Dziemianko (2022) demonstrates that graphic elements in both online and printed dictionaries enhance learners' memory retention (pp. 218-234). Studies by Paivio (1979), Nelson et al. (1976, pp. 523-528), and Shelestova et al. (2017, pp. 164-170) likewise show that the combined presentation of visual and verbal codes (the pictorial superiority effect) yields effective results in language learning.

In the field of teaching Russian as a foreign language, the concept of a lexico-grammatical minimum was established relatively early. Lexical minimums developed by N. P. Andryushina, T. V. Kozlova, and other authors are structured according to proficiency levels (A1–C2) and include the vocabulary and grammatical forms required at each level (Andryushina & Kozlova, 2015). These dictionaries present not only lexical units but also morphological features (such as number, gender, case, and inflectional patterns), thereby enhancing learners' grammatical literacy.

In the works of N. A. Kozlova and M. A. Martynova, the principle of acquiring lexis and grammar as an integrated system is emphasized, and the dictionary is viewed not merely as a reference tool but as a component of a broader instructional complex aimed at developing communicative skills (Kozlova & Martynova, 2014).

In applied linguistics, the issue of grammatical minimum is closely linked to Communicative Language Teaching and Task-Based Language Teaching approaches. In the works of Nunan (2004), Ellis (2003) and Long (2015), it is argued that grammar instruction should be based not on linguistic form alone but on communicative function. These approaches emphasize the need to organize grammatical material in accordance with learners' communicative tasks and stages of language development.

In Kazakh linguistics, the unity of language and culture has been extensively explored, beginning with the works of Ualikhanov (1985), where linguistic data reveal the ethnocultural worldview and conceptual system of the Kazakh people, while the studies of Margulan (1986) highlight the linguistic reflection of national culture through a system of terms representing ancient cultural heritage. In the works of Zhubanov (1999), grammatical structures are examined in connection with the cognitive characteristics of the people, whereas Auezov (1991) demonstrates how lexical units function as carriers of national worldview through their contextual usage. Kenesbaev (1977) characterizes phraseological units as a linguistic repository reflecting traditional life and cultural experience, and this line of inquiry is further developed in the studies of Kaidar (2014), Syzdyq (1997), Zhanpeisov (1989), Mankeeva (1997), and other scholars. Collectively, these works demonstrate that linguistic units, including grammatical structures, possess cultural and cognitive significance. A. Kaidar emphasizes that a nation's worldview can be understood through its language (Kaidar, 2009), while Zhanpeisov (1989) and Mankeeva (1997) reveal the ethnocultural content embedded in grammatical and lexical units. Meanwhile, scholars of the Institute of Linguistics point out in their works that, when identifying a grammatical minimum, it is important not to limit the description of linguistic phenomena to the formal system alone, but to adopt frequency of use, functional productivity, and active presence in contemporary language practice as the principal criteria. These principles establish a robust theoretical foundation for effectively adapting grammatical material to instructional and methodological objectives and are directed toward enhancing practical effectiveness in teaching the language to a foreign audience (Momynova et al., 2024).

In addition, the theory of intercultural communicative competence in foreign language teaching (as developed by M. Byram and C. Kramsch) highlights the importance of learning grammar not merely as a structural system but as a cultural code (Byram, 1997; Kramsch, 1998). Contemporary research in this field also demonstrates the effectiveness of organizing grammatical knowledge in a functional way and orienting it toward real language use, suggesting that the selection of a grammatical minimum should be based on communicative needs when systematizing the structures to be included in a lexicogrammatical dictionary (Gesa et al., 2024). Furthermore, studies on second language grammar learning strategies emphasize the necessity of acquiring grammatical knowledge at a practical level, indicating that the determination of a grammatical minimum should rely not only on rule-based systems but also on core lexico-grammatical models required for authentic communication (Pawlak et al., 2025). These theoretical perspectives strengthen the scientific rationale for including phenomena such as the politeness category, possessive forms, particles, and substantivization in the grammatical minimum of the Kazakh language.

Thus, a review of both international and domestic studies clearly demonstrates the need for a lexico-grammatical dictionary that presents lexis and grammar as an integrated system while incorporating a cultural-cognitive component in teaching Kazakh as a foreign language. However, the lack of scholarly and methodological works specifically designed for English-speaking learners that systematically describe the grammatical minimum of Kazakh underscores the relevance of the present study and defines its contribution to the fields of applied linguistics and learner lexicography.

### III. MATERIALS AND METHODS

The material for this study consists of data from the Lexico-Grammatical Dictionary of Kazakh project designed for English-speaking non-native learners. This dictionary is a comprehensive educational and lexicographic resource aimed at learners for whom Kazakh is not a native language. Its structure and content were developed with consideration of learners' proficiency levels, communicative needs, and the structural-typological characteristics of the Kazakh language.

The dictionary consists of two interrelated main sections:

- lexical minimum;
- grammatical minimum.

The lexical minimum includes more than 300 lexemes of high ethnocultural significance. These units are systematized into thematic groups reflecting the historical and cultural identity, national worldview, and social experience of the Kazakh people. Selection criteria included frequency of use, communicative value, and cultural-cognitive relevance. Particular emphasis was placed on culturally specific lexemes that lack direct equivalents in other languages but are essential for communication in Kazakh society.

The grammatical minimum section covers grammatical inflection patterns, word-formation potential, collocational features, and functional usage of words in sentences. Grammatical material is presented not as abstract rules but through concrete lexical items, collocations, and short sentences. This approach facilitates intuitive understanding of grammatical usage. Functional equivalents or explanatory descriptions in English are provided, and contrastive analysis is extensively employed.

The following research methods were applied:

- lexicographic selection and systematization;
- semantic analysis;
- structural-grammatical analysis;
- contrastive Kazakh–English analysis;
- cognitive and pragmatic methods;
- descriptive and example-based explanation.

The methodological framework of the study is grounded in foreign language teaching theory, pedagogical lexicography,

contrastive linguistics, and research on the relationship between language and culture. These theoretical foundations enabled the development of an effective learner-oriented lexico-grammatical model for teaching Kazakh as a foreign language.

#### IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

As a result of the study, three key criteria for selecting the grammatical minimum were identified:

- frequency;
- structural simplicity;
- cultural-cognitive significance.

The grammatical minimum covers core grammatical categories required for A1–A2 level learners, including noun cases, possessive and plural forms, adjective degrees of comparison, verb tense and mood forms, affirmative and negative constructions, pronoun inflection, numeral types, and the functions of adverbs, particles, interjections, and onomatopoeic words.

##### Noun (NOUN)

– Derivational suffixes: +шы/ші (жұмысшы ‘worker’, әнші ‘singer’), +лық/лік (достық ‘friendship’, сөздік ‘dictionary’), +хана/қана (аурухана ‘hospital’, дәрісхана ‘lecture hall’). Suffix patterns and their English functional equivalents are presented in tabular form.

– Inflectional patterns: plural, possessive, and case suffixes; explanations are provided through comparison with English equivalents (plural -s/-es, possessive ’s, prepositions).

Examples for each part of speech are presented in the nine tables below.

##### Adjective (ADJECTIVE)

– Semantic classification: adjectives are grouped into semantic categories such as color, size, taste, speed, and others; degrees of comparison (-лау/-леу, -рақ/-рек, intensive forms) are analyzed through examples.

– The phenomenon of substantivization (e.g., the adjective қапа acquiring the meaning of a person) is examined, along with strategies for rendering such meanings in English (e.g., a man in black, the dark one).

##### Numeral (NUMERAL)

– Simple and compound numerals; characteristics of ordinal, collective, and approximate numerals are described; English equivalents (cardinal, ordinal, collective, approximate) are provided. Examples are preserved in tabular form.

##### Pronouns (PRONOUNS)

– Complex system: classification, possessive forms, and case inflection are analyzed; a detailed description of the interrogative pronoun қашан (“when”) is included, with a case-declension table.

– Possessive forms are compared with English possessive pronouns.

In the Kazakh language, the personal pronoun ol can take possessive, case, and personal endings, and it can also receive the plural marker, as in olar (“they”). This morphological flexibility distinguishes ol from other personal pronouns. In addition, the pronoun ol combines with other words and refers to a third party—namely, a person, object, or phenomenon that is neither the speaker (мен – I) nor the addressee (сен – you).

Furthermore, the pronoun ol may function with a demonstrative meaning, as in expressions such as ol kisi (“that person”), ol kitap (“that book”), and ol adam (“that man”). In English, the Kazakh pronoun ol corresponds to the personal pronouns he, she, and it, depending on context. The declension, conjugation, and possessive forms of this pronoun are presented in detail in Tables 6, 7, and 8.

##### Adverb (ADVERB)

– Semantic groups: time, place, manner, cause–effect, and degree; positional characteristics (pre-verbal position in Kazakh) are highlighted and compared with English usage.

##### Verb (VERB)

– Tense categories (present, past, future), mood forms (imperative, desiderative), affirmative and negative constructions, and verb–auxiliary combinations (келе жатыр, айтып отыр) are analyzed.

– Differences between Kazakh subject agreement expressed through personal endings and English subject marking via separate pronouns are examined.

##### Onomatopoeic Words, Interjections, and Particles

– Onomatopoeic words: sound-imitative and motion-imitative groups, along with strategies for rendering them in English.

– Interjections: their cultural and pragmatic meanings (e.g., Astapyralla!, Tñ!) and explanatory descriptions.

– Particles: conjunctions and postpositions (және, бірақ, не, немесе, үшін, туралы, кейін) and discourse particles (ғана, да, ғой), with their sentence functions and English equivalents.

##### Integration of the Cultural-Cognitive Component

– A cultural-functional analysis of colors, numerals (e.g., жеті ‘seven’), and politeness forms (сіз/сен); contrastive examples are provided (e.g., seventh heaven vs. cultural meanings of жеті).

– The necessity of presenting cultural-cognitive lexemes within grammatical contexts is substantiated.

Contrastive analysis demonstrates the fundamental difference between the agglutinative structure of Kazakh and the analytic system of English. From a pedagogical perspective, several of these grammatical forms may present difficulty

for foreign learners due to the absence of direct equivalents in English and the need to interpret their functional and pragmatic meanings in context. For instance, the case system, possessive suffixes, and substantivization require learners to move beyond word-level translation and develop sensitivity to structural and discourse-level cues. Consequently, their acquisition is facilitated through repeated exposure in meaningful lexical contexts and through contrastive explanation that highlights both structural differences and communicative functions. Grammatical forms that lack direct equivalents are presented through functional description.

Although the functions of parts of speech in the Kazakh and English languages are in some cases similar, it has been observed that their semantic load and spheres of use are not identical. For instance, in the Kazakh language, adjectives are not limited to the function of an attribute within a sentence; rather, in certain contexts they may undergo substantivization and acquire a nominal meaning. This phenomenon demonstrates the flexibility and semantic richness of the Kazakh language.

For example, in sentences such as “Bir qara körindi” (“A black one appeared”) or “Qara keldi” (“The black one came”), the word qara (“black”) departs from its original adjectival meaning and functions as a noun denoting a person. Such usage is natural and normatively acceptable in Kazakh. In contrast, in English, adjectives do not systematically function as independent nouns in this manner. Consequently, the sentence “Qara keldi” cannot be directly translated as Black came; instead, it must be rendered through analytical constructions such as A man in black came or The dark one came. This divergence highlights a difference in the cognitive structure of the two languages: in Kazakh, describing a person through an external feature – particularly color – is considered a culturally established norm.

Similarly, the cultural and cognitive load of colors and numbers constitutes one of the key indicators of the distinctive nature of the Kazakh language. Within the Kazakh worldview, colors do not merely denote physical characteristics but carry symbolic and sacral meanings. For example, the color aq (“white”) is associated with purity, honesty, and goodness (aq jol “good journey,” aq niet “pure intention”); kök (“blue/sky-colored”) is linked to the sky, eternity, and sacredness (kök aspan “blue sky”); while sary (“yellow”) represents notions of space and time (sary bel “yellow ridge,” sary dala “vast steppe”). These meanings are transmitted from generation to generation through linguistic units and have become deeply entrenched in national consciousness.

Numbers also possess a pronounced cultural-cognitive dimension. In traditional Kazakh worldview, the number seven (jeti) is regarded as sacred. This concept is reflected in stable expressions such as jeti ata (“seven ancestors”), jeti qazyna (“seven treasures”), and jeti jetim (“seven orphans”). These expressions transcend mere numerical meaning and convey information about the social structure, moral principles, and spiritual values of the Kazakh people. The English language also contains numerous phraseological units involving the number seven; however, their semantic content and cultural foundations differ. For instance, the expression seventh heaven denotes a state of extreme happiness and bliss, while seven virtues refers to the seven cardinal virtues rooted in Christian doctrine. Although a degree of semantic similarity can be observed, their cultural and conceptual bases are fundamentally different. Therefore, such units should not be treated as absolute equivalents, but rather as culturally comparable phenomena.

Significant differences are also evident in the pronoun systems of the two languages. The Kazakh pronoun siz does not merely indicate second person reference; it simultaneously conveys politeness, formality, social status, and interpersonal distance within the speech act. In English, all of these pragmatic functions are represented by a single pronoun, you. As a result, in English the speaker’s attitude toward the addressee and the stylistic tone of interaction are typically inferred through context, intonation, or additional lexical means. This distinction demonstrates that grammatical categories in Kazakh possess not only structural significance but also substantial social and cultural content.

In general, many grammatical units in the Kazakh language exhibit cognitive and cultural characteristics and function as linguistic manifestations of national worldview. Accordingly, linguistic units that reflect the cultural and national identity of the Kazakh people were given particular attention in determining the grammatical minimum of the dictionary. Such an approach enables the dictionary to function not only as a linguistic reference tool but also as a source of cultural and cognitive knowledge.

TABLE 1  
DERIVATIONAL SUFFIXES OF KAZAKH NOUNS PRESENTED IN THE GRAMMATICAL MINIMUM (WITH ENGLISH EQUIVALENTS)

| Semantic category | Kazakh suffix                          | Example (Kazakh) | English equivalent | Example (English) |
|-------------------|----------------------------------------|------------------|--------------------|-------------------|
| Profession        | -шы / -ші                              | әнші             | -er, -ist, -or     | singer, worker    |
|                   |                                        | жұмысшы          |                    | worker            |
|                   |                                        | домбырашы        |                    | dombra player     |
| Abstract notion   | лық / -лік / -дық / -дік / -тық / -тік | достық           | ship, -hood, -ness | friendship        |
|                   |                                        | балалық          |                    | childhood         |
| Place / location  | -хана / -қана                          | аурухана         | house, room, hall  | hospital          |
|                   |                                        | дәрісхана        |                    | lecture hall      |

**Note.** The table demonstrates how derivational suffixes are introduced through high-frequency lexical items. English equivalents are provided as functional rather than direct morphological correspondences.

TABLE 2  
INFLECTIONAL ENDINGS OF KAZAKH NOUNS AND THEIR FUNCTIONAL EQUIVALENTS IN ENGLISH

| Grammatical category        | Kazakh suffix                           | Example (Kazakh)  | English equivalent | Translation      |
|-----------------------------|-----------------------------------------|-------------------|--------------------|------------------|
| Plural                      | -лар / -лер / -дар / -дер / -тар / -тер | кітаптар          | -s / -es           | books            |
| Possessive (1st person sg.) | -ым / -ім / -м                          | кітабым           | my                 | my book          |
| Possessive (2nd person sg.) | -ың / -ің / -ң                          | кітабың           | your               | your book        |
| Possessive (3rd person sg.) | -ы / -і / -сы / -сі                     | кітабы            | his / her          | his book         |
| Genitive case               | -ның / -нің / -дың / -дің / -тың / -тің | кітаптың мұқабасы | 's / of            | the book's cover |

**Note.** Unlike Kazakh, English expresses most case relations analytically through prepositions or possessive constructions.

TABLE 3  
SEMANTIC GROUPS OF ADJECTIVES IN THE GRAMMATICAL MINIMUM

| Semantic group | Kazakh adjective | English gloss | Example (Kazakh) | Example (English) |
|----------------|------------------|---------------|------------------|-------------------|
| Color          | ақ               | white         | ақ қағаз         | white paper       |
|                | қара             | black         | қара ат          | black horse       |
| Size / volume  | үлкен            | big           | үлкен үй         | big house         |
|                | кіші             | small         | кіші бөлме       | small room        |
| Taste          | тәтті            | sweet         | тәтті бал        | sweet honey       |
| Speed          | жылдам           | fast          | жылдам көлік     | fast transport    |

**Note.** Adjectives are presented without inflection, reflecting their invariant morphological nature in Kazakh.

TABLE 4  
CLASSIFICATION OF NUMERALS BY STRUCTURE

| Classification criterion | Kazakh examples | English equivalents   |
|--------------------------|-----------------|-----------------------|
| Simple                   | екі, он         | two, ten              |
| Derived                  | бірінші, бірер  | first, some           |
| Compound                 | он бес, бес жүз | fifteen, five hundred |

TABLE 5  
SEMANTIC TYPES OF NUMERALS IN KAZAKH AND THEIR ENGLISH FUNCTIONAL EQUIVALENTS

| Type        | Kazakh example | English equivalent |
|-------------|----------------|--------------------|
| Cardinal    | бір, екі, жүз  | one, two, hundred  |
| Ordinal     | бірінші        | first              |
| Collective  | екеу, үшеу     | two of them        |
| Approximate | бірер, оншақты | about ten          |

**Note.** Collective and approximate numerals in Kazakh lack direct morphological equivalents in English and are rendered analytically.

TABLE 6  
POSSESSIVE FORMS OF THE PRONOUN “OL”

| Person     | Singular              | Plural                                            |
|------------|-----------------------|---------------------------------------------------|
| 1st person | onym (my he/she/it)   | onymyz (our he/she/it)                            |
| 2nd person | onyñ (your he/she/it) | onyñ / onyñyz (your he/she/it, informal / polite) |
| 3rd person | onysy (his/her/its)   | onysy (their)                                     |

TABLE 7  
CASE DECLENSION OF THE PRONOUN “OL”

| Case         | Form   |
|--------------|--------|
| Nominative   | ol     |
| Genitive     | onyñ   |
| Dative       | oğan   |
| Accusative   | ony    |
| Locative     | onda   |
| Ablative     | odan   |
| Instrumental | onymen |

TABLE 8  
PERSONAL CONJUGATION OF THE PRONOUN “OL”

| Person     | Singular                                             | Plural                                          |
|------------|------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------|
| 1st person | olmyn (I am he/she/it)                               | olmız (we are he/she/it)                        |
| 2nd person | olsyñ / olsyz (you are he/she/it, informal / formal) | olsyñdar / olsyzdar (you are he/she/it, plural) |
| 3rd person | ol (he/she/it is)                                    | olar (they are)                                 |



TABLE 9  
CASE FORMS OF THE INTERROGATIVE PRONOUN “ҚАШАН?” (WHEN?)

| Case       | Singular         | Plural |
|------------|------------------|--------|
| Nominative | Қашан?           | —      |
| Dative     | Қашанға (дейін)? | —      |
| Ablative   | Қашаннан?        | —      |

**Note.** The pronoun *қашан* is partially declinable and does not take possessive or plural markers.

Example (Adverbs): Ол тез келді. – *He came quickly.*

Example (Verb forms): Мен жазамын. – *I write.*

Example (Onomatopoeia): Тыр еткен дыбыс естілді. – *A knock was heard.*

## V. CONCLUSION

In the process of selecting grammatical material, such criteria as frequency of use, structural simplicity, and cultural-cognitive significance were taken as a basis. Specifically, grammatical forms that are frequently used in spoken language, communicatively essential, and relatively easy to master from a structural perspective were given priority. This approach made it possible to present the complex agglutinative system of the Kazakh language to inophones in a comprehensible and practically applicable way. Moreover, taking into account the cultural and pragmatic dimensions of grammatical forms allowed them to be presented not merely as linguistic units, but as phenomena intrinsically connected to national worldview.

The results of the study demonstrate the high effectiveness of presenting lexis and grammar as an integrated system within the educational process. Rather than teaching grammatical forms as isolated rules, presenting them through concrete lexical units, fixed collocational patterns, and short functional sentences contributes to transforming learners' grammatical knowledge into active, productive linguistic skills.

In addition, the contrastive description of Kazakh grammatical structures alongside their functional equivalents in English was found to significantly reduce linguistic interference and to facilitate the acquisition of a new linguistic system.

One of the most significant outcomes of the study is the scientific substantiation of integrating a cultural-cognitive component into the grammatical minimum. It has been demonstrated that grammatical phenomena in Kazakh—such as possessive forms, the case system, the category of politeness, particles, and substantivization—possess not only structural, but also cognitive, pragmatic, and cultural functions. These grammatical units convey essential information about the social relations, worldview, and value system of the Kazakh people.

This approach makes it possible to develop the teaching of Kazakh as a foreign language beyond a purely linguistic level and toward the sphere of intercultural communication. By mastering grammatical forms, learners simultaneously gain insight into communicative norms, politeness strategies, and national identity within Kazakh society. This, in turn, contributes to the comprehensive development of learners' communicative competence.

The proposed grammatical minimum model and lexicographic presentation methods may be effectively applied in the future to the development of lexicogrammatical dictionaries, textbooks, online educational platforms, and level-based curricula designed for English-speaking inophones. Furthermore, the findings of the study can contribute substantially to improving methodologies for teaching Kazakh as a foreign language, expanding teachers' methodological resources, and strengthening the position of the Kazakh language within the international educational space.

Thus, the present study expands the scientific and methodological foundation of Kazakh language research within the fields of applied linguistics, educational lexicography, and foreign language teaching theory, and provides a solid theoretical and practical basis for future comprehensive and interdisciplinary research aimed at teaching the grammatical system of Kazakh as a foreign language.

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# Misinterpretation of Diplomatic Language and Conflict Escalation: A Comparative Linguistic Analysis of Four International Crises

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**Abstract**—Diplomatic crises are commonly examined through strategic or institutional frameworks, yet the role of linguistic interpretation in shaping escalation dynamics remains under-theorized. This article analyzes how misinterpretation of diplomatic language contributes to conflict escalation through a comparative qualitative study of four international crises: the Cuban Missile Crisis (1962), the Iraq War (2003), the Russia-Ukraine conflict (2014), and the Israel-Hamas war (2023-2024). Drawing on speech act theory, pragmatics, intercultural communication, practice theory, signaling theory, and translation studies, the analysis traces how illocutionary intent, pragmatic inference, diplomatic repertoires, and cross-linguistic mediation interact under strategic uncertainty. Across cases, the findings reveal recurrent patterns of communicative breakdown, including misalignment between illocutionary force and perlocutionary effect, failures of diplomatic recognition, and meaning shifts introduced through translation. The article conceptualizes miscommunication as a structural feature of crisis diplomacy and highlights the central role of language and mediation in shaping escalation and restraint.

**Index Terms**—diplomatic language, miscommunication, conflict escalation, pragmatics, translation

## I. INTRODUCTION

In international diplomacy, language is never neutral: subtle choices in wording, register, and tone can alter perceptions and escalate crises. From the Cold War to contemporary conflicts, confrontations were shaped by linguistic interpretation alongside material power and strategic interest.

This study addresses that gap by combining linguistic and diplomatic approaches. It draws on speech act theory (Austin, 1962; Searle, 1969), pragmatics (Levinson, 1983; Brown & Levinson, 1987), intercultural communication (Gudykunst, 2004), and genre/register approaches to diplomatic discourse (Holtsova & Khodarchenko, 2021), alongside practice theory (Pouliot, 2008; Faizullaev, 2017) and signaling theory (Crawford & Sobel, 1982; Trager, 2017; Takei, 2024).

To illustrate these dynamics, the article analyzes four cases where linguistic misinterpretation influenced escalation: the Cuban Missile Crisis (1962), the Iraq War (2003), the Russia-Ukraine conflict (2014), and the Israel-Hamas war (2023-2024). Across these cases, terms, metaphors, and rhetorical framing carried incompatible meanings across audiences, shaping divergent interpretations of intent.

This study asks how misinterpretations of diplomatic language, including those shaped by translation and interpretation, contribute to the escalation of international conflict. It examines what recurring patterns of linguistic misalignment emerge across major crises and what these patterns reveal about the role of communication in escalation and restraint. In doing so, the article contributes to the study of language and politics by showing how speech acts, pragmatic inference, and translation practices shape the construction, circulation, and contestation of political meaning in crisis contexts. The analysis therefore approaches diplomatic discourse as a central site in which political meaning is constructed, contested, and negotiated in crisis.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Research shows that diplomatic interactions rely on linguistic precision, yet even minor ambiguities can affect escalation. Political rhetoric often relies on strategic vagueness to preserve flexibility, yet it can backfire when interpreted through incompatible cultural or institutional lenses (Chilton, 2004; Wodak, 2009).

Speech Act Theory and pragmatics provide a basis for analyzing these dynamics. Illocutionary acts such as threats, promises, and declarations can generate different perlocutionary effects depending on context, audience, and background assumptions (Austin, 1962; Searle, 1969; House & Kádár, 2021). In high-stakes crises, implicature, presupposition, deixis, and hedging often shape interpretation as much as literal wording, especially where political actors rely on ambiguity, plausible deniability, or ideologically charged framing (Hall, 1989; Cap, 2017; Zaczynska et al., 2024). Cultural schemas and genre expectations further complicate uptake, since concepts such as honor, resistance, sovereignty, or liberation do not travel evenly across political communities and communicative settings (Mazraani, 1995; Barkho, 2010; Hodges, 2011; Kamyaneets, 2024; Iqbal & Farukh, 2025).

Research on diplomatic practice and signaling adds a further dimension by showing that communication depends on wording and shared expectations about legitimacy, credibility, and appropriate diplomatic conduct (Pouliot, 2008; Faizullaev, 2017; Crawford & Sobel, 1982; Trager, 2017; Takei, 2024). Translation studies likewise demonstrate that diplomatic meaning is actively mediated, not mechanically transferred: translators and interpreters reshape tone, force, and framing as they move discourse across linguistic and political contexts (Agildere, 2009; Nida, 1964; Vermeer, 1989; Seleskovitch & Lederer, 1984; Yang et al., 2025; Yang, 2012). While prior research has examined these processes in individual conflicts, fewer studies compare them systematically across multiple crises through a single integrated framework.

Recent studies have extended these arguments by demonstrating that disagreement in United Nations Security Council speech is frequently implicit, that diplomatic translations can transform linguistic, cultural, and communicative meaning, and that wartime translation can function as a form of gatekeeping and reframing (Kamyaneets, 2024; Yang et al., 2025; Zaczynska et al., 2024). Contemporary diplomatic practice also unfolds in a more fragmented and conflictual communicative environment, while the credibility of public and private threats remains conditional on institutional and domestic settings (Lafont Rapnouil, 2024; Takei, 2024).

## III. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study draws on insights from linguistics, diplomacy, and translation studies to organize the concepts reviewed above into a single analytical framework for the case studies. At the linguistic level, Speech Act Theory and pragmatics explain how diplomatic utterances function as threats, reassurances, offers, or warnings whose force depends on context, inference, and audience uptake (Austin, 1962; Searle, 1969; Levinson, 1983; Brown & Levinson, 1987). Intercultural communication and genre/register approaches extend this analysis by showing how cultural norms and institutional forms shape what counts as appropriate, credible, or intelligible diplomatic discourse (Gudykunst, 2004; Holtsova & Khodarchenko, 2021).

To capture diplomacy as social practice and strategic interaction, the framework also draws on Practice Theory and signaling theory. These perspectives show how speech acts gain or lose credibility within shared repertoires of diplomatic conduct and how ambiguity becomes dangerous when actors do not recognize the same norms of legitimacy, obligation, or commitment (Pouliot, 2008; Faizullaev, 2017; Crawford & Sobel, 1982; Trager, 2017; Takei, 2024). Because much diplomatic discourse is mediated across languages, the framework further incorporates translation and interpretation theories, particularly dynamic equivalence, Skopos theory, and sense theory, in order to trace how cross-linguistic mediation can reshape tone, emphasis, illocutionary force, and inferred meaning (Nida, 1964; Vermeer, 1989; Seleskovitch & Lederer, 1984; Yang et al., 2025; Yang, 2012). Together, these concepts provide the analytical structure for examining how meaning is constructed, distorted, and reinterpreted in high-stakes diplomatic communication.

## IV. METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a qualitative comparative case-study design to examine how diplomatic language is interpreted, misinterpreted, and mediated across four international crises: the Cuban Missile Crisis (1962), the Iraq War (2003), the Russia-Ukraine conflict (2014), and the Israel-Hamas war (2023-2024). The cases were selected purposively because each involved a high-stakes diplomatic confrontation in which linguistic misalignment contributed to escalation, each offers accessible primary linguistic material for analysis, and each provides comparative value across different cultural and linguistic settings (Mahoney & Goertz, 2006; Flyvbjerg, 2006; House & Kádár, 2021; Yang et al., 2025; Cap, 2017). The comparison is therefore analytical rather than historical, focusing on shared communicative mechanisms rather than substantive geopolitical similarity.

The study analyzes publicly available diplomatic texts, including speeches, statements, correspondence, and UN discourse. The analysis combines speech act theory, pragmatics, genre/register analysis, practice theory, signaling theory, and translation theory to examine how diplomatic utterances gain force and shift across audiences in multilingual settings (Austin, 1962; Searle, 1969; Levinson, 1983; Brown & Levinson, 1987; Zaczynska et al., 2024; Holtsova & Khodarchenko, 2021; Pouliot, 2008; Faizullaev, 2017; Crawford & Sobel, 1982; Trager, 2017; Takei, 2024;

Nida, 1964; Vermeer, 1989; Seleskovitch & Lederer, 1984; Yang et al., 2025). The analysis proceeded in three stages: key texts were selected at points of escalatory significance; the texts were coded through a hybrid strategy combining theory-driven categories with inductive attention to case-specific patterns; and the coded materials were then compared across cases to identify recurring mechanisms linking linguistic misalignment to crisis escalation. Table 1 provides a comparative overview of the four cases before the detailed case analyses.

TABLE 1  
COMPARATIVE OVERVIEW OF LINGUISTIC, DIPLOMATIC, AND TRANSLATIONAL DYNAMICS ACROSS FOUR CRISES

| Case                              | Key Linguistic Factors                                                                                            | Key Diplomatic / Signaling Factors                                                                                          | Key Translation / Interpretation Factors                                                                                                     | Consequences                                                            |
|-----------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1. Cuban Missile Crisis (1962)    | Strategic ambiguity; conflicting illocutionary force; metacommunication failures; pragmatic hedging.              | Conflicting signals (conciliatory vs. aggressive letters); credibility uncertainty; backchannel vs. official communication. | Translation shifts between Russian and English altered tone; terms such as “quarantine” and “blockade” carried different legal implications. | Near-nuclear escalation; misread intentions; policy paralysis.          |
| 2. Iraq War (2003)                | Vagueness; presupposition; hedging in WMD claims; misread cultural metaphors (honor, resistance).                 | U.S. credibility framing; intelligence discourse; ultimatum speech acts.                                                    | Arabic-English translations reduced pragmatic nuance; Western mistranslations amplified threat perception.                                   | Justification for invasion; diplomatic deadlock; erosion of trust.      |
| 3. Russia-Ukraine Conflict (2014) | Competing narratives; deixis (“our people”); semantic divergence (“federalization”); ideological metaphors.       | Hybrid signaling; plausible deniability; misaligned expectations in Minsk agreements.                                       | Russian-English/Ukrainian translations produced political non-equivalence; key terms lacked shared sense.                                    | Polarized perceptions; failed agreements; escalation of hybrid warfare. |
| 4. Israel-Hamas War (2023-2024)   | Performative failures; conflicting illocutionary force; direct vs. indirect styles; emotionally loaded metaphors. | Humanitarian diplomacy breakdown; contradictory public and private messages; credibility contestation.                      | Arabic metaphors (“Al-Aqsa Flood”); mistranslations of Israeli evacuation warnings; UN/NGO interpretation inconsistencies.                   | Catastrophic escalation; collapse of communication channels.            |

## V. RESULTS

### A. Case 1: The Cuban Missile Crisis (1962)

The Cuban Missile Crisis was a thirteen-day confrontation between the United States and the Soviet Union over the Soviet deployment of nuclear missiles in Cuba. The crisis brought the world to the brink of nuclear conflict. Communication between Washington and Moscow involved formal speeches, United Nations statements, backchannel exchanges, and personal letters whose distinct tones, rhetorical strategies, and translation challenges shaped perceptions of intent and risk.

The crisis was significantly influenced by pragmatic misalignment between Washington and Moscow (Allison, 1971; Lebow & Stein, 1994). From the perspective of Speech Act Theory (Austin, 1962; Searle, 1969), language functioned as a tool of coercive action rather than a neutral medium of communication. President John F. Kennedy’s televised address on October 22, 1962, exemplifies this performative dimension. While rhetorically framed as a defensive response, the announcement of a “quarantine” around Cuba operated as an indirect ultimatum, carrying the illocutionary force of a directive speech act. Kennedy’s declaration that any missile launched from Cuba would be regarded as an attack by the Soviet Union also produced a calculated perlocutionary effect intended to project resolve, deter Soviet action, and constrain further escalation (Sorensen, 1965). Khrushchev’s correspondence with Kennedy similarly reveals notable illocutionary inconsistency. His initial letter, sent on October 26, adopted a conciliatory and commissive tone, proposing the withdrawal of Soviet missiles from Cuba in exchange for a U.S. pledge not to invade the island. His second letter, delivered on October 27 and influenced by internal Soviet political dynamics, shifted abruptly to a more assertive stance by conditioning Soviet compliance on the removal of U.S. Jupiter missiles from Turkey. This abrupt shift in speech act type and register generated interpretive ambiguity for U.S. policymakers, who struggled to discern which message conveyed the authoritative Soviet position (Fursenko & Naftali, 1997).

Pragmatic elements such as implicature, presupposition, hedging, and lexical choice added further complexity. Kennedy’s deliberate use of the term “quarantine” in place of “blockade” functioned as a strategic ambiguity intended to avoid the legal implications of an act of war under international law while still conveying a credible deterrent posture (May & Zelikow, 2001). In contrast, Khrushchev’s repeated invocation of “peace-loving peoples” presupposed Soviet moral legitimacy and implicitly framed U.S. actions as manifestations of imperial aggression. Intercultural communication frameworks further illuminate this divergence. U.S. diplomatic rhetoric was grounded in legalistic and security-oriented language that prioritized deterrence, credibility, and hemispheric defense, whereas Soviet discourse drew on collectivist and ideological narratives centered on socialist solidarity and the experience of geopolitical encirclement (Lebow & Stein, 1994). This clash of communicative logics produced semantic asymmetries, particularly in the interpretation of terms such as “freedom,” “security,” and “defensive measures,” thereby heightening the risk of escalation.

A practice-theoretical lens shows that the crisis also unfolded through a clash of diplomatic repertoires, status claims, and legitimacy struggles. In the public sphere, U.S. officials followed a familiar script built around an OAS-supported quarantine and carefully calibrated statements, while in private they relied on coordinated backchannel messaging to maintain credibility and reduce uncertainty. By contrast, the Soviet approach shifted between personal, emotional letters and impersonal, ideologically heavy statements. This inconsistency in tone and format complicated judgments about which exchanges communicated authoritative intent. Khrushchev's two letters created confusion in the White House: the first's informal and emotional nature made it appear less official, while the second's tougher and more formal stance implied a different negotiating baseline. Following Robert Kennedy's meeting with Ambassador Dobrynin, the United States chose to respond only to the first letter as a form of "practiced repair" (Pouliot, 2008), bringing both sides back to a more coherent negotiating track and facilitating de-escalation. Signaling theory clarifies this dynamic further. Kennedy's "quarantine" did not impose major immediate material costs, yet it still carried credibility because the institutional setting, audience costs, and U.S. reputational stakes made follow-through plausible. By contrast, Khrushchev's decision to send two letters aimed at different audiences weakened the clarity of the Soviet stance. At the same time, costless statements can still communicate credibility when they occur within repeated interactions and institutionally facilitated visibility in behavior (Trager, 2017; Takei, 2024). Both sides therefore crafted parallel, face-saving accounts that allowed domestic audiences to interpret events without public contradiction.

Translation was also essential to the crisis. All major communications passed through Russian-English or English-Russian mediation, and subtle translation choices affected pragmatic force, emotional tone, and the construction of intended meaning. Khrushchev's first letter included culturally specific metaphors and idiomatic expressions such as "rash" (опрометчивый) and "evil genius" (злой гений), whose English renderings reduced some of the original emotional force (May & Zelikow, 2001). Following Sense Theory, translators reconstruct meaning on a conceptual rather than lexical level (Seleskovitch & Lederer, 1984), which may have tempered the force of Khrushchev's emotional appeals for U.S. officials. Dynamic Equivalence Theory (Nida, 1964) also helps explain the lack of equivalence in Kennedy's use of "quarantine" rather than "blockade," since available Russian renderings were closer to *blokada* and therefore reinforced the Soviet reading of hostile intent. This was a failure of pragmatic equivalence rather than a simple lexical shift, as the U.S. attempt to signal restraint was not conveyed with the same subtlety. Genre and register discrepancies were further intensified by translation. Khrushchev's first letter, informal and story-driven in Russian, lost much of its interpersonal tone in English, making it appear less authoritative to Kennedy's advisers. Conversely, Soviet translations of U.S. communications emphasized legalistic precision, which may have made Kennedy's rhetoric seem more rigid and dogmatic. During the secret RFK-Dobrynin backchannel meeting, interpreters also played a crucial mediating role in conveying implicit commitments such as the quiet removal of Jupiter missiles from Turkey across language boundaries. Translation was an active participant rather than a passive mediator in shaping how intentions were constructed, how credibility was judged, and how risks of escalation were managed (Yang et al., 2025; Yang, 2012).

These communicative dynamics interacted with the material and institutional conditions of the crisis, including the deployment of nuclear weapons, military readiness, alliance commitments, and the risk of unauthorized escalation. Linguistic ambiguity therefore shaped how decision-makers interpreted and managed an already dangerous strategic confrontation, while the availability of backchannels and reciprocal incentives for restraint created opportunities for communicative repair (Allison, 1971; Fursenko & Naftali, 1997; May & Zelikow, 2001).

### *B. Case 2: The Iraq War (2003)*

The 2003 invasion of Iraq emerged from escalating hostilities over suspected weapons of mass destruction and U.S. post-9/11 security strategy (Stieb, 2023). The path to war was shaped by imprecise phrasing, UN rhetoric, and divergent interpretations of Iraqi discourse.

Linguistic miscommunication and intercultural misunderstanding played a central role in the breakdown of dialogue between the Iraqi leadership and U.S. political and intelligence actors before the invasion (Chilton, 2004; Hodges, 2011). Viewed through Speech Act Theory, President George W. Bush's March 17, 2003 address functioned as a decisive directive: by demanding that Saddam Hussein and his sons leave Iraq within 48 hours, the statement issued an ultimatum that left little room for negotiation. Its performative force framed military action as a foregone conclusion and signaled the termination of diplomatic engagement (Mazraani, 1995). Saddam Hussein's televised address, broadcast on Al-Jazeera, relied instead on assertive and commissive speech acts grounded in metaphors of honor, bravery, sacrifice, and resilience. Statements such as "We will fight any aggression with the courage and honor of the Iraqi people" carried strong pragmatic force within Arab political discourse, where such rhetoric is associated with legitimacy and national dignity, yet were often received through a Western lens as defiant or evasive (Barkho, 2010). Strategic ambiguity also shaped U.S. rhetorical framing before the war. In his February 2003 address to the United Nations, Secretary of State Colin Powell used epistemic modal verbs such as "may," "might," and "could," alongside hedged expressions referring to Iraq's "capability to develop WMDs," rather than definitive proof (Chilton, 2004; Zarefsky, 2007). Yet the authority of the UN setting lent these formulations an implicature of certainty, encouraging media and public audiences to hear probabilistic language as factual confirmation. Presuppositions embedded in claims such as "Iraq continues to harbor terrorists" further positioned guilt as already established, narrowing the space for alternative interpretation or critical scrutiny (Hodges, 2011).

Intercultural framing intensified the divide between U.S. and Arab political discourse. American rhetoric foregrounded liberation, preemption, and global security, while Arab political communication emphasized sovereignty, dignity (كرامة), resistance (مقاومة), and martyrdom (شهادة) (Mazraani, 1995). This divergence was especially visible in translation: the U.S. narrative of “liberating Iraq” was frequently rendered in Arab media as الاحتلال (“occupation”), fundamentally altering the pragmatic force of the original message (Barkho, 2010). These semantic asymmetries were reinforced by mismatches of genre and register. U.S. officials relied on military-legal formulations such as “coalition of the willing” and “shock and awe” to project authority and strategic readiness, whereas Iraqi political language drew on poetic and nationalist registers, while United Nations discourse maintained humanitarian and legalistic conventions (Barkho, 2010). In the absence of a shared diplomatic register, inferential coherence broke down.

The Iraq case also reflects a collapse in shared diplomatic routines and credibility structures, as described by practice theory and signaling theory (Pouliot, 2008; Pouliot & Cornut, 2015). U.S. officials operated within a military-legal repertoire built around UN speeches, ultimatums, and coalition branding, creating a recognizable script for acceptable action while narrowing possible interpretations of events. Iraqi communication, by contrast, relied on honor-focused and nationalist rhetoric that resonated domestically but was frequently dismissed by Western audiences as evasive or unserious (Faizullaev, 2017). Powell’s cautious yet authoritative presentation at the UN further complicated matters by importing a strategic-security register into a setting associated with legal and humanitarian justification, thereby unsettling shared assumptions about what counted as legitimate evidence. Signaling theory helps explain why certain messages nonetheless gained credibility despite limited material proof. Powell’s ambiguous claims acquired force because the institutional authority of the UN and the reputational stakes of the setting made apparent dishonesty seem costly (Takei, 2024). Bush’s 48-hour ultimatum likewise signaled commitment because failure to act after such a public deadline would have damaged U.S. credibility (Crawford & Sobel, 1982). Iraqi appeals to honor, by contrast, were mainly calibrated to domestic and regional audiences and therefore circulated unevenly across diplomatic arenas. Translation and framing deepened this gap, especially when “liberation” was received as “occupation,” recasting intent within an entirely different moral register.

Translation and media mediation were active mediators that reshaped pragmatic force and perceived credibility. Saddam Hussein’s speeches, delivered largely in Arabic, drew on culturally loaded terms such as honor (كرامة), resistance (مقاومة), endurance (صمود), and martyrdom (شهادة), which carried legitimizing connotations in Iraqi and Arab political discourse but were often rendered in English in ways that suggested fanaticism or aggression (Barkho, 2010). From the perspective of Dynamic Equivalence Theory, this involved a loss of pragmatic equivalence (Nida, 1964). Conversely, the American discourse of “liberation” was often translated in Arab media as “occupation” (الاحتلال), reversing its moral force (Yang et al., 2025). Hedged formulations in Powell’s UN speech were also sometimes received as more categorical than the original wording warranted, with interpreters amplifying evidential certainty in ways consistent with Sense Theory (Seleskovitch & Lederer, 1984; Yang, 2012).

The linguistic mechanisms identified in this case operated within a broader environment shaped by strategic preferences for regime change, disputed intelligence assessments, institutional authority, and overwhelming military asymmetry. Diplomatic language influenced how these conditions were justified and understood, while the narrowing of political alternatives and the credibility attached to official institutions increased the escalatory consequences of communicative misalignment (Stieb, 2023; Zarefsky, 2007).

### C. Case 3: Russia-Ukraine Conflict (2014)

The Russia-Ukraine conflict that began in 2014 followed the Euromaidan uprising, Crimea’s annexation, and the emergence of separatist activity in eastern Ukraine. At the center of the crisis were rival discursive constructions of sovereignty, security, and protection, articulated through diplomatic exchanges in Russian, Ukrainian, and English. Expressions such as “federalization,” “our people,” and “self-defense forces” were interpreted differently depending on linguistic, ideological, and audience-specific contexts and ultimately weakened ceasefire efforts.

The conflict was shaped by semantic misalignment and indeterminate political discourse between Moscow and Kyiv (House & Kádár, 2021; Kamyanets, 2024). From the perspective of Speech Act Theory, Vladimir Putin’s March 18, 2014 address, asserting that “Crimea has always been an inseparable part of Russia,” functioned as an illocutionary act of sovereign claim rather than simple historical narration. Its perlocutionary consequences were immediate: Ukraine, along with the EU and NATO, interpreted the statement as a legitimating act of annexation and a clear signal of escalation (Wodak & Forchtner, 2018). More broadly, the language of “protection,” “compatriots,” and “historical justice” operated as political framing. It performed political work by constructing intervention as both morally warranted and historically grounded. Yet these same utterances were processed by Ukraine and Western actors through a legal and territorial frame that treated them as revisionist justification rather than legitimate diplomatic argument.

The Minsk I and II agreements further exposed a mismatch in speech acts and communicative expectations. Expressions such as “special status,” “decentralization,” and “amnesty” failed to produce shared illocutionary force: Russia treated them as binding constitutional requirements, whereas Ukraine understood them as negotiable or conditional provisions (House & Kádár, 2021). Terms that appeared to promise compromise instead encoded incompatible political assumptions, weakening compliance from the outset. Pragmatic ambiguity intensified this instability. Russian discourse repeatedly relied on indeterminate deictic references such as “our people,” “compatriots,” and “local self-defense forces,” thereby obscuring agency and preserving plausible deniability within the logic of hybrid



warfare (Wodak & Forchtner, 2018). The term “federalization” similarly concealed opposing political models: in Russian narratives it was framed as a mechanism of minority protection and conflict resolution, whereas in Ukrainian interpretations it implied territorial fragmentation and the erosion of sovereignty (Kamyanyets, 2024).

Presupposition also played a decisive role. Statements such as “We must protect Russian speakers abroad” presupposed both the existence of imminent danger and a corresponding Russian obligation to intervene. These assumptions were categorically rejected by Ukraine, NATO, and the EU, producing sharply divergent interpretations of intent rather than any stable consensus about meaning (Cap, 2017; Hall, 1989). The divergence was intensified by incompatible intercultural frames. Russia articulated a civilizational self-image as the historical guardian of Eastern Slavic identity, while Ukraine and Western actors foregrounded sovereignty, territorial integrity, and self-determination. Breakdowns were reinforced at the level of genre and register. Russia combined historical narration, moral justification, and strategic indeterminacy; Ukraine emphasized legal reasoning grounded in international law; Western institutions relied on procedural and multilateral forms of address. These divergent genre conventions blurred the line between threats, obligations, and negotiation offers, repeatedly destabilizing the ceasefire process and narrowing the possibilities for shared interpretation.

A practice-theoretical perspective helps explain why communication broke down so persistently. The conflict unfolded through a clash of diplomatic repertoires, recognition routines, and shared expectations (Pouliot, 2008; Faizullaev, 2017). Russian officials drew on a civilizational and historical repertoire, stressing Crimea’s “inseparability,” shared identity, and duties toward Russian speakers. This repertoire was intelligible domestically, but in Kyiv and the West it was received as revisionist and illegitimate, producing failures of recognition (Pouliot & Cornut, 2015). Ukraine, together with the EU and NATO, relied instead on a legal and multilateral repertoire centered on sovereignty, procedural legitimacy, and international norms. Because Russia’s claims did not fit that evidentiary grammar, they were treated as illegitimate negotiating positions. Terms such as “special status,” “decentralization,” and “local elections” appeared mutually acceptable on paper, yet carried different constitutional and political meanings for each side. Russia treated them as binding structural commitments; Ukraine framed them as conditional, sequential, and negotiable. These divergences were compounded by status injury and symbolic competition over who had the authority to define regional order, leaving communication to revert to performative contestation rather than diplomatic recognition (Faizullaev, 2017).

Signaling theory clarifies an additional set of dynamics. Russian verbal statements such as “Crimea is inseparable” and “we will protect Russian speakers” were initially forms of cheap talk: easy to issue, strongly audience-oriented, and of limited credibility unless paired with observable, costly action (Crawford & Sobel, 1982; Trager, 2017; Takei, 2024). The deployment of forces, the support of local militias, and the consolidation of territorial control shifted these statements toward more credible commitments. When such actions were absent or deniable, the same rhetoric held little value for Kyiv and Western audiences. The Minsk process also exposed the enforcement problems created by ambiguity. Flexible wording allowed each party to signal different meanings to different audiences, enabling agreement without resolving the underlying interpretive divide. By contrast, sanctions, military mobilization, and institutional commitments functioned as costlier signals that tied positions to expected follow-through.

Translation and cross-lingual mediation were central to these processes. Many of the most important terms, including “federalization,” “special status,” “self-defense forces,” and “compatriots abroad,” did not travel cleanly across Russian, Ukrainian, and English. The Russian word *federalizatsiya* (“federalization”), for example, had no exact equivalent in Ukrainian institutional discourse. In Russian political language it implied decentralization and minority protection; in Ukrainian sociopolitical memory it was closely associated with disintegration, secession, and foreign domination (Kamyanyets, 2024). Literal translation therefore created a misleading appearance of semantic equivalence while concealing incompatible pragmatic implications, illustrating a failure of dynamic equivalence in Nida’s (1964) sense. The expression *nashi lyudi* (“our people”) also carried broader ideological scope in Russian political discourse, encompassing not only citizens but co-ethnics and Russian-speaking compatriots abroad. In Ukrainian and Western translations it was often rendered literally, obscuring this ideological reach and allowing different inferences about Russian intent.

Similar distortion surrounded the classification of separatist forces as *mestnye samooborony* (“local self-defense forces”). Russian media preserved the original term, maintaining a vocabulary of local legitimacy and plausible deniability, while Ukrainian authorities frequently rendered it as “Russian-backed militants,” foregrounding external control and coercion. The Minsk agreements were likewise burdened by ambiguous translations of “special status” (*osobyi status*) and “local self-government,” both of which carried different constitutional implications in the Russian and Ukrainian legal systems and later became leverage points for reinterpretation. Simultaneous interpretation in OSCE and UN negotiations added a further layer of instability. Russian delegations often used legal-historical vocabulary with strong cultural resonance that lost part of its institutional meaning in English, undermining perceived legitimacy, while Ukrainian legalistic claims were at times rendered into Russian with reduced procedural detail. Sense Theory helps explain this dynamic: interpreters reconstruct meaning holistically rather than mechanically reproducing form, so under conditions of geopolitical polarization even subtle lexical or syntactic choices can shape how obligations, rights, and intentions are perceived (Seleskovitch & Lederer, 1984). Translation thus became a battlefield of meaning in its own right rather than a neutral channel of transfer.

The trajectory of the conflict was also shaped by territorial contestation, military intervention, coercive asymmetry, domestic political narratives, and competing expectations concerning regional security. Linguistic and translational divergence amplified these pressures by permitting incompatible interpretations of agency, sovereignty, and obligation to persist within negotiations (Kamyantets, 2024).

#### *D. Case 4: Israel-Hamas War (2023-2024)*

The 2023-2024 Israel-Hamas war unfolded through competing narratives in Hebrew, Arabic, and English. Terms such as “Al-Aqsa Flood,” “evacuation orders,” and “self-defense” acquired sharply different meanings across contexts, while diplomatic interaction between Israel, Hamas, regional actors, and international institutions was further complicated by genre mismatches and inconsistent mediation across languages.

Hamas’s use of the phrase “طوفان الأقصى” (“Al-Aqsa Flood”) in its October 7 announcement functioned as a symbolic label and a commissive and declarative speech act. It projected ideological resolve, invoked religious legitimacy, and framed the event within a longer narrative of struggle over the Al-Aqsa Mosque (House & Kádár, 2021). Yet the phrase was received very differently by Israeli authorities and Western governments, who widely interpreted it as a declaration of expansive and open-ended war. This divergence illustrates a breakdown in the alignment between illocutionary force and perlocutionary effect, in which intended performative meaning produced unintended responses that intensified hostilities (Searle, 1969). Israel’s categorical commissive speech act, “We will eliminate Hamas,” reveals a parallel pragmatic divergence. Within the Israeli domestic context, the statement functioned as a performative expression of moral obligation and a commitment to restoring national security. Across regional and international contexts, however, it was often interpreted as suggestive of collective punishment and the threat of disproportionate or indiscriminate force (El Damanhoury et al., 2025; Iqbal & Farukh, 2025). Humanitarian communication also revealed important pragmatic failures. Israeli evacuation directives to Gaza civilians frequently used the Arabic phrase “سيتحمل المسؤولية,” which literally translates as “will bear responsibility” but in Palestinian communicative norms is often understood as a veiled threat rather than a neutral advisory (Yule, 1996). As a result, many civilians perceived evacuation alerts as signals of impending danger, which eroded trust in humanitarian messaging and reduced compliance with designated corridors.

Both parties relied on highly symbolic and, at times, dehumanizing language that widened the communicative fracture. Israeli descriptions of Hamas combatants as “human animals” circulated widely and, when translated into Arabic, provoked widespread outrage and deepened hostility. Hamas, for its part, characterized Israeli airstrikes using terms such as “genocide,” “massacre,” and “desecration of Al-Aqsa,” invoking religious imagery and activating collective memory frameworks. These opposing discursive strategies reflected a wider intercultural rupture: Israeli rhetoric was grounded in narratives of national security and historical trauma, while Hamas framed the conflict through the lens of religious eschatology and pan-Arab identity (Wodak & Forchtner, 2018; Cap, 2017). Clashes in genre further exacerbated the problem. Israeli discourse predominantly employed a legal-military register, framing actions through expressions such as “counterterrorism operation” and “self-defense.” Hamas combined religious and nationalist rhetoric, while third-party mediators, including the United Nations, Qatar, Egypt, and NGOs, used humanitarian or neutrality-based discourse. The result was a form of semantic polyphony in which labels such as “war on terror,” “genocide,” and “humanitarian catastrophe” circulated simultaneously without shared reference points (House & Kádár, 2021).

A practice-theory perspective shows a collapse of shared repertoires, recognition routines, and communicative habits (Pouliot, 2008; Pouliot & Cornut, 2015; Faizullaev, 2017). Hamas drew on a repertoire that combined insurgent identity with religious symbolism. “طوفان الأقصى” functioned as a performative signal of steadfastness, sacrifice, and sacred duty, but was received by Israeli and Western audiences as an existential threat. Israel relied on a legal-military repertoire shaped by counterterrorism doctrine, evacuation directives, and commitments such as “we will eliminate Hamas,” which Hamas read as evidence of total-war intent. Because uptake depends on competence in a shared diplomatic field (Jönsson & Hall, 2005), these divergent repertoires produced systematic misrecognition. Evacuation messages, including Arabic renderings that implied coercion, were widely read locally as instruments of displacement rather than humanitarian measures. Hamas’s sacralized narratives were treated in Israeli and Western settings as maximalist threats rather than coded resistance claims. Mediators, meanwhile, used a neutrality and civilian-protection genre, yet competing frames such as “war on terror,” “genocide,” and “humanitarian catastrophe” prevented the emergence of an agreed script for repair (Roselle et al., 2014).

Translation was central to this process. Hamas’s phrase “طوفان الأقصى” (“Al-Aqsa Flood”) carried connotations in Arabic political and religious discourse of divine cleansing, apocalyptic renewal, and collective resistance, yet when translated literally into English and Hebrew it lost much of its sacred and metaphorical resonance and was instead recast as a radical slogan associated with indiscriminate violence. From the perspective of Dynamic Equivalence Theory, this reflects a failure to convey both the pragmatic intent and symbolic depth of the original expression (Nida, 1964). Israeli alerts issued to Gaza residents included the phrase “سيتحمل المسؤولية,” which lexically means “will bear responsibility” but pragmatically carries the force of a veiled threat in Arabic. Reports from humanitarian agencies suggested that real-time interpretation often resulted in mistranslation or incomplete rendering of such warnings, heightening fear and reducing civilian adherence to evacuation directives. In contrast, Israeli officials’ characterization of Hamas fighters as “human animals” underwent further semantic escalation in Arabic translation, where the phrasing was sometimes generalized beyond combatants and interpreted as dehumanizing the broader Palestinian population. Key international legal terms also shifted in translation. “Self-defense,” a recognized legal construct in UN discourse, was frequently

translated as “مبرّر للهجوم” (“justification for attack”), altering its normative implications. At the same time, elements of Hamas’s rhetoric such as الدين (“religion”), الأرض (“land”), and المقدسات (“sacred sites”) were often neutralized in English translation, reducing their persuasive and moral force. Humanitarian mediation exposed similar volatility, as operational terms such as “safe zones,” “evacuation windows,” and “buffer areas” were translated into Arabic without stable conceptual equivalents in the lived reality of Gazan civilians. In line with Yang et al. (2025) and Yang (2012), translation here functioned as political framing rather than neutral transfer. The case shows how linguistic indeterminacy, incompatible communicative repertoires, and translational distortion shaped legitimacy, perception, and escalation in a multilingual conflict setting.

These linguistic dynamics interacted with military objectives, asymmetric power relations, domestic political pressures, and deteriorating humanitarian conditions. Competing frames and translation choices shaped public and diplomatic interpretations of these conditions, thereby reinforcing mistrust and limiting the possibility of establishing a shared communicative basis for restraint (El Damanhoury et al., 2025; Iqbal & Farukh, 2025).

### *E. Cross-Case Synthesis*

The four cases reveal recurring patterns in how diplomatic language is produced, interpreted, and mediated across crises. Across all cases, escalation was shaped by interactions between linguistic formulation, pragmatic inference, diplomatic practice, and translation. These patterns appear at three levels: linguistic-pragmatic processes, diplomatic repertoires, and translation-mediated meaning.

Across the four cases, linguistic misalignment did not operate in isolation. Its escalatory effects emerged through interaction with military capabilities, institutional authority, domestic political pressures, ideological commitments, and pre-existing strategic objectives. Language shaped how these conditions were interpreted, justified, and communicated, whereas the conditions themselves affected which messages appeared credible, threatening, or negotiable. This relationship is consistent with recent work that situates crisis communication within affective, embodied, and material environments (Charalambous et al., 2025).

At the linguistic-pragmatic level, all four cases show that the force of diplomatic speech acts was shaped by how those acts were interpreted in context. Utterances framed as warnings, deterrent signals, reassurances, or symbolic affirmations were frequently understood differently by opposing actors, often as explicit threats, ultimatums, or indications of irreversible intent. Pragmatic features such as ambiguity, implicature, presupposition, and deixis played a central role in shaping these divergent interpretations, particularly in conditions of limited trust and high strategic uncertainty.

At the level of diplomatic practice, the cases show that communication depended on shared expectations regarding genre, sequencing, and legitimacy, which were not consistently aligned across actors. Statements that conformed to one diplomatic repertoire were not always recognized as such by others, leading to breakdowns in recognition of intent. Differences in communicative conventions, institutional roles, and audience orientation contributed to situations in which messages were interpreted outside the frameworks in which they were produced. In this sense, crisis communication was shaped by what was said and whether interlocutors recognized the act being performed as diplomatically meaningful within a shared field of practice.

Translation and interpretation also played a central role in shaping how diplomatic messages circulated across linguistic and political contexts. Across the cases, translated discourse differed in tone, emphasis, and lexical choice from source texts, altering how statements were received by different audiences. These shifts affected how utterances were categorized as conciliatory, threatening, credible, or evasive and contributed to divergent understandings across actors. Translation therefore emerged as a recurrent feature of multilingual crisis communication rather than a merely technical matter of linguistic transfer, with significant consequences for interpretation.

These patterns show that miscommunication in diplomatic crises emerges from the interaction of linguistic ambiguity, pragmatic inference, divergent communicative repertoires, and translation-mediated variation. These dynamics recur across different historical and geopolitical contexts, indicating that they are not case-specific but systematically embedded in crisis communication. The discussion turns from these recurring patterns to their broader implications for linguistic pragmatics, diplomatic practice, and translation in international conflict.

## VI. DISCUSSION

The analysis shows that miscommunication is a constitutive mechanism of crisis diplomacy. Across cases, escalation was shaped by recurring mismatches between illocutionary intent and uptake, by failures of diplomatic recognition rooted in incompatible communicative repertoires, and by translational shifts that altered tone, force, and inferred intent across linguistic and political contexts.

At the linguistic-pragmatic level, the analysis shows that diplomatic speech acts operate through uptake shaped by context, inference, and audience positioning (Austin, 1962; Searle, 1969). Communicative acts intended as deterrent gestures, provisional warnings, reassurance, or symbolic affirmation were repeatedly construed as explicit threats, uncompromising ultimatums, or declarations of irreversible action. The study therefore reinforces a central insight of Speech Act Theory while also extending pragmatic accounts of political discourse: ambiguity is not inherently stabilizing or destabilizing. Its effects depend on whether interlocutors share sufficient interpretive ground to recognize

broadly similar meanings in threats, reassurances, obligations, and offers. Where such overlap exists, ambiguity may preserve flexibility and permit diplomatic maneuver; where it is absent, ambiguity amplifies mistrust, ideological projection, and strategic worst-case interpretation (Levinson, 1983; Brown & Levinson, 1987; Cap, 2017).

The findings also refine diplomatic practice theory by showing that communication failure is rooted in wording, inference, and repertoire misalignment and disrupted recognition processes. Effective diplomacy depends on shared expectations regarding communicative genre, procedural sequencing, legitimacy claims, and the forms through which intent becomes recognizable. When those expectations are weak or absent, speech acts do not simply become ambiguous; they fail to secure uptake within the very practices that constitute diplomacy as a social field (Pouliot, 2008; Pouliot & Cornut, 2015). Breakdown, in other words, occurs not only because actors say different things, but because they do not inhabit the same communicative repertoires for recognizing what counts as an offer, a warning, a concession, a face-saving move, or a legitimate diplomatic claim (Faizullaev, 2017; Jönsson & Hall, 2005).

A further contribution of the study lies in showing that translation operates as a structural dimension rather than a passive channel of crisis communication. Across the cases, translation altered illocutionary force, ethical framing, and inferred intent, supporting key insights from translation theory while extending them into the study of international conflict (Nida, 1964; House, 2016; Yang et al., 2025). In multilingual crises, diplomatic meaning is not simply transmitted across languages; it is re-mediated through lexical choice, register, cultural resonance, and institutional framing. Translational choices helped shape which statements appeared conciliatory, threatening, credible, evasive, or morally legitimate across different audiences (Seleskovitch & Lederer, 1984; Yang, 2012).

These findings contribute to several overlapping fields. In linguistics and pragmatics, they show how speech acts, inference, and framing operate under high-stakes institutional conditions in which interpretive divergence can produce material consequences. In international relations, they extend practice-based and signaling approaches by showing that credibility depends not only on material costs, but also on linguistic form, audience configuration, and institutional context (Trager, 2017; Takei, 2024). In translation studies, they provide comparative empirical support for the claim that translation actively shapes political meaning rather than merely transmitting it. At the same time, the scope of the argument should be understood alongside several limitations: the study relies on publicly available texts, cannot capture confidential deliberations or informal exchanges, and does not permit causal quantification. Its aim is instead analytical explanation of communicative mechanisms across cases, while opening space for future corpus-based, ethnographic, and experimental research on multilingual crisis communication.

## VII. CONCLUSION

This study has examined the role of linguistic misinterpretation in conflict escalation through a comparative analysis of four major international crises: the Cuban Missile Crisis (1962), the Iraq War (2003), the Russia-Ukraine conflict (2014), and the Israel-Hamas war (2023-2024). The analysis shows that miscommunication operates as a structural mechanism shaping crisis dynamics. Across the cases, escalation was repeatedly driven by mismatches between illocutionary intent and perlocutionary effect, failures of diplomatic recognition rooted in incompatible communicative repertoires, and translation-mediated reframing of meaning across linguistic and cultural boundaries.

By integrating speech act theory, pragmatics, practice theory, signaling theory, and translation studies, the article advances an interdisciplinary framework for analyzing international crises as communicative processes. Ambiguity can function as a stabilizing or destabilizing force depending on whether interlocutors share sufficient interpretive ground to recognize threats, reassurances, and commitments in broadly similar ways. Where such overlap was absent, ambiguity intensified mistrust and facilitated escalation.

The study also shows that diplomatic breakdown is a failure of recognition and uptake rather than simple information transmission. Diplomatic speech acts do not succeed solely by being uttered; they depend on alignment in genre, register, and audience expectations. Translation further emerges not as a neutral conduit but as an active dimension of crisis communication, reshaping illocutionary force, moral framing, and perceived intent across multilingual settings. Recognizing these linguistic and translational dynamics is essential to understanding how diplomatic crises are shaped and intensified in a multilingual political world.

These findings also yield practical implications for crisis communication. Governments and international organizations should use professional diplomatic interpreters during message formulation, conduct systematic back-translation of high-stakes statements, and release verified source-language and translated versions simultaneously. Negotiating parties should establish shared multilingual glossaries for contested legal and political terms, preserve secure backchannels for clarifying illocutionary intent, and adopt rapid correction procedures when mistranslation alters a message's perceived force. Intercultural pragmatic training for diplomats, spokespersons, and interpreters would further improve recognition of culturally specific metaphors, indirect threats, and face-saving conventions. These measures cannot eliminate strategic conflict, yet they can reduce the interpretive uncertainty through which political and material tensions become more difficult to manage.

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# Fairy-Tale Character Names and Sound Symbolism: An Experimental Study of Back and Front Vowels in Kazakh

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**Abstract**—This study aims to experimentally investigate how the sound-symbolic functions of back (low) and front (high) vowels are realized through the semantics of fairy-tale characters. The experiment was conducted online using the Google Forms platform and involved 55 participants. As research material, six short fairy-tale-like texts were used, each describing semantically opposed characters (e.g., a brave Lion vs. a cowardly Rabbit, a strong Wolf vs. a weak Calf). After each text, participants were presented with pairs of artificial words that were phonologically contrasted: forms dominated by back vowels versus forms dominated by front vowels (e.g., bobobo vs. bibibi). Participants were asked to rate how well each artificial word matched the given character on a 5-point ordinal scale (1–5). The collected data were analyzed in the R statistical computing environment using non-parametric statistical methods. The results demonstrate that the effect of sound symbolism varies depending on character semantics. Artificial words dominated by back vowels were consistently rated higher for characters associated with “bravery”, “strength”, and “largeness”, whereas forms dominated by front vowels were preferred for characters associated with “cowardice,” “weakness,” and “smallness”. These differences were statistically significant. In contrast, characters related to movement speed showed an asymmetrical sound-symbolic effect, while no significant differences between back and front vowels were observed for light–dark imagery or texture-based characters. Overall, the findings indicate that the sound-symbolic potential of back and front vowels is dependent on the specific character image and its semantic domain.

**Index Terms**—fairy-tale, characters, sound symbolism, vowels, folklore

## I. INTRODUCTION

The relationship between language and meaning has long been one of the central theoretical issues in linguistics. Although the arbitrariness of the linguistic sign was established as a fundamental principle within the classical structuralist tradition (Saussure, 1999), interdisciplinary research conducted over the past decades (Lockwood et al., 2016; Sidhu & Pexman, 2018; Johansson et al., 2020; Winter & Perlman, 2021) has demonstrated that this principle is not absolute. In particular, the field of sound symbolism (also referred to as phonetic iconicity), which investigates systematic relationships between sound and meaning, has provided substantial empirical evidence that linguistic signs are not entirely arbitrary (Monaghan et al., 2012).

Sound symbolism refers to the systematic association between specific phonetic units (sounds, syllables, or prosodic features) and particular semantic concepts or perceptual properties (Magnus, 2013). It has long been observed across many languages that back or low vowels tend to be associated with concepts such as largeness, heaviness, and strength, whereas front or high vowels are more often linked to smallness, weakness, and lightness (Wichmann et al., 2010; Haynie et al., 2014). Importantly, this phenomenon is not restricted to individual languages but appears as a recurrent cross-linguistic and cross-cultural tendency, suggesting a degree of universality.

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One of the earliest experimental demonstrations of sound symbolism is Köhler's (1929) well-known bouba–kiki experiment, which showed that rounded shapes are preferentially associated with words containing back or open vowels, while angular shapes are linked to words with front or close vowels (Ramachandran & Hubbard, 2001). Subsequent studies (Imai & Kita, 2014; Elsen, 2017) have extended these findings to a wide range of semantic domains, including size, texture, movement speed, emotion, and even social evaluation (Sidhu, 2025). Moreover, sound-symbolic effects have been observed not only in adults but also in children and even in pre-linguistic infants (Nielsen & Rendall, 2011; D'Onofrio, 2013; Ozturk et al., 2013).

Nevertheless, accumulating evidence suggests that the strength and consistency of sound symbolism are not uniform across all semantic domains (Khassenov et al., 2026). While the association appears robust and stable in domains such as size, strength, and weight, it tends to be weaker or more variable in abstract or culturally mediated domains, such as light–dark contrasts or moral evaluation. This observation highlights the need to conceptualize sound symbolism not merely as a universal phenomenon but as a system constrained by specific semantic and cognitive factors.

Another important direction in contemporary research involves investigating sound symbolism through artificial words rather than natural lexical items. Because artificial words lack conventional semantic content, participants' judgments rely solely on phonetic form, allowing researchers to isolate the direct relationship between sound and meaning. This approach enhances experimental control and increases the interpretability of the results.

Following this methodological framework, the present study aims to experimentally examine the symbolic functions of back and front vowels in Kazakh across different semantic domains. The use of fairy-tale-like texts in this study is not accidental. Fairy tales are rich in semantic oppositions, cognitively accessible, and culturally familiar narrative structures. Binary oppositions such as brave–cowardly, strong–weak, and big–small are particularly salient in fairy-tale discourse (Jung, 1991; Qondybai, 2020), making it an ideal context for testing sound-symbolic effects.

It is well known that fairy-tale characters are often referred to not by personal names but by generalized labels. In Tursunov's (2004) "Genesis of the Kazakh Domestic Fairy Tale", characters such as the giant, the orphan, or the khan are shown to form oppositional pairs (e.g., orphan vs. khan, youngest son vs. elder brothers, trickster vs. khan), even though they lack individual names. In the present study, we constructed fictional characters embodying dualistic concepts and developed fairy-tale-like plots accordingly (Agabekova et al., 2024). Based on our research hypothesis, the names associated with characters—reflecting their traits and attributes—may carry sound-symbolic meaning. This assumption is grounded in the widely held view that sound symbolism played a particularly significant role in proto-language.

We hypothesize that the symbolic functions of back and front vowels are directly dependent on semantic domain. In concrete and perceptually salient domains such as strength, bravery, and size, artificial words dominated by back vowels are expected to receive systematically higher ratings, whereas in domains associated with weakness, smallness, and lightness, forms dominated by front vowels should be preferred. Confirming this hypothesis would suggest that sound symbolism in Kazakh aligns with universal tendencies observed in other languages. Notably, experimental studies of this kind have not previously been conducted in Kazakh. Although some research on sound symbolism exists (Khassenov, 2021), the interaction between fairy-tale narratives, character semantics, and the phonetic form of character names has not yet been explored.

Therefore, this study argues for treating sound symbolism not merely as a phonetic phenomenon but as a multi-layered system situated at the intersection of semantics, cognition, and discourse. The symbolic potential of back and front vowels may be activated or attenuated depending on character imagery, semantic domain, and contextual framing. In this sense, the findings contribute to a deeper understanding of the nature of language and help delineate the actual boundaries of the relationship between sound and meaning.

## II. METHODOLOGY

### A. Participants

A total of 55 participants took part in the study. All participants were adult native speakers of Kazakh, aged between 18 and 66 years (mean age = 41). Participation was voluntary, and informed consent was obtained through participation in the online questionnaire. The study was conducted anonymously, and no personally identifiable information was collected.

### B. Stimulus Texts

Six short fairy-tale-like texts were used as experimental stimuli. Each text presented characters or entities structured around a clear binary semantic opposition relevant to sound symbolism (e.g., brave–cowardly, fast–slow, light–dark, strong–weak, smooth–rough, big–small).

#### 1. *The Brave Lion and the Cowardly Rabbit*

Long ago, in a time when humans and animals spoke the same language, there was a sacred land between the endless steppe and the dense forest where great animals lived. In this land, the sunlight was especially warm, and the night breeze was gentle. The animals did not treat one another as enemies and each continued its life in peace.

At the center of the steppe lived a mighty lion. His mane was golden, his voice thundered like lightning, and his steps made the ground tremble. Yet the lion never used his strength against the weak. He revealed his power only when order was broken, acting as a protector of the vulnerable. For this reason, the animals called him the Guardian of the Steppe.



In one corner of the forest lived a small rabbit. His eyes were wide, his ears long, and his heart was constantly filled with fear. Every sound seemed dangerous to him; even the rustling of leaves made him hide in his burrow. The animals did not mock him, but they were surprised by the depth of his fear.

One day, a severe drought struck the land, and a fire broke out in the steppe. Red flames moved toward the forest, and the animals were overcome with panic. Some ran east, others west, but no one knew what to do.

At that moment, the lion climbed onto a high rock and roared:

“Stop! If everyone runs in different directions, we will all perish! Follow me to the river!”

The animals followed him. The rabbit, though terrified, ran after the lion as well. Along the way, he stopped many times, but whenever he looked back and saw the flames approaching, he forced himself to move again.

In the end, they all reached the river and survived. After the fire subsided, the animals bowed to the lion. At that moment, the lion turned to the rabbit and said:

“Even though you were afraid, you did not stop. Bravery is not the absence of fear, but moving forward despite fear.”

## 2. *The Fast Eagle and the Slow Tortoise*

Long ago, when the earth and the sky still shared their secrets, living beings dwelled in harmony between the wide steppe and the towering mountains. In this land lived a majestic eagle who ruled the sky. He soared high, vanished from sight in an instant, and reached distant places with great speed. The eagle considered himself a symbol of freedom and believed he was faster than the wind itself.

Below, among springs and green grass, lived a tortoise. His movement was slow, his steps heavy, but every motion was deliberate. He never hurried, yet he always completed what he began.

One day, a harsh drought struck the land. Rivers shrank, springs dried up, and the animals grew anxious in search of water. From high above, the eagle spotted a glimmer of water at the foot of a distant cliff and cried:

“I will reach it first!”

He flew swiftly and arrived quickly, but the water turned out to be only a temporary puddle left by rain, which soon dried up.

The tortoise, sensing moisture in the ground, slowly scraped the soil and discovered the source of an old spring. When water emerged from beneath the earth, he called the other animals.

The animals were saved from thirst. At that moment, the eagle acknowledged that the saying “slow and steady wins the race” was indeed true.

## 3. *The Bright Sun and the Dark Cave*

Long ago, when the earth and the sky could still listen to one another, two powerful places existed in the vast land. One was the Bright Sun in the sky, and the other was the Dark Cave inside the mountain.

Every morning, the Sun poured out its golden rays, awakening the earth and giving life to all beings. Wherever its light touched, flowers bloomed and birds sang. Humans and animals alike regarded it as the source of life.

Inside the mountain, the Cave was filled with darkness. No light entered it; it was cool and silent. Yet within that darkness lay ancient secrets, underground waters, and the strength of stone. Those who saw the Cave were afraid, but for bats and insects it was a safe shelter.

One year, intense heat scorched the steppe, and the land began to burn. The Sun gave its light without restraint, yet life started to weaken. The animals fled to the mountains and hid in the Cave. Its coolness saved them.

Seeing this, the Sun realized that even light has its limits. The Cave, in turn, understood that without light, nothing can grow.

## 4. *The Strong Wolf and the Weak Calf*

Long ago, on a steppe stretching to the horizon, wild animals and domestic animals grazed in the same pasture. There lived a powerful wolf with well-defined muscles. His run was swift, his teeth sharp, and his voice terrifying. He believed himself to be the strongest of all animals.

In the same pasture wandered a young, weak calf. His steps were unsteady, his voice faint, and he was unable to defend himself. He always lagged behind the herd.

One day, a fierce snowstorm struck, and the cold intensified across the steppe. The animals searched for shelter. The wolf found a cave, but it was narrow. The calf stood outside, shivering with cold.

At that moment, the wolf shared his cave and let the calf inside. Together, they survived the storm. Then the wolf realized that strength lies not only in muscles, but also in compassion.

## 5. *The Smooth Lake and the Rough Rock*

Long ago, when mountains and rivers could speak to one another, a Smooth Lake and a Rough Rock lived at the foot of a high peak.

The surface of the lake was smooth like a mirror, gently rippling even when the wind blew. Anyone who looked into it could see their reflection clearly. The Rock, by contrast, was rough and jagged, with sharp edges that seemed capable of wounding anyone who touched it.

One day, a violent storm broke out and heavy rain fell. Water flowed down the mountain, slid over the Rock, and eventually poured into the Lake. The Rock obstructed the water, while the Lake received it and calmed it.

## 6. *The Big Tree and the Small Wind*

Long ago, when humans and animals spoke the same language, there was a remarkable forest in the great steppe. In this forest stood a giant tree. Its trunk was thick, its branches reached the sky, and its leaves shaded the land below. When it rained, water gathered at its roots; when the sun shone, all animals gathered in its shade.

The animals called it the Great Tree. It was the heart of the forest. Birds built nests in its crown, wolves rested beneath it, and foxes hid among its roots.

One day, a small wind arrived from afar. It was weak and thin, blowing only in whispers. It tried to move the leaves of the Great Tree, but the tree did not stir. The wind became offended.

“I am small, but I am alive,” said the wind.

“And I am big, but I remain silent,” replied the tree.

Days passed. Autumn came. The Great Tree grew heavy and began to shed its leaves. Then the small wind grew stronger, running around and scattering the fallen leaves. It blew sometimes fast, sometimes slow. The tree creaked.

Finally, when winter arrived, one branch of the giant tree broke. The wind became faster than ever. Though small, it realized that it could move everything.

All texts were specifically constructed to activate semantic domains commonly associated with sound symbolism and were comparable in length, narrative structure, and stylistic simplicity.

### C. *Experimental Tool and Procedure*

The experiment was conducted online using the Google Forms platform. The questionnaire structure was identical for all participants.

Each participant read the six fairy-tale texts in a fixed order. After each text, participants were presented with pairs of artificial (nonce) words designed to be phonologically contrasted while lacking any lexical meaning.

The artificial words were grouped into two phonetic types:

- Back-vowel-dominant forms (e.g., momono, bobobo, patata),
- Front-vowel-dominant forms (e.g., mimini, bibibi, kipiti).

These nonce words were selected to ensure that participant judgments were based solely on phonetic structure rather than semantic associations.

### D. *Rating Scale*

Participants evaluated how well each artificial word matched the given character or image using a 5-point Likert-type scale:

- 1 – does not match at all
- 2 – weak match
- 3 – neutral
- 4 – good match
- 5 – very good match

Thus, each participant provided a numerical rating for each artificial word associated with each fairy-tale scenario.

### E. *Variables*

The primary independent variable was phonetic structure (back-vowel-dominant vs. front-vowel-dominant forms).

The dependent variable was the matching rating provided by participants on the 1–5 ordinal scale.

For additional analysis, a median difference score was calculated to quantify the contrast between back- and front-vowel forms ( $\Delta = \text{median\_back} - \text{median\_front}$ ).

### F. *Statistical Analysis*

Because the ratings were measured on an ordinal scale, non-parametric statistical methods were applied. Differences between back-vowel and front-vowel forms were tested separately for each semantic opposition using the Wilcoxon signed-rank test.

Results were summarized using medians, standard deviations (SD), and p-values. Statistical significance was set at  $p < 0.05$ . All analyses were conducted in the R statistical computing environment.

### G. *Ethical Considerations*

All ethical standards for human-subject research were fully observed. Participants were informed about the purpose of the study, participation was voluntary, and responses were collected anonymously.

## III. RESULTS

This section presents the experimental results based on the semantics of fairy-tale characters. The analysis focused on the matching ratings assigned to artificial words dominated by back versus front vowels across different character types. Because all ratings were collected on a 1–5 ordinal scale, the data were analyzed using non-parametric methods in the R statistical computing environment. The results make it possible to identify differences in the evaluation of back- and front-vowel forms across semantic oppositions, as well as to assess the extent to which these differences depend on character

type. Below, the comparative results are presented in sequence for strength–weakness, size, movement speed, light–dark, and textural imagery.

#### A. Results for *The Brave Lion and the Cowardly Rabbit*

The statistical analysis clearly demonstrated a systematic association between vowel quality (back vs. front) and character semantics (Table 1).

TABLE 1  
STATISTICAL RESULTS

| No | Character              | Median_momono | Median_mimini | SD_momono | SD_mimini | Median_delta | p_value |
|----|------------------------|---------------|---------------|-----------|-----------|--------------|---------|
| 1  | <i>Brave Lion</i>      | 4             | 1             | 1.49      | 1.25      | 3            | <0.001  |
| 2  | <i>Cowardly Rabbit</i> | 2             | 4             | 1.27      | 1.42      | -1           | <0.001  |
| 3  | Delta comparison       | NA            | NA            | NA        | NA        | NA           | <0.001  |

The brave Lion character was rated significantly higher with the back-vowel-dominant form (momono) than with the front-vowel-dominant form (mimini) (Median = 4 vs. 1;  $p < 0.001$ ). This result provides strong evidence that back vowels are associated with concepts of strength, bravery, and largeness.

In contrast, the Cowardly Rabbit character showed the opposite pattern: the front-vowel-dominant form (mimini) received significantly higher ratings than the back-vowel form (momono) (Median = 4 vs. 2;  $p < 0.001$ ). This finding indicates a close association between front vowels and semantic attributes such as weakness, smallness, and cowardice.

A comparison of the median differences between back- and front-vowel forms ( $\Delta = \text{back} - \text{front}$ ) further confirmed that the effect is dependent on character type. For the Brave Lion, the difference was positive ( $\Delta = +3$ ), whereas for the Cowardly Rabbit, the difference was negative ( $\Delta = -1$ ). This contrast was statistically highly significant ( $p < 0.001$ ).

Overall, these results indicate that back and front vowels function not merely as phonetic features but as sound-symbolic cues that reflect the semantic characteristics of fairy-tale characters.

#### B. Results for *the Strong Wolf and the Weak Calf*

The statistical data likewise revealed a systematic relationship between vowel quality and character representation within the strength–weakness semantic domain (Table 2).

TABLE 2  
STATISTICAL RESULTS

| No | Character          | Median_bobobo | Median_bibibi | SD_bobobo | SD_bibibi | Median_delta | p_value |
|----|--------------------|---------------|---------------|-----------|-----------|--------------|---------|
| 1  | <i>Strong Wolf</i> | 4             | 2             | 1.64      | 1.27      | 1            | < 0.001 |
| 2  | <i>Weak Calf</i>   | 2             | 4             | 1.37      | 1.58      | -1           | 0.00242 |
| 3  | Delta comparison   | NA            | NA            | NA        | NA        | NA           | < 0.001 |

For the Strong Wolf character, the back-vowel-dominant form (bobobo) was rated significantly higher than the front-vowel-dominant form (bibibi) (Median = 4 vs. 2; SD = 1.64 and 1.27, respectively;  $p < 0.001$ ). This result supports the association of back vowels with powerful, forceful, and potentially aggressive character traits.

By contrast, for the Weak Calf character, the front-vowel-dominant form (bibibi) received significantly higher ratings than the back-vowel form (bobobo) (Median = 4 vs. 2; SD = 1.58 and 1.37, respectively;  $p = 0.002$ ). This pattern indicates a strong link between front vowels and semantic attributes such as weakness, softness, and vulnerability.

The comparison of median differences ( $\Delta = \text{back} - \text{front}$ ) again confirmed the dependence of the effect on character type: a positive difference was observed for the Strong Wolf ( $\Delta = +1$ ), while a negative difference was found for the Weak Calf ( $\Delta = -1$ ). This contrast was statistically significant ( $p < 0.001$ ).

#### C. *The Fast Eagle and the Slow Tortoise*

For the Fast Eagle character, the front-vowel-dominant form (titiki) received higher ratings than the back-vowel-dominant form (totoko); however, this difference did not reach statistical significance ( $p = 0.11$ ). This result suggests that the sound-symbolic encoding of speed is relatively weak and variable (Table 3).

TABLE 3  
STATISTICAL RESULTS

| No | Character            | Median_titiki | Median_totoko | SD_titiki | SD_totoko | Median_delta | p_value |
|----|----------------------|---------------|---------------|-----------|-----------|--------------|---------|
| 1  | <i>Fast Eagle</i>    | 3             | 2             | 1.65      | 1.33      | 0            | 0.11    |
| 2  | <i>Slow Tortoise</i> | 2             | 4             | 1.23      | 1.51      | -2           | <0.001  |
| 3  | Delta comparison     | NA            | NA            | NA        | NA        | NA           | <0.001  |

In contrast, for the Slow Tortoise character, the back-vowel-dominant form (totoko) was rated significantly higher than the front-vowel form (titiki), and this difference was statistically highly significant ( $p < 0.001$ ). These findings are

consistent with previous research. The back vowel /o/ has been associated with meanings such as slowness, gradualness, and roundness, which appear to align well with the tortoise character.

The comparison of differences between back and front vowels (Delta comparison) further confirmed that this sound-symbolic effect is dependent on character semantics ( $p < 0.001$ ).

#### D. *The Bright Sun and the Dark Cave*

In myths and fairy tales, the light–dark contrast represents one of the most salient semantic oppositions, often underlying antonymic pairs such as good–evil and day–night. According to the hypothesis, concepts related to light are expected to be associated with front vowels, whereas back vowels are assumed to be linked to darkness (Ludwig et al., 2011).

However, the results of the present study did not support this prediction. For the Bright Sun character, the difference between the front-vowel-dominant form (pitiki) and the back-vowel-dominant form (potoko) was not statistically significant (Median = 3 vs. 4; SD = 1.47 vs. 1.71;  $p = 0.119$ ) (Table 4).

TABLE 4  
STATISTICAL RESULTS

| N <sup>o</sup> | Character        | Median pitiki | Median potoko | SD pitiki | SD potoko | Median delta | p value |
|----------------|------------------|---------------|---------------|-----------|-----------|--------------|---------|
| 1              | Bright Sun       | 3             | 4             | 1.47      | 1.71      | -1           | 0.119   |
| 2              | Dark Cave        | 2             | 3             | 1.65      | 1.54      | 0            | 0.278   |
| 3              | Delta comparison | NA            | NA            | NA        | NA        | NA           | 0.628   |

Similarly, for the Dark Cave character, no statistically significant difference was observed between the front-vowel (pitiki) and back-vowel (potoko) forms (Median = 2 vs. 3; SD = 1.65 vs. 1.54;  $p = 0.278$ ). The Delta comparison also indicated that the sound-symbolic effect in this semantic opposition was not systematic ( $p = 0.628$ ).

Overall, these findings indicate that the symbolic functions of back and front vowels are not equally activated across all semantic domains. In particular, for abstract concepts such as light and darkness, sound-symbolic encoding appears to be weak and highly variable. This outcome contrasts with several previous studies, which have reported systematic associations between front vowels and lightness, and back vowels and darkness. In the present experiment, however, no such clear distinction emerged for the light–dark opposition.

#### E. *The Smooth Lake and the Rough Rock*

For textural imagery, clear differences were observed in the perception of back-vowel (Rorora) and front-vowel (Rereri) forms. For the Smooth Lake character, the median rating of the back-vowel form (Rorora; Median = 3) was higher than that of the front-vowel form (Rereri; Median = 2), and this difference was statistically significant (Wilcoxon signed-rank test,  $p = 0.039$ ). This result suggests that back vowels evoke relatively stronger associations with smooth textures (Table 5).

TABLE 5  
STATISTICAL RESULTS

| N <sup>o</sup> | Character        | Median popora | Median pereri | SD popora | SD pereri | Median delta | p value |
|----------------|------------------|---------------|---------------|-----------|-----------|--------------|---------|
| 1              | Smooth Lake      | 3             | 2             | 1.26      | 1.27      | 0            | 0.03866 |
| 2              | Rough Rock       | 3             | 2             | 1.47      | 1.35      | -1           | 0.00103 |
| 3              | Delta comparison | NA            | NA            | NA        | NA        | NA           | 0.07704 |

A similar pattern was found for the Rough Rock character: the back-vowel form (Rorora; Median = 3) was rated higher than the front-vowel form (Pereri; Median = 2), with a highly significant difference ( $p = 0.001$ ). This indicates that rough and coarse textures are more strongly associated with back vowels in participants' perceptions.

However, when comparing the magnitude of the vowel-based differences (delta) between the smooth and rough conditions, no statistically significant difference was found ( $p = 0.077$ ). Thus, although an overall preference for back vowels was observed in both textural conditions, the strength of the sound-symbolic effect did not systematically increase or decrease within the textural domain. These results suggest that back vowels are associated with both smooth and rough textures, but that the relative strength of this association varies across specific textural contexts.

#### F. *The Big Tree and the Small Wind*

In the Big Tree – Small Wind opposition, the symbolic evaluation of back and front vowels revealed clear and statistically significant differences (Table 6).

TABLE 6  
STATISTICAL RESULTS

| N <sup>o</sup> | Character        | Median kipiti | Median patata | SD kipiti | SD patata | Median delta | p value |
|----------------|------------------|---------------|---------------|-----------|-----------|--------------|---------|
| 1              | Big Tree         | 2             | 3             | 1.14      | 1.44      | -1           | < 0.001 |
| 2              | Small Wind       | 4             | 3             | 1.41      | 1.34      | 1            | 0.00128 |
| 3              | Delta comparison | NA            | NA            | NA        | NA        | NA           | < 0.001 |

For the Big Tree character, the back-vowel form (patata) was rated significantly higher than the front-vowel form (kipiti) (Median = 3 vs. 2; Wilcoxon paired test,  $p < 0.001$ ). This finding supports the association between back vowels and large, heavy, and stable objects.

Conversely, for the Small Wind character, the front-vowel form (kipiti) received significantly higher ratings than the back-vowel form (patata) (Median = 4 vs. 3;  $p = 0.00128$ ). This result highlights a strong association between front vowels and small, light, and dynamic phenomena.

The Delta comparison demonstrated that the direction of the effect was opposite for the two characters and that the contrast between them was highly significant ( $p < 0.001$ ).

Overall, these results provide strong evidence that back vowels are systematically associated with largeness, whereas front vowels are linked to smallness, confirming that sound symbolism is robust and stable in the domain of size semantics.

#### IV. DISCUSSION

The present study experimentally examined the sound-symbolic functions of back and front vowels across different semantic oppositions. The results demonstrate that the effects of sound symbolism do not manifest uniformly across all semantic domains, but instead emerge systematically in some domains while remaining weak or absent in others. The discussion below is based exclusively on the empirical findings obtained in the experiment.

From a theoretical perspective, these findings align with cross-linguistic research on sound symbolism, which has repeatedly shown that low or back vowels tend to be associated with concepts such as largeness, heaviness, and strength, whereas high or front vowels are more often linked to smallness, lightness, and weakness (Wichmann et al., 2010; Sidhu & Pexman, 2018). One possible explanation for this pattern is articulatory and perceptual: the production of back vowels involves a lower tongue position and a wider oral cavity, which may perceptually correlate with the conceptual domain of largeness or strength. In contrast, front vowels are produced with a higher tongue position and a narrower oral cavity, which may evoke associations with smaller or lighter entities. The present results therefore support the view that sound symbolism is grounded in both articulatory and perceptual mechanisms.

First, the results related to strength and bravery semantics reveal a clear and robust pattern. For the Brave Lion and Strong Wolf characters, artificial words dominated by back vowels were rated significantly higher than front-vowel-dominant forms ( $p < 0.001$ ). Conversely, for the opposing characters—the Cowardly Rabbit and the Weak Calf—front-vowel-dominant forms received significantly higher ratings. These findings provide strong evidence that back and front vowels are associated in opposite directions with semantic attributes such as strength versus weakness. Moreover, the systematic reversal of the median difference values ( $\Delta$ ) across character types confirms that this effect is not random but tightly linked to character semantics.

A similar pattern was observed for size-related semantics. In the Big Tree condition, the back-vowel-dominant form was rated higher, whereas in the Small Wind condition, the front-vowel-dominant form showed a statistically significant advantage ( $p < 0.001$ ). In this domain, the correspondence between back–large and front–small was clearly expressed in both directions. The highly significant Delta comparison further indicates that sound symbolism operates in a stable and consistent manner in the domain of size semantics.

In contrast, the results for movement speed were less uniform. For the Fast Eagle character, the median rating of the front-vowel-dominant form was higher than that of the back-vowel form; however, this difference did not reach statistical significance ( $p = 0.11$ ). By comparison, for the Slow Tortoise character, the back-vowel-dominant form was rated significantly higher ( $p < 0.001$ ). These findings suggest an asymmetrical pattern in the sound-symbolic encoding of speed: while slowness shows a stable association with back vowels, no comparable systematic pattern emerges for fast movement.

No sound-symbolic effect was observed for the light–dark semantic opposition. For both the Bright Sun and the Dark Cave characters, no statistically significant differences were found between back- and front-vowel-dominant forms ( $p > 0.1$ ). The Delta comparison likewise failed to reach significance ( $p = 0.628$ ). Within the scope of the present material, these results indicate the absence of a systematic relationship between the light–dark semantic contrast and the back–front vowel opposition.

The findings for texture-related imagery showed partial regularities. For both the Smooth Lake and the Rough Rock characters, back-vowel-dominant forms were rated significantly higher than front-vowel-dominant forms ( $p = 0.039$  and  $p = 0.001$ , respectively). However, the comparison of the magnitude of the vowel-based differences between smooth and rough textures did not yield a statistically significant result ( $p = 0.077$ ). This suggests that although back vowels show a general advantage in texture-related evaluations, the strength of the sound-symbolic effect does not systematically increase or decrease within the textural domain itself.

Taken together, the results clearly demonstrate that the effect of sound symbolism is dependent on semantic domain. Domains such as strength, weakness, and size show stable and consistent oppositions between back and front vowels, whereas domains such as speed, light–dark contrast, and texture display weaker, asymmetrical, or non-systematic patterns. In addition, Figure 1 presents the distribution of ratings for each artificial word using violin plots.

An additional factor that may influence these associations is the phonological structure of the Kazakh language itself. Kazakh is characterized by a strong system of vowel harmony that systematically distinguishes front and back vowel classes. Native speakers are therefore highly sensitive to this phonological opposition in their linguistic experience. It is possible that this sensitivity reinforces the perceptual salience of front–back vowel contrasts in experimental tasks such

as the present study. In this sense, the observed sound-symbolic patterns may reflect not only universal tendencies but also language-specific phonological structures (Iskakov, 1991; Khassenov & Ibraimova, 2025).

The distributions indicate that artificial words containing back vowels (momono, potoko, rorora, bobobo, totoko, patata) generally received higher median ratings. For these forms, the bulk of the ratings clustered in the middle-to-high range of the scale (3–5). In contrast, artificial words dominated by front vowels (mimini, pitiki, rereri, bibibi, titiki, kipiti) tended to receive ratings concentrated in the lower-to-middle range (1–3) (Fig. 1).

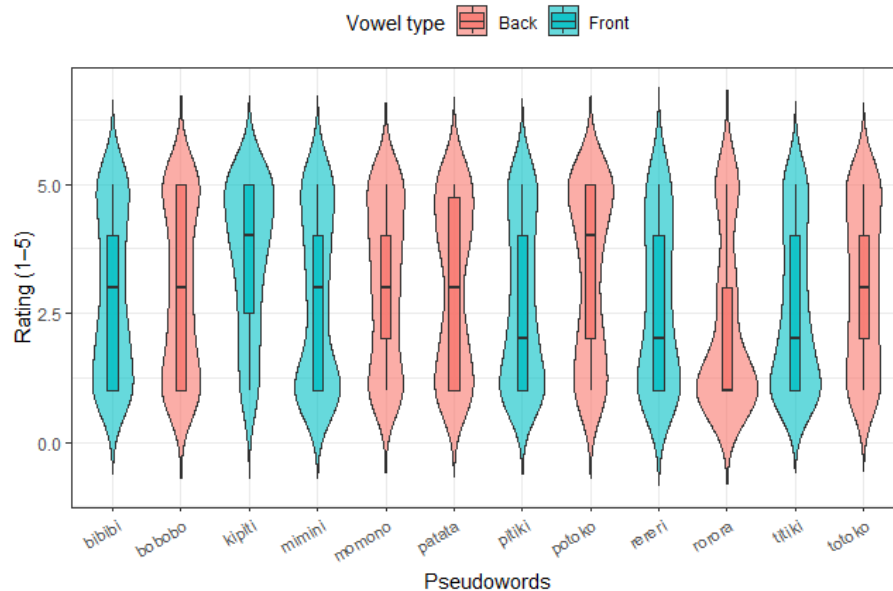


Figure 1. Distribution of Ratings Given to Artificial Words With Thick/Back and Thin/Front Vowels (Violin Plot)

The violin plots further demonstrate that the distinction between back and front vowels is preserved at the level of individual artificial words. Although the distributional shapes differ across stimuli, the direction of the medians consistently indicates higher ratings for back-vowel forms and relatively lower ratings for front-vowel forms. This pattern confirms that the observed differences are not driven by isolated stimuli but reflect a general trend across the entire set of artificial words.

Finally, these findings suggest that sound symbolism may play a particularly important role in the naming of primordial oppositions underlying mythological and fairy-tale discourse. It is well known that characters in ancient myths and fairy tales are often referred to by generalized labels rather than individual names (e.g., the trickster, the poor man, the rich man, the youth). The dualistic nature of fairy tales—manifested in oppositions such as day–night, light–dark, strong–weak, and big–small—appears to align naturally with sound-symbolic patterns. Previous research has shown that in certain Kazakh fairy tales, phonetic elements within character names encode semantic contrasts such as plurality versus singularity or strength versus weakness, in direct correspondence with both character roles and narrative structure. The present study similarly demonstrates that the dualistic structure of fairy-tale narratives aligns closely with sound-symbolic encoding, pointing to the deep historical roots of this phenomenon.

## V. CONCLUSION

This study experimentally examined the sound-symbolic functions of back and front vowels across different semantic domains. An online experiment conducted via the Google Forms platform involved 55 participants, who evaluated the degree of correspondence between fairy-tale-based characters and artificial words using a 5-point ordinal scale. The collected data were analyzed in the R statistical computing environment using non-parametric methods.

The results demonstrate that the effect of sound symbolism does not manifest uniformly across all semantic oppositions. In domains related to strength, weakness, and size, the evaluation of back- and front-vowel-dominant forms consistently followed opposing patterns. Artificial words dominated by back vowels received higher ratings for strong, brave, and large characters, whereas front-vowel-dominant forms were preferred for weak, fearful, and small characters. In these domains, the observed differences were statistically significant.

The findings for movement speed revealed an asymmetrical pattern. While back vowels showed a statistically significant advantage in representations of slow movement, no significant difference between back and front vowels emerged in the domain of speed. In the light–dark semantic opposition and in some texture-related conditions, the sound-symbolic effect appeared weak or inconsistent.

Overall, the results indicate that the sound-symbolic potential of back and front vowels is strongly dependent on semantic domain. In concrete and perceptually salient domains, sound-symbolic effects are robust and systematic,

whereas in more abstract or cognitively complex domains, these effects tend to weaken or disappear altogether. Thus, the present study provides experimental evidence for the manifestation of sound symbolism in Kazakh and helps delineate the conditions under which sound–meaning correspondences are most likely to emerge.

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# Narrating Inequality: Social Criticism, Power Structures, and Moral Crisis in Ayu Utami's *Saman*

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**Abstract**—Social phenomena in Indonesia continue to reflect social inequality, human rights violations, and gender injustice despite advances in technology and freedom of expression. This study examines the forms of social criticism represented in Ayu Utami's novel *Saman*, focusing on poverty, crime, family disorganization, violation of norms, and environmental degradation. The study employs a qualitative descriptive design using a sociocritical or literary-sociological approach, which views literary texts as reflections of the interaction between the author and social reality. The data consist of excerpts from the novel that represent social phenomena. Data were collected through close reading and systematic note-taking, then classified based on Soekanto's categories of social criticism. Data validity was ensured through bibliographic triangulation and citation consistency checks. The analysis was conducted descriptively and interpretively to reveal the social messages and human values contained in the novel. The findings show that *Saman* strongly voices social inequality and the failure of social systems in protecting society, as seen in the portrayal of poverty, crime and sexual violence against women, family disorganization, violations of legal and social norms, and environmental damage caused by forced plantation clearing. This study enriches the understanding of social criticism in Indonesian literature and demonstrates how literary works function as a medium of moral and social reflection, encouraging awareness of justice, humanity, and social responsibility.

**Index Terms**—social criticism, novel *Saman*, Ayu Utami, literary sociology

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## I. INTRODUCTION

Social life in Indonesia continues to reflect a complex tension between modernization and persistent structural inequality. Although technological development and wider opportunities for public expression indicate social progress, many fundamental problems remain unresolved, including economic disparity, human rights violations, and gender injustice (Apriani & Fikriana, 2023). This contradiction demonstrates that material advancement does not necessarily correspond with moral development. In many cases, rapid transformation coexists with discrimination, repression, and unequal access to social resources, revealing enduring imbalances of power and humanitarian concern.

Literature provides a significant medium through which such contradictions may be represented, interpreted, and contested. As an aesthetic expression shaped by thought, emotion, and imagination, literature communicates human experience through meaningful language (Habinek, 2023; Sapiro, 2016; Shim, 2022). Beyond its artistic function, literature also conveys moral reflection, cultural memory, and social criticism (Pamungkas et al., 2024). Through genres such as poetry, drama, and prose, literary works deepen public understanding of existential and social realities while contributing to broader intellectual discourse (Dzikrulloh et al., 2022; Pamungkas, 2021; Prameswari & Fauzan, 2025; Prameswari & Pamungkas, 2024).

As a reflection of human life, literature frequently records and critiques the conditions of the society from which it emerges (Ratna, 2004). Authors often articulate responses to injustice, inequality, and moral crisis through narrative form (Lizé, 2016; Vána, 2020). One of the most influential Indonesian novels in this regard is *Saman* by Ayu Utami. The novel addresses issues that remain highly relevant in contemporary Indonesia, including the oppression of marginalized communities, abuse of authority, moral hypocrisy, and gender inequality. These concerns are not incidental narrative elements, but central critiques of Indonesian social reality from the late New Order period to the Reform era.

This study adopts the perspective of literary sociology, which understands literary texts as products of dynamic interaction between authors and their surrounding social world (Al-Ma'ruf & Nugrahani, 2020). Literary works do not emerge in a social vacuum; rather, they are shaped by historical, political, economic, and cultural contexts (Ratna, 2004; Vána, 2020). Through this lens, researchers may identify embedded values, ideological tensions, and forms of resistance expressed in narrative discourse. Social criticism in literature can therefore be understood as an authorial response to problems such as injustice, oppression, poverty, greed, and moral disorder (Faruk, 2012; Andani et al., 2022; Novitasari, 2021; Salim & Sukendro, 2021; Pamungkas, 2021; Pamungkas & Pamungkas, 2024; Simbolon et al., 2024).

According to Soekanto and Sulistyowati (2012), major social problems commonly include poverty, crime, family disorganization, violations of social norms, environmental degradation, and other structural disruptions. Previous studies have explored these issues in Indonesian fiction, including works by Sriwahyuni and Asri (2020), Dewi (2023), and Febrilian et al. (2022), who demonstrate that novels often function as vehicles of social awareness and critique. Building on this scholarship, the present study examines *Saman* through five dimensions of social criticism: poverty, crime, family disorganization, violations of social norms, and environmental damage. By applying this framework, the article seeks to clarify how Ayu Utami constructs literary resistance to inequality and why *Saman* remains relevant to contemporary debates on justice, power, and humanity in Indonesia.

## II. METHODOLOGY

Before the formal analysis was conducted, the novel was read comprehensively to develop a full understanding of its narrative structure and social context. This process enabled the researcher to interpret the events, characters, and narrative situations in relation to the framework of social criticism proposed by Soekanto. Particular attention was given to the conceptual categories within Soekanto's theory to ensure that the identification and interpretation of characters' actions corresponded appropriately to the relevant dimensions of social criticism. Such a preliminary understanding facilitated a more systematic process of data coding and meaning interpretation.

This study employs a qualitative descriptive method informed by a sociocritical, or literary-sociological, approach. The analysis is grounded in five dimensions of social criticism formulated by Soekanto—namely poverty, crime, family disorganization, norms violation, and environmental damage—to explore how social inequalities and societal dynamics are represented in the novel *Saman* (Soekanto & Sulistyowati, 2012, p. 321).

Qualitative descriptive research emphasizes the collection of factual and contextual information in order to provide an in-depth account of the phenomenon under study. This approach aims to achieve a comprehensive understanding of social and human realities by interpreting meanings embedded in events, actions, and interactions within everyday contexts. Unlike quantitative research, qualitative descriptive research does not rely on numerical data or statistical analysis, but instead focuses on rich narrative descriptions that are interpreted in relation to relevant theoretical frameworks. The data in this study were obtained from documentary sources and analyzed within their natural context in order to produce a comprehensive and representative depiction of the research object (Prameswari & Pamungkas, 2024; Ulfatin, 2022).

Accordingly, the data consisted of verbal units—words, sentences, and paragraphs, that represented the social phenomena examined in this study. In the context of this study, the data consist of textual excerpts from the novel *Saman* that depict various forms of social inequality in accordance with the theoretical framework of social criticism applied in the analysis. The categories of social problems examined include (1) poverty, (2) crime, (3) family disorganization, (4)

violations of social norms, and (5) environmental damage. These data were obtained through an intensive reading of the novel to identify textual segments that represent forms of social criticism.

Data were collected through close reading and systematic note-taking. The reading process involved a careful examination of the entire content of the novel *Saman* to identify textual passages relevant to the research focus. Subsequently, important excerpt containing elements of social criticism were systematically recorded according to the categories derived from Soekanto's theoretical framework. These recorded excerpts were then used as analytical material to identify and interpret forms of social criticism that reflect the social realities portrayed in the novel (Harliyana & Shella, 2020).

The data were analyzed using a descriptive-analytical method. This method aims to describe the facts or phenomena presented in literary works and subsequently conduct a deeper interpretative analysis. From a linguistic and interpretative perspective, this approach does not merely describe the data but also seeks to provide a broader explanation of the meanings embedded within them. The analytical process begins with data reduction, which involves identifying, selecting, and categorizing textual data relevant to Soekanto's theory of social criticism. Data that do not correspond to the theoretical framework are excluded to maintain the focus of the research. The selected data are then organized into narrative descriptions that illustrate the social problems represented in Ayu Utami's *Saman*. In the subsequent stage, the data are analyzed using a sociocritical perspective to reveal the messages and social values that function as sources of tension and critique toward societal realities. Finally, conclusions were drawn to ensure that the findings remained relevant to the research focus and analytically grounded (Ratna, 2004, p. 53).

Furthermore, the data used in this study were obtained through a selective process aligned with the research focus. Theoretical references were collected through a literature review of relevant sources, including books, academic journals, theses, and credible online publications, in order to establish a solid theoretical foundation. Data collection and processing were conducted using a coding technique in which each textual finding was assigned an abbreviated code corresponding to Soekanto's categories of social criticism. These codes include: 1) poverty (PV/SM/page), 2) crime (CR/SM/page), 3) family disorganization (FD/SM/page), 4) norm violation (NV/SM/page), and 5) environmental damage (ED/SM/page).

In this coding system, "SM" refers to *Saman*, the novel serving as the primary data source. The page number indicates the location of the excerpt within the text, while each component of the code is separated by a slash (/) to facilitate readability and data organization. For example, the following excerpt is coded as: "More than five unidentified bodies are found every week in the South Sumatra area, perhaps. Two or three are women. Among them, there are often those who have been raped. What is the difficulty of finding a decaying corpse and putting it in a ditch?" (CR/SM/37).

### III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the findings derived from the close reading and systematic recording of data from Ayu Utami's novel *Saman*. All identified excerpts were classified according to the categories of social criticism, such as 1) poverty, 2) crime, 3) family disorganization, 4) norms violation, and 5) environmental damage (Soekanto & Sulistyowati, 2012, p. 319) as illustrated in the conceptual map in Figure 1.

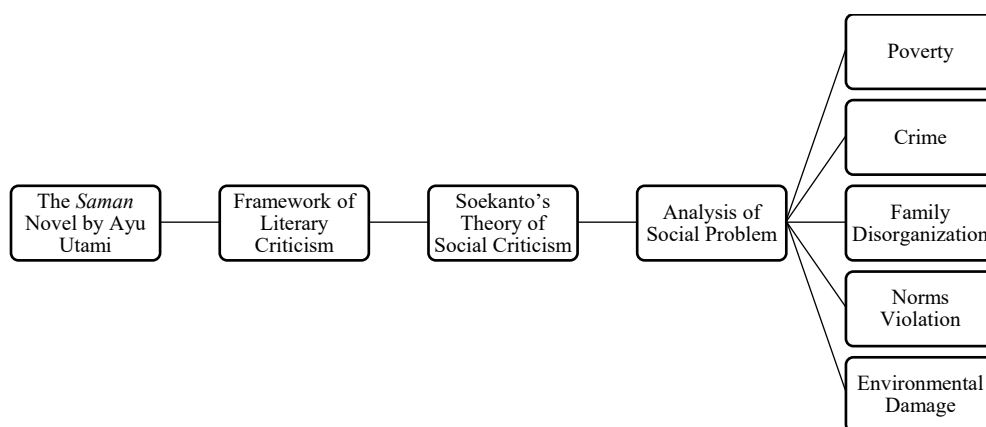


Figure 1. Research Concept Map

The classification reveals that social criticism in the novel is articulated through narrative elements such as characters, events, and conflicts, which collectively reflect broader social realities. To ensure analytical clarity and transparency, all identified excerpts are systematically organized and coded according to their respective categories, as presented in Table 1.

TABLE 1  
CLASSIFICATION OF EXCERPTS AND INDICATORS OF SOCIAL CRITICISM IN THE NOVEL *SAMAN*

| No | Excerpt                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             | Indicator              | Code        |
|----|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------|-------------|
| 1  | I was half convinced, but I was desperate. He said: "Then is it not possible to take him to a mental hospital?" But the mother sighed. "In Palembang? Where does the money come from? Mom told you, it's not that we were mean to her...."                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          | Poverty                | (PV/SM/74)  |
| 2  | A packet of supermi for a side dish of five. Not eaten as the main menu of carbohydrates. That night he slept in the Argani family's house which was barely blocked. There was only one room there, two by three meters, the parents' bedroom. Anson and Nasri's brothers, as well as Wis, sleep lying on the porch, three times three meters in floor area. The smell of used cooking oil, acid, and ammonia stored in the aisle is sometimes blown by the wind.                                                                                                                                                                                   |                        | (PV/SM/76)  |
| 3  | Of course, some prankster men have taken advantage of their bodies. That said, this girl enjoyed it too.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            | Crime                  | (CR/SM/70)  |
| 4  | Sometimes they choke his body with cigarette cobs, pinch his fingers, whip him even if he is not in the chest, electrocute his neck, or just use fists and kicks. None are more convenient than the others. He has never felt more pain than he does now. Wis really didn't know if the people were doing it out of revenge or because they really didn't believe his confession.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |                        | (CR/SM/106) |
| 5  | We met, ate or drank, watched in a place away from his wife or my family, and then kissed in the car.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               | Family Disorganization | (FD/SM/26)  |
| 6  | The family held a mass of the spirit, and his mother followed the procession like a repentant sinner. With tears in her eyes, she kissed her husband's hand who never lost his love for her even though he never told her what happened.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |                        | (FD/SM/52)  |
| 7  | The people who burned Upi, kidnapped Anson's wife, damaged the millhouse, uprooted young rubber trees, became irrelevant for the judge to talk about. Those people are not to blame.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                | Norms Violation        | (NV/SM/113) |
| 8  | People are afraid to go out of the house, no one dares to trade. The labor protests have been going on for two days, and it seems to be ending in failure. Shops whose owners are innocent are also vandalized. But the climax is the demolition and murder of Yuly Kristanto, a businessman trapped in the crowd. Since the early days of the action, there have indeed been several anti-China leaflets, some of which came from nowhere from the source, possibly from intel. Towards the evening of today, we made an evaluation secretly and anxiously. Also weakness. Because the field commanders did not succeed in controlling the people. |                        | (NV/SM/179) |
| 9  | If they do not obey within a month, bulldozers will have to cut down the plantation.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                | Environmental damage   | (EV/SM/93)  |
| 10 | Here and there bulldozers began to knock down rubber trees.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |                        | (EV/SM/96)  |

The following discussion provides a more in-depth interpretation of the findings presented above. The analysis was carried out to understand the meaning behind each form of social criticism that appears in *Saman's* novel. Through a literary sociology approach, this discussion tries to see how Ayu Utami voices the social reality and inequality that occurs in society through her literary works. Accordingly, the discussion not only examines the content of the narrative, but also interprets the author's critical stance toward the social conditions of the period.

#### A. Poverty

Excerpt (PV/SM/74) reflects a form of structural poverty experienced by the characters in Ayu Utami's *Saman*. The expression "Where does the money come from?" indicates the family's economic constraints, which prevent them from accessing essential health services, even in urgent circumstances such as psychiatric treatment. Within the framework of Soekanto's theory of social criticism, this situation can be interpreted as a representation of structural poverty. In this context, economic hardship is not merely the result of individual limitations but is closely related to a social system that fails to provide equitable opportunities and access to resources for economically marginalized groups (Hasbullah, 2018).

The excerpt also reveals a moral dilemma faced by families living under conditions of poverty. The statement "it's not that we were mean to him" reflects a sense of guilt and emotional conflict arising from the inability to provide better care due to financial limitations. This narrative moment functions as a form of social criticism directed at the persistent inequalities that shape unequal access to public services, particularly healthcare (Nabilla & Hikmat, 2023). Through this seemingly simple dialogue, Ayu Utami emphasizes that poverty extends beyond the absence of financial resources; it also involves restricted choices and limited opportunities for individuals to achieve a dignified quality of life.

Similarly, the excerpt coded (PV/SM/76) presents a vivid portrayal of extreme poverty in the novel *Saman*. The depiction of "a pack of noodles for a side dish of five" serves as a powerful symbol of severe economic deprivation, where even basic nutritional needs cannot be adequately fulfilled. This situation reflects the adaptive strategies adopted by lower socioeconomic groups who must survive under conditions of scarcity and deprivation (Defianti, 2020; Hilmi & Sultoni, 2019). The necessity of using instant noodles as the sole accompaniment for five individuals highlights the stark social

disparities between economically marginalized communities and those who enjoy adequate living conditions (Adiyanti et al., 2021).

Furthermore, the description of the Argani family's neighborhood, characterized as poorly partitioned and permeated by the smells of used cooking oil, acid, and ammonia, reinforces the depiction of material deprivation as a key indicator of poverty. The cramped and unhealthy living environment reflects the low socioeconomic status of the residents while simultaneously functioning as a critique of social injustice that forces certain segments of society to inhabit conditions that are far from humane. Through such detailed and realistic narrative descriptions, Ayu Utami encourages readers to reflect on the broader implications of poverty, highlighting that it is not solely a matter of material insufficiency but also a question of dignity, human welfare, and the structural inequalities embedded within the social system.

### B. Crime

The excerpt coded (CR/SM/70) portrays a situation that reflects the occurrence of sexual violence against female characters in Ayu Utami's *Saman*. The phrase "some prankster men have used their bodies" suggests that the woman becomes the victim of harassment and exploitation by others. Within the framework of Soekanto's theory of social criticism, such actions can be categorized as social crimes because they violate both legal and moral norms that regulate social life (Angelina, 2024). This form of violence not only causes physical harm but also produces profound psychological consequences for the victim. Sexual exploitation in this context illustrates an imbalance of power relations in which women, who are socially and economically marginalized, become objects of domination by more powerful actors. Such conditions reflect a broader pattern of structural oppression in which women remain vulnerable to violence and harassment within unequal social systems (Nabilla & Hikmat, 2023).

The excerpt also reveals an ambiguous public perception of the victim, where the experience of abuse is interpreted as if the victim "enjoys" the treatment. This narrative element reflects a common social phenomenon in which victims' experiences are frequently misunderstood or distorted, often leading to victim-blaming attitudes. From the perspective of social criticism, this illustrates how legal and moral norms are not always applied equitably, particularly in cases involving women. Through this depiction, Ayu Utami critiques a social structure that positions women in vulnerable circumstances while simultaneously exposing society's tendency to ignore victims' rights or attribute responsibility to them (Nabila, 2018).

Moreover, the scene emphasizes sexual violence as a form of crime with long-term psychological and social consequences for victims. Women subjected to sexual exploitation face not only physical threats but also emotional trauma that can influence their self-esteem, identity formation, and social interactions (Islamiah & Wulan, 2023). This depiction resonates with Soekanto's argument that social crimes disrupt not only material conditions but also the moral and psychological order of society. In this regard, the violence experienced by the female character symbolizes a broader social failure to protect vulnerable members of society.

Through this narrative episode, Ayu Utami conveys a strong critique of sexual violence and gender injustice. The author not only portrays the suffering experienced by individuals but also highlights the structural conditions that allow such violence to persist and, in some cases, become socially normalized. The novel *Saman* presents a reality in which women frequently become victims of sexual crimes, both at the individual level and within social systems that fail to provide adequate protection. Consequently, the narrative emphasizes that sexual violence should not be understood merely as a personal issue but rather as a broader social phenomenon that demands critical attention and structural reform in legal institutions, moral norms, and collective social awareness regarding women's rights (Dewi, 2023).

Similarly, the excerpt coded (CR/SM/106) depicts an extreme form of physical violence experienced by a female character in the novel. The description of acts such as "stabbing his body with cigarette coals, pinching his fingers, whipping him, electrocuting his neck, or simply using fists and kicks" illustrates deliberate and repeated acts of brutality intended to inflict suffering. From the perspective of Soekanto's theory of social criticism, such actions constitute social crimes because they violate fundamental legal norms, moral values, and principles of human dignity. These repeated acts of violence produce not only severe physical injuries but also deep psychological trauma, revealing patterns of injustice and oppression directed toward socially vulnerable individuals.

The violence portrayed in this scene reflects a profound imbalance of power relations, where perpetrators exercise control and domination over defenseless victims. At the same time, the narrative also critiques a social reality in which women frequently become objects of violence while society and legal institutions fail to provide sufficient protection. The expression "No one is more comfortable than the other" emphasizes the victim's experience of continuous suffering without meaningful protection or justice. Through this depiction, Ayu Utami exposes how violence against women is embedded within broader social structures characterized by patriarchal values that legitimize male dominance. Thus, *Saman* functions not only as a literary narrative but also as a powerful social critique addressing gender injustice, systemic oppression, and the failure of social institutions to safeguard women's rights and dignity, while simultaneously inviting readers to reflect on the urgency of strengthening legal awareness and moral responsibility in preventing such crimes (Sarina, 2022).

### C. Family Disorganization

The excerpt coded (FD/SM/26) illustrates a form of family disorganization reflected in the behavior of a character who engages in an illicit relationship outside the marital bond. Actions such as "meeting, eating or drinking, watching away

from his wife or family, and then kissing in the car” indicate a violation of moral commitments and social norms within the institution of the family. In the framework of Soekanto’s theory of social criticism, such behavior represents family disorganization because it reflects the breakdown of family structure and function, where values such as loyalty, honesty, and responsibility among family members are no longer upheld. This situation demonstrates the erosion of ethical principles within domestic relationships and signals broader social changes in which traditional moral boundaries become increasingly blurred (Fadilah, 2024; Khasanah & Solichin, 2023).

Rather than presenting the affair merely as a personal matter, Utami frames it as a critique of shifting social values and moral norms in contemporary society. The phenomenon of infidelity portrayed in the excerpt illustrates how processes such as urbanization, the expansion of individual freedom, and modern lifestyles can disrupt the stability of traditional family structures (Syarifah & Surana, 2023). The narrative suggests that emotional and sexual relationships in modern society are often driven by personal desire without sufficient consideration of their broader social consequences. Consequently, the scene functions as a reflection of the gradual erosion of loyalty and responsibility within family institutions, which may ultimately lead to disharmony and disintegration in domestic life (Putri et al., 2025).

Similarly, the excerpt coded (FD/SM/52) depicts another form of family disorganization characterized by remorse and emotional distance among family members. The mother’s actions—described as “following the procession like a repentant sinner” and “kissing her husband’s hand”—suggest the presence of past transgressions that have generated tension within the family relationship. Within the perspective of Soekanto’s theory, this condition represents a disruption in the balance of family functions, particularly in terms of communication, openness, and emotional connection among family members. Although the husband still appears to demonstrate affection and loyalty, the mother’s silence reflects a psychological distance that is difficult to overcome due to the burden of guilt and moral regret.

Through this narrative moment, Ayu Utami implicitly critiques the social reality of families that appear harmonious externally but remain fragile internally. As noted by Sriwahyuni and Asri (2020), unresolved guilt and the inability to confront past mistakes often reflect a broader crisis of values within modern family institutions. The novel suggests that family disorganization does not always manifest through overt conflict or separation but may also emerge through silence, emotional estrangement, and suppressed regret. In a subtle and emotionally nuanced manner, Ayu Utami illustrates how family relationships can gradually lose their authenticity when honesty and open communication are replaced by secrecy, remorse, and loneliness.

#### *D. Norms Violations*

The excerpt coded (NV/SM/113) illustrates a clear example of the violation of social and legal norms within society. Acts of violence such as burning individuals, rape, and destruction of property represent forms of behavior that are explicitly prohibited by both law and moral conventions. The phrase “becomes irrelevant for the judge to discuss” suggests that the legal system has lost its essential role as a guarantor of justice. Within the framework of Soekanto’s theory of social criticism, this situation can be categorized as a violation of legal and social norms, since such deviant acts not only harm individuals but also undermine the moral order of society. Dewi (2023) argues that the neglect of such violations reflects structural inequalities within legal and social institutions that fail to protect victims, thereby allowing injustice to become normalized (Azizah et al., 2022).

Through this narrative depiction, Ayu Utami conveys a sharp critique of weak law enforcement and the erosion of humanitarian values within society (Pasaribu et al., 2023). The narrative suggests that violations of norms are not solely committed by individual perpetrators but may also occur through systemic failures within social and legal institutions that permit injustice to persist. In *Saman*, power relations and political interests frequently obscure the truth, leaving victims to endure suffering without adequate protection. Consequently, the excerpt reflects not merely individual deviance but also a structural failure that weakens moral values and undermines the sense of justice in social life (Al Awwal, 2022).

Similarly, the excerpt coded (NV/SM/179) portrays a chaotic social situation characterized by widespread violence, destruction, and acts of murder. The conditions described by Ayu Utami illustrate how violations of norms occur on a massive scale, encompassing breaches of legal, social, and humanitarian principles. The depiction that “people are afraid to go out of their homes,” “no one dares to trade,” and that “shops whose owners are innocent are destroyed” indicates that social security and public order have collapsed. Norms that should guide collective behavior and maintain social harmony are instead replaced by destructive actions driven by emotional resentment, political provocation, and social tensions (Alsyrirad & Rosa, 2020).

According to Nabilla and Hikmat (2023), within Soekanto’s framework, violations of norms represent a form of social deviation that threatens the stability of the social order. Acts such as the destruction of property and the murder of Yuly Kristanto described in the excerpt constitute concrete manifestations of the breakdown of legal and moral norms. When individuals or groups commit violence against fellow citizens without legitimate justification, it indicates a profound erosion of human values. Furthermore, such violations are not only carried out by direct perpetrators but are also facilitated by the inability of authorities and social institutions to control the situation. The statement that “the field commanders did not succeed in controlling the people” signifies the weakening of mechanisms of social control. In such circumstances, society enters a state of anomie, characterized by the loss of normative guidance and social direction, as conceptualized by Durkheim and often applied in sociological analyses of norm violations (Paulia et al., 2022).

The excerpt also suggests that violations of norms are frequently rooted in broader social and political inequalities. The circulation of “anti-Chinese leaflets” indicates deliberate attempts to provoke hostility and divide communities along

ethnic lines. Such incitement represents a serious violation of social norms that uphold principles of tolerance and humanity. Within the Indonesian sociohistorical context, this phenomenon reflects longstanding tensions in which ethnic violence has often been intertwined with political and economic conflicts (Armanto, 2024). Ayu Utami critically exposes how racial hatred, when politically mobilized, can trigger brutal collective actions that not only harm individuals but also damage the social cohesion of society.

Furthermore, the atmosphere described as “stealthy and anxious” emphasizes that violations of norms generate not only physical victims but also collective psychological trauma. Fear of engaging in daily activities, the loss of public safety, and declining trust in legal institutions constitute significant social consequences of such violence. Through this narrative moment, Ayu Utami does more than merely describe violent events; she encourages readers to reflect on the deeper causes of social chaos, particularly the erosion of human values and the failure of social systems to protect their citizens. The social criticism conveyed in this scene implies that when legal institutions lose their authority and moral norms are weakened, society becomes dominated by violence, fear, and suffering (Sabila & Fathurohman, 2022).

Overall, this excerpt represents a powerful reflection on the failure of social and moral structures within modern society. Through the events depicted in *Saman*, Ayu Utami portrays social conditions in Indonesia that remain vulnerable to conflict, discrimination, and injustice. The violations of norms described in the narrative not only reveal individual deviant behavior but also criticize how power, political interests, and social incitement can manipulate communities and erode their sense of humanity. In this regard, *Saman* functions as a medium of social critique that exposes unjust and violent social realities while reminding readers that the enforcement of both legal and moral norms is fundamental to the creation of a humane and civilized social order.

#### *E. Environmental Damage*

The excerpt coded (ED/SM/93) depicts a situation in which legal and social norms are disregarded to achieve a particular objective, namely the forced clearing of plantations. The statement “If within a month they do not comply, bulldozers will be forced to clear the plantation” indicates an act of coercive authority in which the property rights and security of local residents are no longer respected (Khoirony et al., 2025). Such actions clearly constitute a violation of legal norms, as they ignore formal legal procedures and the rights of individuals. At the same time, they also violate social norms that emphasize mutual respect, social justice, and environmental balance (Sultoni, 2020). The use of force or heavy machinery functions as an instrument of intimidation, compelling residents to submit to external authority. Consequently, social relations become increasingly unequal, generating tensions between authorities and the communities affected by these actions.

Within the framework of Soekanto’s theory of social criticism, this situation reflects a form of social deviation rooted in unequal power structures. Norms that should serve as guidelines for resolving conflicts or land disputes are ignored in pursuit of particular political or economic interests. The act of forcibly clearing plantations does not only produce material and physical losses but also generates psychological trauma for communities that lose their land and primary sources of livelihood. Moreover, the threat of coercion highlights the weakness of law enforcement and the persistence of structural injustice within modern social systems. This depiction can therefore be interpreted as a critique of bureaucratic and corporate practices that prioritize power and profit while neglecting the rights and welfare of marginalized communities (Sundari et al., 2021).

Through this narrative episode, Ayu Utami also illustrates how violations of norms may trigger broader social conflicts. The threat of deploying bulldozers symbolizes a systematic form of injustice in which those in positions of authority disregard legal procedures and moral considerations in order to achieve their objectives. Such conditions reveal that legal and social norms are not applied equally to all members of society, and that marginalized communities frequently become victims of competing interests and power struggles. As noted by Larasati and Manut (2022), actions of this nature not only disrupt social relations but also produce environmental consequences, since forced plantation clearing can damage ecosystems and undermine the livelihoods of communities that depend on the land.

Consequently, the excerpt functions as a reflection of how violations of norms occur not only at the individual level but also at structural and institutional levels. Ayu Utami emphasizes that unequal power relations and weak law enforcement create opportunities for social deviations that harm large segments of society. Through this scene, the author invites readers to recognize that social and legal norms should function as mechanisms of protection for society, and that violations of these principles represent forms of injustice that require critical reflection and social correction (Jannah & Efendi, 2024).

Similarly, the excerpt coded (ED/SM/96) depicts destructive actions that violate both social and legal norms, illustrated by the destruction of rubber trees using bulldozers. This activity demonstrates the arbitrary exercise of authority without regard for the property rights and welfare of the affected communities. From the perspective of Soekanto’s theory of social criticism, such acts constitute violations of norms because they disregard legal procedures and principles of justice. According to Sultoni (2020), the destruction of trees that serve as the primary source of livelihood for residents reflects a form of social inequality in which authorities employ physical force to dominate marginalized communities. In addition to causing material damage, these actions also generate ecological consequences that threaten environmental balance and the sustainability of local livelihoods.

Through this narrative moment, Ayu Utami highlights that violations of norms are often carried out not only by individuals but also by institutions possessing structural power. The destruction of rubber plantations symbolizes a

conflict of interests between local communities who depend on the land and external authorities seeking to impose their will. Such conditions produce a climate of fear and insecurity among community members, as their rights are ignored and the potential losses they face are both immediate and significant (Islamiah et al., 2024). In this regard, *Saman* functions as a medium of social criticism that exposes the misuse of power and the failure of social systems to uphold justice, portraying how communities frequently become victims of systematic violations of norms that perpetuate inequality and social suffering.

#### IV. CONCLUSION

The analysis shows that Ayu Utami consistently articulates social criticism of major problems in Indonesian society through *Saman*. Through the depiction of poverty conditions, Ayu Utami shows the economic limitations that cause moral dilemmas and family helplessness, as well as highlights the inequality of access to basic needs. Scenes depicting crime, especially violence and exploitation of women, emphasize power imbalances, gender injustice, and weak social and legal protections. Family disorganization is shown through the cracking of household structures and functions, both in the form of infidelity and emotional distance, as a reflection of changes in moral values and loyalty. Violations of norms, both legal and social, are displayed through acts of violence, destruction, and intimidation that undermine the social order, while environmental damage is manifested through the practice of forcible plantation logging that harms communities and ecosystems. Overall, *Saman* not only depicts complex social realities, but also functions as a vehicle of social criticism that invites readers to understand inequality, injustice, and failures of social systems, thus emphasizing the importance of moral, legal, and social awareness in building a more just and humane society.

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# Predictors of Learner Satisfaction in Video-Based ESP Assessment: A Factor-Analytic and Regression Study From Vietnam

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**Abstract**—This study employs exploratory factor analysis (EFA) and multiple regression analysis (MRA) to identify the key predictors of learner satisfaction with video-based assessment (VBA) in an English for Specific Purposes (ESP) context. Data were collected from 100 Public Relations students at a private university in Vietnam. Six constructs were examined: English skill gains, soft skill development, external motivation, internal motivation, perceived difficulties, and overall satisfaction. EFA confirmed the factorial validity of the instrument, while MRA revealed that only two factors exerted a statistically significant positive effect on satisfaction: soft skill improvement ( $\beta = 0.322$ ,  $p < .05$ ) and English language gains ( $\beta = 0.295$ ,  $p < .05$ ). Contrary to expectation, perceived difficulties and both motivational constructs showed no significant predictive effect. These findings suggest that skill acquisition — rather than motivational orientation or contextual challenge — is the primary driver of satisfaction in technology-mediated language assessment. Implications for ESP course design and digital assessment practice are discussed.

**Index Terms**—video-based assessment, ESP, learner satisfaction, skill development

## I. INTRODUCTION

Digital media and technology have fundamentally reshaped how language educators design assessments and how learners engage with them. Among the most prominent of these shifts is the growing adoption of video-based assignments (VBA) in ESP classrooms, where learners move from passive observers of content to active producers of meaning. Yet despite a substantial body of evidence documenting the benefits of video production for language development, relatively little is known about which specific factors predict learner satisfaction with VBA as a form of summative assessment — particularly in the Vietnamese ESP context.

From an assessment design perspective, the potential of video-based tasks to engage learners in authentic, multi-modal production has been well documented. Yang and Yeh (2021) demonstrated that EFL learners who created promotional YouTube videos developed not only target language skills but also the capacity to articulate and represent meaning through digital media — a competency increasingly valued in professional ESP contexts such as Public Relations. Crucially, their findings highlight that the assessment value of such tasks lies not merely in linguistic output but in the integrated cognitive and creative demands placed on learners, suggesting that satisfaction with video-based assessment may be tied to the perceived richness of the learning process rather than task completion alone.

Naqvi and Al-Mahrooqi (2016) investigated how digital video projects may be incorporated into Middle Eastern EFL classes and showed how they could improve students' communication abilities and subskills. In a similar vein, Hafner (2014) promoted the inclusion of digital literacies in language instruction, highlighting the transformative power of multimodal ensembles in language learning—such as student-produced documentaries about science.

Sastre et al. (2022) carried out a thorough literature analysis that clarified the different ways that digital technologies support collaborative creativity in language learning. Their conclusions emphasized how important technology is for promoting co-creative language learning experiences and giving students the tools they need to succeed in an increasingly interconnected society.

Yeh et al. (2020) investigated how video production affected the writing abilities of EFL students. While video-making projects are frequently used to support language learning, their impact on writing abilities has not been well studied. During an 18-week investigation involving 57 EFL students, researchers examined how different types of video production could enhance writing skills. Data collection methods included reflective essays and pre- and post-writing assessments. The results indicated improvements in students' creative utilization of different modes of expression, alongside enhanced self-regulation and awareness of diverse perspectives and contexts.

Video assignments were also proven not only to improve language abilities but also to provide a platform for students to grow in terms of their personal competencies and skills. Student-produced instructional videos have been shown to support independent learning, collaborative teaching, and technical communication skills (Abidi et al., 2022).

Digital video production assignments have also been demonstrated to inspire students to be more self-regulated as they work to improve their pronunciation, vocabulary, and grammar. According to Mahardika et al. (2021), undergraduate

English learners have positive opinions about how video production affects language acquisition, emphasizing how it promotes motivation, self-assurance, and independent learning.

Brega and Kruglyakova (2025) developed and experimentally validated a pedagogical framework integrating ESP language competences (reception, mediation, production, and interaction) with five digital competence areas drawn from the DigComp 2.2 framework in the context of video podcast creation. Their experimental study with third-year non-linguistic ESP students demonstrated a statistically significant improvement in digital competence levels following structured video podcast training ( $\chi^2 = 9.386$ ,  $p = .025$ ). Crucially, the study found that video production tasks simultaneously developed both linguistic and digital skills, with the largest competence gains observed in communication and collaboration and digital content creation — areas that closely correspond to the soft skill gains identified in the present study's regression model.

Nevertheless, there are obstacles to implementing video-based assignments, such as time constraints and technological limitations. Although Maryani and Aguskin (2023) acknowledged the advantages of independent learning, they also recognized technical preparation and time management as major obstacles that students faced when working on collaborative video projects.

Cheng (2025) investigated the challenges encountered by ESP college students when composing video resumes as a digital multimodal composing task. Drawing on post-task interviews with eight fourth-year students and an analysis of 42 video productions, the study identified four primary difficulties: negotiating professional identity projection within time constraints, coordinating multiple communication modes, overcoming technical obstacles in video editing, and regulating verbal and non-verbal communication skills. Notably, even digitally competent students demonstrated limited readiness for multimodal text-generation, suggesting that familiarity with technology as consumers does not automatically translate into proficiency as digital producers. These findings resonate with those of the present study, where technical difficulties and skill-related challenges were among the factors examined in relation to student satisfaction with video-based assessment in ESP contexts.

Dal (2012) discussed the integration of digital video technology in language teaching, highlighting the importance of providing students with chances to develop 21st-century skills and adapt to emerging literacies. The study focused on how, especially in the context of task-based language learning, digital video technology empowers students to interact meaningfully with media, content, and language proficiency.

Students' preferences for speaking exercises in online ESP lessons were investigated by Odotu and Khoiriyah (2023). Their study found that students preferred a variety of online activities, such as video-based projects, online chores and exams, and video-conference discussions. Particularly popular were discussion activities conducted through websites like Zoom and Google Meet, which provided advantages including enhanced speaking, inventiveness, and vocabulary.

Kew et al. (2022) looked into how digital video production assignments could improve the pedagogical performance of English language learners in virtual settings. Their study demonstrated how digital video production can help with information acquisition and enhance students' ability to communicate in English, even in online classes where there are no in-person contacts.

Aksel and Gürman-Kahraman (2014) examined the impact of video project assignments (VBAs) on learning a foreign language. Students from Uludağ University in Turkey participated in their study, which examined the ways in which VBAs aided in the acquisition of English at various skill levels. The results, which were assessed quantitatively using questionnaires, emphasized the beneficial effects of VBAs on language acquisition procedures.

Aldukhayel (2021) investigated how teachers and EFL students felt about using vlogs in L2 listening instruction. The study, which included a sizable sample of instructors and university students, found that vlogs are well-liked and useful resources for enhancing vocabulary acquisition and listening comprehension in second language contexts.

In addition, Bobkina and Romero (2020) looked into how self-produced videos helped Spanish ESP engineering students improve their digital oracy. The study revealed that although some students felt frightened by the procedure, most students had positive opinions about how well video production enhanced their oracy skills. This shows that in addition to video production activities, it is important to build digital communication abilities.

The practice of using student-made videos as a means of creating meaning has also been explored in the context of collaborative learning by Anas (2019). The study demonstrated how video creation promoted active learning, vocabulary building, autonomous learning, and the development of technological skills in students through semi-structured interviews and analysis of student movies.

In the framework of Languages for Specific Purposes, Rodgers and Ni Dhonnchadha (2018) assessed the efficacy of utilizing digital video creation as a tool for teaching and learning. Their research, which involved undergraduate students, revealed that learners had favorable things to say about how well digital video creation helped them improve their language skills as well as their social and professional talents. The study did, however, provide a warning against assuming too much about students' digital competencies and emphasized the necessity of ongoing assistance and direction for the growth of digital literacy.

Lastly, according to Abdulrahman and Basalama (2019), EFL students' enthusiasm to study English vocabulary was greatly increased by working together on a collaborative film project. The investigation involved twenty-five students enrolled in a vocabulary-enhancement program, revealing their favorable perceptions of the project. Using camcorders and computer programs, students created a variety of collaborative videos that demonstrated their inventiveness and level

of engagement. According to the research, group video projects can improve engagement and motivation for learning English while also expanding vocabulary in an interactive classroom setting.

A recent systematic review by Al-Jarf (2026) synthesizing fifteen years of research (2010–2025) on instructional videos and podcasts in EFL and ESP contexts confirmed that video-based instruction consistently enhanced learners' comprehension, vocabulary development, pronunciation accuracy, and engagement with authentic language input across diverse skill areas. The review highlighted that the effectiveness of digital audio-visual materials depends not on technology itself but on structured pedagogical design — specifically the alignment between resource type and learning objectives, and the implementation of pre-, while-, and post-viewing task sequences. These principles are directly relevant to the design of the video-based assessment examined in the present study, which similarly required students to engage in structured production and reflection phases.

All of this research points to the many advantages of using student-made movies in the classroom, from improved pedagogical performance and language learning outcomes to higher levels of engagement and self-efficacy. They emphasize how crucial it is to use digital tools to design dynamic, captivating lessons that are appropriate for students in the twenty-first century.

In summary, there is a great deal of promise for how video-based projects might enhance language learning, advance cross-cultural awareness, and develop individual talents. In order to enable students to flourish in a globalized society, educators can design dynamic and captivating learning environments by utilizing digital technology and encouraging collaborative creativity.

Taken together, the literature establishes that VBA can enhance language proficiency, foster soft skills, and support digital literacy development. However, few studies have moved beyond descriptive or ANOVA-based approaches to examine which factors most strongly predict overall learner satisfaction. The present study addresses this gap by employing EFA and multiple regression to test the predictive weight of five constructs — language skills, soft skills, external motivation, internal motivation, and perceived difficulties — on satisfaction with VBA. Building on the exploratory findings reported in Tran et al. (2023), which used ANOVA to examine group-level differences in the same context, this study advances a regression-based model suited to quantifying individual-level predictors of satisfaction.

1. What are the primary factors influencing students' satisfaction with video-based assignments in language education, and how do improvements in English language skills and the development of soft skills contribute to this satisfaction?
2. Do external motivations, such as incentives or rewards, significantly impact students' satisfaction levels with video-based assignments, and how do internal motivations, such as personal interest or intrinsic motivation, influence this satisfaction?
3. How does students' gender identity affect their perceptions of video-based assignments across the six studied constructs, and are there statistically significant differences in satisfaction and related variables among male, female, and “prefer not to say” students?

These research questions aim to clarify the relative contribution of each factor to learner satisfaction, and to test whether gender — a demographic variable rarely examined in the VBA literature — moderates perceptions of language gains, soft skills, motivation, and difficulty. By grounding the analysis in motivation theory and empirically testing hypothesised relationships through MRA and one-way ANOVA, the study seeks to offer evidence-based recommendations for ESP practitioners designing video-based assessment tasks.

## II. THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS AND HYPOTHESES

For many years, numerous researchers have examined individual motivation. The prevailing consensus from these studies suggests that motivation serves as the determining force behind whether an individual opts to act or abstain (Guay et al., 2010; Broussard & Garrison, 2004). In the realm of language teaching, numerous scholars have explored the ramifications of learning motivation. Gardner (1985) posits that motivation emerges from the confluence of exerted effort, harboring positive attitudes toward language acquisition, and aspiring to achieve proficiency in the target language. Recent developments in this field have seen a proliferation of L2 models of motivation, expounded upon by a multitude of linguists and language specialists (Dörnyei, 2005). It is theorized that the motivation for language acquisition can be instigated, sustained, or terminated based on students' learning experiences. Various factors, both internal and external, such as environmental stimuli, educators, methodologies, and media exposure, can influence students' motivation to learn. Despite minimal variance in students' language aptitude (Christophel & Gorham, 1995; Kim et al., 2017), there exists the potential for a student initially exhibiting low motivation to later display a fervent drive for language learning. Investigating the dynamics of motivational shifts in language acquisition thus warrants attention. Dörnyei (2001) emphasizes the importance of researching the impact of specific teaching strategies on the cultivation of L2 motivation.

Within the extensive literature on video-based assignments in language learning, several pertinent issues emerge that warrant integration into the theoretical framework. One such issue pertains to the transformative potential of digital media and technology in facilitating language acquisition and cultural awareness. As evidenced by the studies conducted by Yang and Yeh (2021) and Naqvi and Al-Mahrooqi (2016), video-based assignments serve as effective tools for promoting intercultural communication skills and fostering cross-cultural exchange. These findings underscore the importance of



considering the role of technology-mediated interactions in shaping students' linguistic and cultural competencies within the language learning context.

The literature also reveals insights into the multiple benefits of video production assignments beyond language proficiency enhancement. Studies such as those by Mahardika et al. (2021) and Bobkina and Romero (2020) shed light on how video assignments can stimulate students' motivation, self-assurance, and digital communication skills. Additionally, the investigation by Rodgers and Ni Dhonnchadha (2018) underscores the need for ongoing support and guidance to nurture students' digital literacy skills alongside language development. These findings highlight the interconnectedness of technological integration, motivational dynamics, and skill acquisition in the context of video-based language learning. Thus, integrating these insights into the theoretical framework enriches our understanding of the complex interplay between instructional methodologies, learner motivation, and technological affordances in language education.

To address the research questions above, this study adopted a quantitative survey design. Five hypotheses were formulated based on the theoretical framework and literature review:

*H1: Improving English skills through video-based assignments has a positive impact on students' satisfaction.*

*H2: Improving soft skills through video-based assignments has a positive impact on students' satisfaction.*

*H3: Difficulties in completing video-based assignments have a negative impact on students' satisfaction.*

*H4: External motivations of making video-based assignments have a positive impact on students' satisfaction.*

*H5: Internal motivations of making video-based assignments have a positive impact on students' satisfaction.*

These hypotheses guided the quantitative analysis. The following section describes the instrument, sampling procedure, and statistical methods employed to test them.

### III. METHODOLOGY

#### A. Measure Designs, Data Collection and Data Analysis

The instrument comprised two parts. Part 1 captured demographic information: age, gender, place of residence during the study period, and device type. Part 2 measured six constructs using a 20-item, five-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree; 5 = strongly agree): English skill gains (EGS, 4 items), soft skill development (SOS, 5 items), external motivation (EXM, 2 items), internal motivation (INM, 3 items), perceived difficulties (DIF, 3 items), and overall satisfaction (SSA, 3 items). Items were developed from the literature and validated through expert review. The scale was administered via Google Form.

The survey was distributed to 124 fourth-year students enrolled in an ESP course — English for Public Relations — at a large private university in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam, where the first author served as visiting lecturer. Students completed their group video projects as a summative end-of-term assessment. As first-hand participants in both the benefits and challenges of the method, they were well-positioned to provide meaningful evaluations of their experience. A total of 100 valid responses (response rate: 80.6%) were retained for analysis. Demographic details are presented in Table 4. This study uses the same dataset reported in a conference proceedings paper (Tran et al., 2023). That paper reported descriptive statistics and ANOVA results. The present manuscript extends this work through exploratory factor analysis (EFA) and multiple regression analysis (MRA), addressing distinct research questions about predictors of student satisfaction. No text from the conference paper has been reproduced in this submission.

#### B. Data Analysis

Data were initially screened and cleaned using spreadsheet software before being imported into SPSS version 20 for statistical analysis. The analytical procedure proceeded in four stages: (1) reliability analysis using Cronbach's  $\alpha$  to assess internal consistency; (2) exploratory factor analysis (EFA) using Principal Component Analysis with Varimax Rotation to verify construct validity; (3) correlation analysis to examine bivariate relationships among variables; and (4) multiple regression analysis (MRA) to estimate the predictive weight of each independent variable on overall satisfaction. Prior to MRA, multicollinearity was assessed using Tolerance and VIF values, and model assumptions including normality and autocorrelation were verified.

##### (a). Reliability Analysis

The data underwent analysis to assess internal consistency, communalities, and factor loadings. These analyses were conducted collectively to make informed decisions about retaining factors. Corrected item-total correlation values were examined for each item. Notably, items 12 (0.004) and 16 (0.126) exhibited corrected item-total correlation values below the desired threshold of 0.200 (Johnson & Morgan, 2016); consequently, these items were removed from the scale. Following this refinement process, the scale achieved a Cronbach's  $\alpha$  value of 0.953, indicating "excellent" reliability for the final version of SAS.

The internal consistency of retaining factors were analyzed for better judgment of the reliability of the scale. Among the 6 dimensions, the results showed that the desired Cronbach's  $\alpha$  value  $> 0.722$  in the 4 dimensions: SSA (with 3 items SSA1, SSA2, SSA3); EGS (with 4 items EGS1, EGS2, EGS3, EGS4); EXM (with 2 items EXM1, EXM2) and INM (with 3 items INM1, INM2, INM3). For SOS (with 5 items SOS1, SOS2, SOS3, SOS4, SOS5) and DIF (with 3 items DIF1, DIF2, DIF3), the findings showed that for SOS5 and DIF3, the corrected item-total correlation values fell below the



desired threshold of 0.300 (Nunnally, 1978; Hair et al., 2014), resulting in Cronbach's  $\alpha$  values of SOS and DIF being less than 0.6. Consequently, these items were eliminated from the scale. After the removal of these two items, the Cronbach's  $\alpha$  values of SOS and DIF were respectively measured at 0.859 and 0.694 indicating an acceptable level of reliability.

(b). *Exploratory Factor Analysis*

Principal Component Analysis with Varimax Rotation was conducted during the EFA process to assess the structure of students' satisfaction with VBA and validate the model, in which associated items correctly correspond to their variables. Two test values Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) and Bartlett's Test of Sphericity reflect that observed data are valid and adequate for EFA procedure. In the current study, the KMO value was 0.772 and the Bartlett's test was significant (approximately Chi-Square was 753.78 and  $p$  value  $< .05$ ). Both the KMO and the Bartlett values in this study are satisfied (KMO score must be greater than 0.6 and  $p$ -value must lower than 0.05), which means that the obtained data were sufficient for exploratory factor analysis. In addition, factor loadings for each construct were calculated to measure convergent validity, and the threshold was set at 0.5 (Hair et al., 2017). The results are presented in Table 1.

TABLE 1  
KMO AND BARTLETT'S TEST

|                                                  |         |
|--------------------------------------------------|---------|
| Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy. | .772    |
| Approx. Chi-Square                               | 753.785 |
| Bartlett's Test of Sphericity                    | df      |
|                                                  | 105     |
|                                                  | Sig.    |
|                                                  | < .001  |

The EFA process utilized Principal Component Analysis with Varimax Rotation on 15 items designed to gauge students' satisfaction with VBA. The results presented in Table 1 indicate that the Bartlett Test score is significant ( $p$  value  $< .05$ ), suggesting that the observed data are suitable for subsequent EFA procedures (Awang, 2010, 2012).

The rotated component matrix (Table 2) confirmed that items loaded cleanly onto their respective constructs, with no cross-loadings exceeding 0.40. This pattern supports the six-factor structure underlying the instrument: English skill gains, soft skill development, external motivation, internal motivation, perceived difficulties, and overall satisfaction. Each factor represents a theoretically coherent dimension of students' VBA experience.

TABLE 2  
ROTATED COMPONENT MATRIX

|      | Component |      |      |      |      |      |
|------|-----------|------|------|------|------|------|
|      | 1         | 2    | 3    | 4    | 5    | 6    |
| SOS1 | .863      |      |      |      |      |      |
| SOS3 | .798      |      |      |      |      |      |
| SOS2 | .793      |      |      |      |      |      |
| SOS4 | .682      |      | .372 |      |      |      |
| EGS3 |           | .869 |      |      |      |      |
| EGS4 |           | .813 |      |      |      |      |
| EGS1 | .398      | .762 |      |      |      |      |
| EGS2 |           | .753 |      |      |      |      |
| INM3 |           | .306 | .834 |      |      |      |
| INM1 |           |      | .815 |      |      |      |
| INM2 | .383      |      | .721 |      |      |      |
| EXM2 |           |      |      | .868 |      |      |
| EXM1 |           |      |      | .814 |      |      |
| DIF1 |           |      |      |      | .879 |      |
| DIF2 |           |      |      |      | .851 |      |
| SSA2 |           |      |      |      |      | .875 |
| SSA1 |           |      |      |      |      | .812 |
| SSA3 |           |      |      |      |      | .723 |

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.

Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization.

TABLE 3  
FACTOR LOADING, CRONBACH'S ALPHA, COMPOSITE RELIABILITY AND CONVERGENT VALIDITY OF THE MEASURES

| Dimensions                        | Items |                                                                     | Factor loading | Cronbach's $\alpha$ | CR   | AVE  |
|-----------------------------------|-------|---------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------|---------------------|------|------|
| EGS<br>English skills development | EGS1  | Speaking skill improved                                             | .762           | 0.84                | 0.84 | 0.57 |
|                                   | EGS2  | Listening skill improved                                            | .753           |                     |      |      |
|                                   | EGS3  | Reading skill improved                                              | .869           |                     |      |      |
|                                   | EGS4  | Writing skill improved                                              | .813           |                     |      |      |
| SOS<br>Soft skills development    | SOS1  | Digital literacy improved                                           | .863           | 0.85                | 0.85 | 0.60 |
|                                   | SOS2  | Online working capability improved                                  | .793           |                     |      |      |
|                                   | SOS3  | Improved ability of speaking in front of camera                     | .798           |                     |      |      |
|                                   | SOS4  | Time management skill improved                                      | .682           |                     |      |      |
| EXM<br>External motivations       | EXM1  | Course examination accomplishment                                   | .814           | 0.77                | 0.73 | 0.59 |
|                                   | EXM2  | High score achievement                                              | .868           |                     |      |      |
| INM<br>Internal motivations       | INM1  | The joy of group work/ collaboration                                | .815           | 0.82                | 0.80 | 0.54 |
|                                   | INM2  | Self-reflection and better self-understanding                       | .721           |                     |      |      |
|                                   | INM3  | Video publicity on social media                                     | .834           |                     |      |      |
| DIF<br>Difficulties in VBA        | DIF1  | Lack of time                                                        | .879           | 0.69                | 0.70 | 0.54 |
|                                   | DIF2  | Lack of IT skills                                                   | .851           |                     |      |      |
| SSA<br>Students' satisfaction     | SSA1  | Satisfaction with the working on VBA                                | .812           | 0.72                | 0.84 | 0.64 |
|                                   | SSA2  | Satisfaction with the result of VBA                                 | .875           |                     |      |      |
|                                   | SSA3  | Satisfaction with the knowledge and the skills acquired through VBA | .723           |                     |      |      |

The results from Table 3 underscore the robust psychometric properties of the measurement items employed in the study. The factor loading values exceeding 0.56 suggest that each item contributes significantly to its respective construct, indicating good construct validity (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). The CR scores surpassing 0.7 indicate high internal consistency reliability, implying that the items within each construct are highly correlated with each other (Nunnally, 1978).

The AVE values above 0.50 suggest that more than 50% of the variance in each construct is explained by its measured indicators, indicating satisfactory convergent validity. This implies that the constructs are adequately represented by their respective measurement items. The comprehensive results presented in Table 3 offer compelling evidence supporting the reliability and validity of the measurement instrument utilized in this study. This bolsters confidence in the accuracy and credibility of the study's outcomes and conclusions.

#### IV. RESULTS

##### A. Descriptive Statistics

All 100 participants were enrolled in the Faculty of Public Relations. The sample was predominantly female (76.0%) and largely city-based, with 62.0% residing in Ho Chi Minh City at the time of the course, 30% in other provinces, and 8% in rural areas. Regarding technology access, most students used laptops (69.0%) or smartphones (26.0%) for their coursework. Table 4 presents the full demographic breakdown.

TABLE 4  
DEMOGRAPHIC BACKGROUNDS OF THE PARTICIPANTS

| Variable              | Group             | Frequency | %  | Cumulative (%) |
|-----------------------|-------------------|-----------|----|----------------|
| Gender                | Male              | 16        | 16 | 16             |
|                       | Female            | 76        | 76 | 92             |
|                       | Prefer not to say | 8         | 8  | 100            |
| Place of living       | Ho Chi Minh city  | 62        | 62 | 62             |
|                       | Other provinces   | 30        | 30 | 92             |
|                       | Countryside       | 8         | 8  | 100            |
| Online learning tools | Laptop            | 69        | 69 | 69             |
|                       | Desktop           | 4         | 4  | 73             |
|                       | Tablet            | 1         | 1  | 74             |
|                       | Smartphone        | 26        | 26 | 100            |

The mean of each construct measured the level of students' perception to each type of the six studied variables. Table 5 displays the descriptive statistics of the variables and the correlations among them.

TABLE 5  
MEANS, STANDARD DEVIATIONS AND CORRELATIONS OF VARIABLES

| Dimensions                       | Mean | SD   | EGS    | SOS    | DIF  | EXM    | INM    | SSA |
|----------------------------------|------|------|--------|--------|------|--------|--------|-----|
| English skills development (EGS) | 4.26 | 0.63 | -      |        |      |        |        |     |
| Soft skills (SOS)                | 4.36 | 0.59 | 0.42** | -      |      |        |        |     |
| Difficulties in VBA (DIF)        | 3.30 | 0.90 | 0.07   | 0.03   | -    |        |        |     |
| External motivations (EXM)       | 4.32 | 0.72 | 0.25*  | 0.42** | 0.09 | -      |        |     |
| Internal motivations (INM)       | 4.09 | 0.74 | 0.38** | 0.54** | 0.02 | 0.43** | -      |     |
| Students' satisfaction (SSA)     | 4.30 | 0.62 | 0.48** | 0.54** | 0.11 | 0.39** | 0.40** | -   |

Note: \* $p < .01$  (two-tailed)

Table 5 provides insights into the descriptive statistics and correlations among the variables under study. Regarding the means and standard deviations, participants reported high levels of agreement across most dimensions, with soft skills (SOS) having the highest mean ( $M = 4.36$ ,  $SD = 0.59$ ), followed closely by students' satisfaction (SSA) ( $M = 4.30$ ,  $SD = 0.62$ ). Correlation analysis revealed significant positive relationships between various constructs. Particularly noteworthy is the strong positive correlation between students' satisfaction (SSA) and both internal motivations (INM) ( $r = 0.40$ ,  $p < .01$ ) and soft skills (SOS) ( $r = 0.54$ ,  $p < .01$ ), suggesting that higher levels of internal motivations and soft skills are associated with greater satisfaction with video-based assignments. Additionally, a significant positive correlation was found between external motivations (EXM) and soft skills (SOS) ( $r = 0.42$ ,  $p < .01$ ), indicating that external motivational factors may contribute to the development of soft skills. These findings highlight the importance of considering both internal and external motivational factors in enhancing students' satisfaction and skill development in video-based assignments.

### B. Multiple Regression Analysis

#### (a). Testing for Multicollinearity

In educational research, multicollinearity is a common issue that can introduce bias into the final outcomes. Therefore, it is crucial to address this concern—high correlations among independent variables - prior to conducting regression analyses. Following the recommendations of Hair et al. (2014), this study utilized tolerance and variance inflation factor (VIF) assessments to evaluate multicollinearity. Tolerance values within the range of 0.1 to 1.0 (Kutner et al., 2004) and VIF values below 3.0 are typically deemed acceptable. As depicted in Table 5, all variables exhibited tolerance values within the acceptable range. Additionally, VIF values ranged from 1.02 to 1.64, well below the upper limit of 3.0. Consequently, these findings indicate the absence of multicollinearity among the factors.

#### (b). Testing for Model Fit

Statistics data in Table 6 show that the model was statistically significant ( $p < .001$ ). The adjusted R square of 0.382 suggested relatively high explanatory power, in which independent variables of the study (i.e. improvement in English skills, development of soft skills...) can explain 38.2 % of the total variance of the dependent variable (students' overall satisfaction). Owing to the fact that The Durbin-Watson value (1.82) was between the critical range of 1.5 and 2.5 (Turner, 2019), it is suggested that the study was free from autocorrelation.

TABLE 6  
MODEL SUMMARY AND THE AUTOCORRELATION TEST

| R     | R square | Adjusted R square | F change | p-value | Durbin-Watson |
|-------|----------|-------------------|----------|---------|---------------|
| 0.643 | 0.413    | 0.382             | 13.24    | < .001  | 1.82          |

#### (c). Parameter Estimates and Hypothesis Testing

Figure 1 and Table 7 reveal the results of the hypothesis testing and the influence of five constructs on student satisfaction. Among the five independent variables/predictors, only two factors related to H1 and H2 were found significant ( $p < .05$ ), suggesting not all predictors in the study had an impact on the dependent variable.

TABLE 7  
MULTIPLE REGRESSION COEFFICIENTS AND HYPOTHESIS TESTING

| H  | Hypothesis                 | $\beta$ | Tolerance (VIF) | t-value | p-value | 95% CI          | Results     |
|----|----------------------------|---------|-----------------|---------|---------|-----------------|-------------|
| H1 | EGS positively affects SSA | 0.295   | 0.77 (1.28)     | 3.297   | .001    | [0.118, 0.473]  | Supported   |
| H2 | SOS positively affects SSA | 0.322   | 0.60 (1.64)     | 3.179   | .002    | [0.121, 0.523]  | Supported   |
| H3 | DIF negatively affects SSA | 0.109   | 0.98 (1.02)     | 1.369   | .174    | [-0.049, 0.268] | Unsupported |
| H4 | EXM positively affects SSA | 0.155   | 0.75 (1.32)     | 1.697   | .093    | [-0.026, 0.335] | Unsupported |
| H5 | INM positively affects SSA | 0.050   | 0.63 (1.58)     | 0.506   | .614    | [-0.147, 0.248] | Unsupported |

Because all items were measured on a consistent scale (5-point Likert), standardized regression coefficients ( $\beta$ ) were used to assess the relative impact of each predictor on overall satisfaction. As shown in Table 7, the enhancement of soft skills exhibited the highest statistically significant coefficient ( $\beta = 0.322$ , 95% CI [0.121, 0.523],  $p = .002$ ), underscoring its considerable influence on student satisfaction. The improvement in English skills ( $\beta = 0.295$ , 95% CI [0.118, 0.473],  $p = .001$ ) also showed a significant positive effect. Both confidence intervals exclude zero, confirming the reliability of these estimates. The remaining three predictors — difficulties ( $\beta = 0.109$ , 95% CI [-0.049, 0.268]), external motivation ( $\beta = 0.155$ , 95% CI [-0.026, 0.335]), and internal motivation ( $\beta = 0.050$ , 95% CI [-0.147, 0.248]) — were not statistically significant, with all confidence intervals spanning zero.

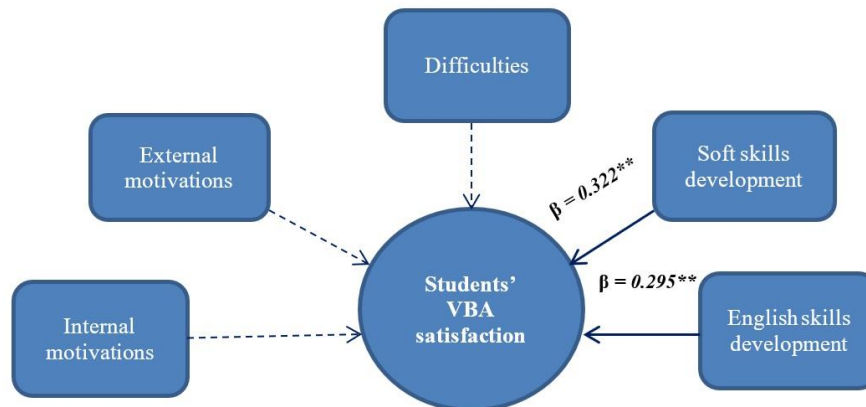


Figure 1. The Results of the Path Analysis and the Examined Model

Contrary to the hypotheses, three constructs showed no statistically significant effect on satisfaction. Perceived difficulties (H3:  $\beta = 0.109$ ,  $p > .05$ ) did not predict satisfaction, suggesting that even when students encountered obstacles in video production, these challenges did not diminish their overall contentment with the assessment. Similarly, neither external motivation (H4:  $\beta = 0.155$ ,  $p > .05$ ) nor internal motivation (H5:  $\beta = 0.05$ ,  $p > .05$ ) reached significance in the regression model, despite both showing significant bivariate correlations with satisfaction (Table 5). This dissociation between correlation and regression significance suggests that motivational effects may be mediated through skill gains rather than operating as independent predictors of satisfaction.

### C. Differences in VBA Perceptions Across Gender Groups

One-way ANOVA was conducted to examine whether gender identity influenced students' perceptions across the six constructs. The sample comprised three groups: female ( $n = 76$ , 76.0%), male ( $n = 16$ , 16.0%), and "prefer not to say" students ( $n = 8$ , 8.0%). Levene's test confirmed homogeneity of variance across all constructs (all  $p > .05$ ), satisfying the assumption for ANOVA. As presented in Table 8, no statistically significant between-group differences were found for any construct (all  $F < 1.75$ ,  $p > .05$ ). Mean satisfaction scores were comparable across groups, and a similar pattern held for English skills, soft skills, motivation, and perceived difficulties. These results indicate that gender identity did not moderate students' experience of video-based assessment in this context.

TABLE 8  
ONE-WAY ANOVA RESULTS ON STUDENTS' VBA PERCEPTIONS BY GENDER

| Construct                 | SS     | df | Mean Square | F     | Sig.  |
|---------------------------|--------|----|-------------|-------|-------|
| English Skills (Between)  | 0.641  | 2  | 0.321       | 0.800 | 0.452 |
| English Skills (Within)   | 38.891 | 97 | 0.401       |       |       |
| English Skills (Total)    | 39.532 | 99 |             |       |       |
| Soft Skills (Between)     | 1.227  | 2  | 0.613       | 1.746 | 0.180 |
| Soft Skills (Within)      | 34.070 | 97 | 0.351       |       |       |
| Soft Skills (Total)       | 35.297 | 99 |             |       |       |
| External Motiv. (Between) | 0.192  | 2  | 0.096       | 0.179 | 0.836 |
| External Motiv. (Within)  | 51.995 | 97 | 0.536       |       |       |
| External Motiv. (Total)   | 52.187 | 99 |             |       |       |
| Internal Motiv. (Between) | 0.483  | 2  | 0.241       | 0.431 | 0.651 |
| Internal Motiv. (Within)  | 54.250 | 97 | 0.559       |       |       |
| Internal Motiv. (Total)   | 54.732 | 99 |             |       |       |
| Difficulties (Between)    | 0.516  | 2  | 0.258       | 0.313 | 0.732 |
| Difficulties (Within)     | 79.932 | 97 | 0.824       |       |       |
| Difficulties (Total)      | 80.448 | 99 |             |       |       |
| Satisfaction (Between)    | 1.121  | 2  | 0.561       | 1.453 | 0.239 |
| Satisfaction (Within)     | 37.434 | 97 | 0.386       |       |       |
| Satisfaction (Total)      | 38.556 | 99 |             |       |       |

## V. DISCUSSION

This study set out to identify which factors predict learner satisfaction with video-based assessment in an ESP context, using EFA and multiple regression as its primary analytical tools. The regression model achieved an adjusted  $R^2$  of .382, indicating that the five predictors together accounted for approximately 38% of the variance in satisfaction — a result that underscores both the explanatory value of the model and the existence of additional factors not captured in this study. Of the five hypothesised predictors, only two — English skill gains and soft skill development — emerged as statistically significant, lending support to H1 and H2 while rejecting H3, H4, and H5.

The primacy of soft skill development ( $\beta = 0.322$ ) over English language gains ( $\beta = 0.295$ ) as a predictor of satisfaction is theoretically noteworthy. Students who perceived that collaborative video production strengthened their organisational, critical thinking, and presentation skills reported higher overall satisfaction — even when controlling for English proficiency gains.

Regarding RQ2, neither external nor internal motivation emerged as a significant predictor of satisfaction in the regression model. The non-significance of both motivational constructs in the regression model warrants particular attention. Although external and internal motivations showed significant bivariate correlations with satisfaction (Table 5), these effects disappeared when controlling for skill gains. This pattern is consistent with a mediation interpretation: motivation may influence satisfaction indirectly, operating through its facilitative effect on skill acquisition, rather than constituting an independent determinant. This challenges straightforward applications of Gardner's (1985) additive model of motivation and suggests that in assessment contexts where learners are cognitively and creatively engaged, perceived competence gains may override motivational orientation as the more proximal predictor of satisfaction. Future studies employing mediation analysis would be needed to test this interpretation.

The one-way ANOVA results for gender (Section 4.3) revealed no statistically significant differences across any of the six constructs (all  $p > .05$ ), despite the sample comprising three gender groups: female (76%), male (16%), and “prefer not to say” (8%). This finding suggests that VBA satisfaction and its associated predictors are experienced comparably across gender identities in this context — a noteworthy result given that gender effects on technology-mediated learning have been documented in some prior research (Christophel & Gorham, 1995; Kim et al., 2017). The equity of experience across gender groups may reflect the collaborative and creative nature of video production, which accommodates diverse learner orientations rather than privileging any particular group.

The adjusted  $R^2$  of .382 indicates that approximately 38% of the variance in satisfaction was explained by the five constructs examined, suggesting that other factors not captured in this study also contribute meaningfully. Based on the specific context of this research — ESP students producing Public Relations videos online during COVID-19 — several concrete predictors merit consideration in future work. Instructor feedback quality is one such factor: in this study, feedback was delivered primarily during the Q&A session on exam day, and the timeliness and specificity of this feedback may independently shape satisfaction beyond skill gains. Group dynamics and peer collaboration quality — particularly salient in a team-based project — may also contribute to individual satisfaction regardless of motivation level. Additionally, students' digital self-efficacy and prior experience with video editing tools such as CapCut or iMovie could moderate how they perceived difficulties and skill development, yet these were not isolated as separate variables in the instrument. Regarding the non-significant motivational predictors, the present study's quantitative design limits our ability to explain the mechanisms underlying this finding. Future studies employing mixed-methods designs — incorporating student interviews or focus groups alongside survey data — could directly probe why motivated students did not necessarily report higher satisfaction once skill gains were controlled, and whether contextual or interpersonal factors mediate this relationship.

Several limitations should be noted. The study relies on a single cohort from one institution, limiting generalisability. Self-report data cannot fully capture the complexity of learning processes. The moderate adjusted  $R^2$  also indicates that predictors beyond those examined here — such as instructor feedback quality, task authenticity, or individual digital self-efficacy — merit investigation. Future research could employ longitudinal or mixed-methods designs, test mediation pathways between motivation and satisfaction, or compare VBA outcomes across different ESP specialisations.

## VI. CONCLUSION

This study examined the predictors of learner satisfaction with video-based assessment among ESP students in Vietnam, employing EFA to validate the measurement instrument and MRA to test five hypothesised relationships. The findings confirm that gains in English skills and soft skills are the only significant predictors of satisfaction, jointly accounting for a substantial portion of explained variance. Motivational factors and perceived difficulties, while correlated with satisfaction at the bivariate level, did not exert independent predictive effects once skill gains were controlled.

These results carry concrete implications for ESP practitioners. Assessment tasks that are perceived to develop both linguistic competence and transferable soft skills — such as collaborative video production — are likely to generate higher learner satisfaction, regardless of students' residential context or available technology. Instructors should therefore prioritise task designs that make skill gains visible and salient to learners, for instance through structured reflection activities or peer feedback on both language and presentation quality. Further research into the mediating role of

motivation and the moderating effects of individual differences will help build a fuller model of satisfaction in technology-mediated language assessment.

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# The Role of English Language Skills in Promoting Leadership in Energy and Industry Sectors: Insights From Saudi University Teachers

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**Abstract**—This study examines teachers' perspectives regarding the relevance of the English language skills for developing leadership in the Saudi higher education context for the energy and industrial sectors. The data was collected using structured questionnaire based on quantitative method from 40 ESP instructors through a structured 25-item questionnaire covering leadership development, teaching practices, skill development, challenges and career readiness. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics such as mean scores and coefficients of variance. The results indicated that teachers had a strong belief in the contribution of English language teaching to the development of leadership qualities, communication skills, critical thinking, employability and global competitiveness. Interactive ESP activities including presentations, discussions and negotiations were seen as useful for developing leadership skills. However, the study indicated a few obstacles such as students' lack of English proficiency, unavailability of industry-specific teaching materials, lack of institutional support, time limitations and the need for more teacher training. The study suggests that ESP-based English instruction plays a vital role in preparing students for leadership and professional achievement in energy and industrial sectors, especially, in alignment with Saudi Vision 2030.

**Index Terms**—ESP, energy, industry, youth employment, technology

## I. INTRODUCTION

English is the most used language of communication in the energy and industrial sectors in the current period of globalisation and technical advancement (Tan, 2024; Hodges & Seawright, 2023; Patel & Shriwas, 2025). It is regarded as the language of science, technology and international business and is vital for facilitating collaboration and knowledge sharing across borders (Almudibry, 2023). This reality is very much in accordance with the national transformation strategy set forth in the Saudi Vision 2030 in Saudi Arabia, which gives importance to economic diversification, industrial expansion and the building of a globally competitive workforce. The Kingdom's investments in big scale industrial and energy projects such as NEOM have led to a remarkable expansion in the demand for graduates who have not only technical expertise, but also great communication and leadership ability (Alghamdi & Alghamdi, 2020; Alrashedi, 2025; Summary Report, 2020; NEOM Careers, n.d.; Bindawas, 2024).

In this context, leadership in the energy and industrial sectors goes beyond technical knowledge to encompass the capacity to communicate in English, manage multicultural teams and engage in strategic decision making. Therefore, competence in English, especially in discipline-specific contexts, has become a crucial element for professional success. English for Specific Purposes (ESP) has become a crucial technique in meeting these needs, as it provides learners with the language abilities required for particular academic and professional fields (Ulyani, 2025; Chi & Vu, 2024; Pavlenko, 2023; Kumari, 2024). Research shows that ESP programs help learners build their linguistic skills and socialize them into professional discourse communities and so facilitate their academic and career development (Yu et al., 2025; Azami et al., 2026). In Saudi institutions, ESP courses are being offered in engineering, medical and industrial

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disciplines to equip students to meet the workplace communication demands (Almudibry, 2023).

However, despite the increasing importance of ESP, some research indicates continuing challenges of its implementation in Saudi higher education. For example, studies on Saudi engineering students have shown that ESP education is often insufficient to address students' real academic and workplace communication needs, resulting in a discrepancy between curricular content and professional demands (Muhammad & Raof, 2019). Research on the needs of engineering students highlights gaps in technical vocabulary, genre familiarity (reports, proposals) and discipline-specific oral and written genres employed in professional contexts (Salehi, 2010; Alhadid et al., 2026; Tomak & Atas, 2019; Kausar, 2025). Students are aware of the usefulness of ESP but they are confronted with pedagogical and material-related problems. At the same time, English-medium instruction (EMI) is growing in STEM programs, opening up prospects for content-language integration and tensions over language support (Alqarni et al., 2024). Likewise, recent research suggests that ESP courses in Saudi schools do not always adequately prepare students for practical communicative tasks, especially those involving higher-order speaking, presentation, and leadership abilities (Bashir & Fouad, 2017). Moreover, students' perceptions of ESP and English for General Purposes (EGP) courses indicate that even while students recognize the relevance of English, they are still challenged to develop the required language abilities for academic and professional success (Gaffas, 2019).

The above problems raise a broader research issue of whether or not ESP curriculum could be in consistent with the changing needs of the energy and industrial sectors. ESP strives to integrate language learning to professional practice, yet current curriculum focuses more on basic language skills and technical terminology, often disregarding higher-order abilities such as critical thinking, persuasive communication and leadership. Furthermore, there is a dearth of empirical research on the effect of English language instruction in the development of students' leadership qualities in technical fields.

#### *A. Research Problem*

The energy and industrial sectors have grown significantly, although many experts are struggling to participate in global discussions because of poor English skills. This results in less prospects for collaboration, innovation and leadership on the international stage. Existing ESP courses typically lack leadership, leading to professionals who are technically adept in English but ill-prepared for leadership jobs. This research therefore tries to fill the gap by finding out what specific language skills and training methods can build leadership in energy and industry. It caters to the global requirement for experts adept at engaging in international dialogues on energy security, sustainable industrialization and technology growth. Thus, the main goals of the study are to respond to the following research questions:

1. How important do teachers think it is to have English language competency in order to build leadership abilities in energy and industry?
2. How do teachers integrate leadership curriculum and industry-specific communication strategies into English language instruction?
3. What is the function of English language teaching in enhancing students' critical thinking, communication and problem-solving abilities as viewed by teachers?
4. What are the challenges for instructors when it comes to incorporating leadership development into English language teaching?
5. What do teachers think about the influence of teaching the English language on the employability and leadership preparedness of students in the energy and industrial sectors?

#### *B. Research Objectives*

The following are the objectives of the present study –

1. To investigate teachers' perspectives on the usefulness of English language proficiency for building leadership skills in the energy and industrial sectors.
2. To explore how teachers incorporate leadership curricula and industry-specific communication skills into English language teaching.
3. To examine the role of English language education in increasing students' critical thinking, communication and problem-solving skills from teachers' viewpoints.
4. To identify the problems faced by instructors in integrating leadership development in English language education.
5. To explore teachers' perspectives of the influence of English language teaching on students' employability and leadership readiness in the energy and industrial sectors.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

The development of English language skills within the context of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) plays a significant role in fostering leadership capabilities, particularly in sectors such as energy and industry. Recent studies highlight the importance of tailored language instruction in equipping students with the communication and research skills necessary for leadership roles in specialized fields. For instance, Alhumaidan and Alghamdi emphasize the

integration of innovative approaches like Agile English for Specific Purposes (AESP) to meet the specific needs of hospitality and hotel management students, suggesting that customized ESP curricula can enhance professional competencies that underpin leadership in industry sectors (Alhumaidan & Alghamdi, 2023). In the context of Saudi Arabia, the strategic importance of English language education aligns with national visions such as Vision 2030, which aims to enhance the country's global competitiveness through improved language proficiency and industry-specific skills. The literature notes a shift in Saudi Arabia's approach to English education, emphasizing its role in supporting economic diversification and leadership in energy and industry sectors (Almesaar, 2024). This aligns with broader educational reforms in G20 countries, where curricula are increasingly designed to develop job-specific skills and leadership qualities necessary for emerging industries (G20 Indian Presidency Education Working Group, 2023). Moreover, innovative pedagogical strategies such as project-based learning are being explored to foster leadership qualities among students by promoting practical skills and collaborative problem-solving, which are essential in energy and industrial sectors (Zhang & Ma, 2023). The emphasis on skills development through tailored curricula and active learning approaches suggests that English language instruction is not merely about linguistic competence but also about cultivating leadership attributes necessary for navigating complex industry environments. Teaching English language skills within ESP curricula significantly contributes to developing leadership in energy and industry sectors. By focusing on research, communication, and industry-specific competencies, ESP programs can prepare students to assume leadership roles in their respective fields, aligning with national and global educational objectives aimed at fostering innovation and industry advancement (Al-Jarf, 2022; Al-Busaidi & Al-Seyabi, 2021).

English is a global language essential for academic and cultural exchange, and it has become a key component of higher education in Saudi Arabia, where all new university students are required to take English courses through the Preparatory Year Program. Despite substantial efforts and investments to promote English proficiency among Saudi students, outcomes have fallen short of expectations (Al-Wossabi, 2023). Hamouda (2012) highlights the challenges faced by Saudi students in participating actively in English classrooms, citing factors such as low proficiency, fear of speaking, and lack of confidence as barriers to engagement. In the realm of ESP, Wu (2014) emphasizes the importance of vocabulary learning tailored to specific fields, noting that abstractness and pronunciation are significant difficulties for learners. In the Saudi context, AlHashemi et al. (2017) identify specific academic writing needs among postgraduate students, emphasizing mechanics, correctness, and originality. Research on engineering and energy-track students indicates that successful ESP should encompass technical language, reading of standards and specifications, report writing, oral presentations, and work place communication genres. In addition, studies demonstrate that digital technologies and e-learning can facilitate ESP delivery, especially to "digital native" engineering students, but their successful integration needs teacher training and industry-oriented materials (Khan, 2019). Several Saudi studies reveal generally excellent attitudes by students to ESP where courses are explicitly related to professional outcomes. Task-based and project-oriented techniques are emphasized by teachers and literature refers to pedagogical adaptations such as realistic materials, simulation and engagement with industry partners as possibly effective in enhancing motivation and real-world preparedness (Alharbi, 2022; Montasser & Althaqafi, 2023). Recent work in Saudi contexts addresses the use of AI (e.g., ChatGPT) as an assistive tool for ESP writing and drafting, and institutional advances towards EMI create new modalities for language-and-content integration. These innovations demand careful curriculum design so that AI supplements rather than replaces pedagogically beneficial communicative practice and critical thinking required for leadership (Elmotri et al., 2025; Oraif & Alrashed, 2022).

### III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The demographic data indicated that the sample consisted primarily of experienced middle-aged male ESP professors in Saudi higher education institutions. The participants represented a wide array of academic disciplines and institutions, lending a diversity of viewpoints to the discussion about the importance of English language teaching in fostering leadership abilities in the energy and industry sectors. Although not evenly distributed among institutions and gender categories, the sample is representative of a purposive and professionally relevant population with the capacity to offer informed perspectives on ESP teaching practices and leadership development.

#### A. Sample and Population

The study sample consisted of 40 ESP teachers from various higher education institutions in Saudi Arabia. Table 1 presents the demographic characteristics of the participants, including gender, age group, teaching experience, teaching field, and institutional affiliation. The sample represented teachers with diverse professional backgrounds and varying levels of ESP teaching experience. Male teachers constituted the majority of the sample (77.5%), while females represented 22.5%. Most respondents were middle-aged professionals, particularly within the 36–40 years (30%) and 46–50 years (27.5%) age groups, indicating substantial academic and teaching experience that enhances the reliability of their perceptions regarding leadership-oriented English instruction.

Regarding specialization, Humanities represented the largest group in the sample (50%), followed by Engineering (20%), Business (15%), Applied Science (12.5%), and Medical (2.5%). This distribution provided perspectives from diverse ESP teaching contexts related to professional and industrial communication. Most respondents were affiliated with Prince Sattam bin Abdulaziz University (72.5%), while Tabuk University and the National Industrial Training

Institute each represented 10% of the sample. King Saud University and Hail University accounted for 5% and 2.5%, respectively.

TABLE 1  
DEMOGRAPHIC DESCRIPTION

|                                         | Frequency | Percentage |
|-----------------------------------------|-----------|------------|
| <b>Gender</b>                           |           |            |
| Male                                    | 31        | 78%        |
| Female                                  | 9         | 23%        |
| <b>Age Group (in years)</b>             |           |            |
| 25-30                                   | 1         | 2.50%      |
| 31-35                                   | 6         | 15.00%     |
| 36-40                                   | 12        | 30.00%     |
| <b>Variables</b>                        | 8         | 20.00%     |
| 46-50                                   | 11        | 27.50%     |
| Above 50                                | 2         | 5.00%      |
| <b>Teaching Experience</b>              |           |            |
| 0 years - 5 years                       | 7         | 17.50%     |
| 6 years - 10 years                      | 9         | 22.50%     |
| 11 years - 15 years                     | 5         | 12.50%     |
| 16 years - 20 years                     | 10        | 25.00%     |
| More than 20 years                      | 9         | 22.50%     |
| <b>Teaching ESP in the field of</b>     |           |            |
| Humanities                              | 20        | 50.00%     |
| Business                                | 6         | 15.00%     |
| Engineering                             | 8         | 20.00%     |
| Applied Science                         | 5         | 12.50%     |
| Medical                                 | 1         | 2.50%      |
| <b>Working Institutions of teachers</b> |           |            |
| Prince Sattam bin Abdulaziz University  | 29        | 72.50%     |
| King Saud University                    | 2         | 5.00%      |
| Tabuk University                        | 4         | 10.00%     |
| National Industrial Training Institute  | 4         | 10.00%     |
| Hail University                         | 1         | 2.50%      |

### B. Research Instrument

The researchers developed a structured questionnaire as the primary data collection instrument to achieve the study objectives. The questionnaire consisted of 25 items divided into five categories: perceived importance of English language skills in energy and industry leadership, teaching practices and classroom integration, skill development through English language teaching, challenges and barriers, and impact on students' career readiness. Each category included five items examining teachers' perceptions of leadership-oriented English instruction, industry-specific communication skills, critical thinking and problem-solving development, challenges in integrating leadership into English teaching, and the role of English language education in enhancing students' employability and leadership readiness in the energy and industrial sectors.

### C. Data Collection and Data Analysis

For this inquiry, the researcher used Google Forms. The researcher provided a link to the questionnaire via WhatsApp to the faculty who teach ESP from a number of higher education institutions in Saudi Arabia and asked them to fill out the questionnaire. The researchers employed a quantitative technique to explore the teachers' perspectives on the significance of teaching English language skills in boosting leadership in the energy and industrial sectors. Once a sufficient number of responses were received, the Google questionnaire was downloaded and imported into Excel in order to examine the quantitative data. Data were visually depicted with bar graphs to demonstrate the distributions of responses easily.

## IV. RESULTS AND FINDINGS

In this section the results of the answers to the questionnaire are presented and analysed. The results are arranged to make the study's conclusions easy to comprehend. The questionnaire includes questions in five categories, corresponding with the five study questions. The first set of elements concerns the perceived value of English language skills to energy and industry leadership. In this category, five questions were posed to examine the opinions on the importance of teaching English language skills in enhancing leadership in energy and industrial sectors. The findings relating to the research question "How important do teachers think it is to have English language competency in order to build leadership abilities in energy and industry?" are summarized in Figure 1 and Table 2.

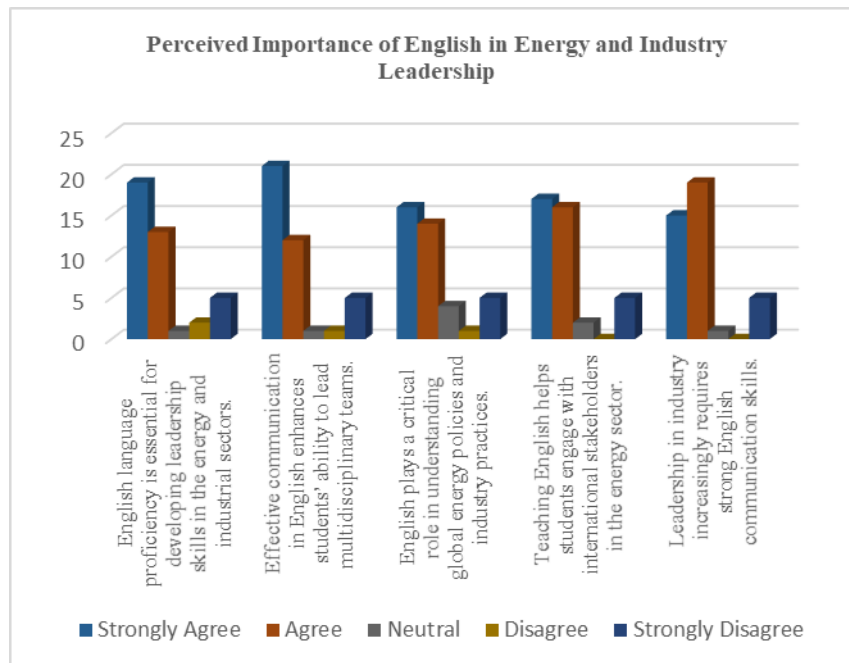


Figure 1. Variables of Perceived Importance of English in Energy and Industry Leadership

TABLE 2  
DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS AND ANALYSIS

| No.          | Variables                                                                          | Mean (M) | Coefficient of Variation (%) |
|--------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------|------------------------------|
| 1            | English proficiency supports leadership development in energy and industry.        | 3.98     | 34.41                        |
| 2            | English communication improves multidisciplinary team leadership.                  | 4.08     | 33.05                        |
| 3            | English is important for understanding global energy and industry practices.       | 3.88     | 34.16                        |
| 4            | English teaching promotes engagement with international stakeholders.              | 4.00     | 32.02                        |
| 5            | Industrial leadership increasingly depends on strong English communication skills. | 3.98     | 31.45                        |
| Overall Mean |                                                                                    | 3.98     |                              |

As illustrated in the chart in Figure 1 and descriptive statistics in Table 2, instructors generally hold strong favorable attitudes about the relevance of English language skills in developing leadership in the energy and industrial sectors. All variables had mean values of 3.98, showing general agreement among respondents. The statement English communication increases multidisciplinary team leadership had the highest mean score ( $M = 4.08$ ). The result indicates that English communication is highly recognized by teachers as an important leadership competence in the industrial society today. The coefficient of variation ( $CV = 33.05\%$ ) is reasonably low, suggesting that the respondents express moderately consistent ideas, implying a common attitude towards the necessity of communication skills in collaborative working environments. The statement “English teaching promotes engagement with international stakeholders” recorded a mean score of 4.00 with a comparatively lower coefficient of variation (32.02%). This result implies a high level of agreement and relatively consistent responses among teachers. The finding reflects the globalized nature of the energy industry, where English serves as the primary language for international communication, professional networking, and industrial cooperation. Likewise, the item on the need for English communication skills for industrial leadership earned a high mean score ( $M = 3.98$ ) and the lowest coefficient of variance (31.45%) among all variables. The lower CV value shows more uniformity in the teachers’ responses showing a significant agreement on the increasing importance of English communication skills for leadership roles in industry. The statement about the role of English proficiency in establishing leadership qualities similarly obtained a high mean ( $M = 3.98$ ), with a coefficient of variance of 34.41%. Overall, the replies were quite favorable but the slightly higher CV indicates some diversity in teachers’ perceptions probably due to differences in institutional contexts, teaching experiences or disciplinary backgrounds. The item on the comprehension of global energy policies and industrial practices had the lowest mean ( $M = 3.88$ ) of the variables, although this still suggests a positive view. Its coefficient of variation is 34.16% which shows a moderate variety in answers. This means that some teachers see English as a tool for communication, not as a way to acquire technical and policy expertise in the global energy sector. Overall, descriptive statistics show that teachers value English language abilities for leadership, professional communication, and global energy and industry engagement. The low coefficients of variance indicate perceived consistency, corroborating the findings and emphasizing the importance of ESP-based English teaching in preparing students for leadership and professional success.

The second category of items deals with teaching practices and classroom integration. In this category, five questions were asked to assess the teachers’ responses regarding teaching practices and classroom integration related to leadership development in English language instruction. Figure 2 and Table 3 display the findings related to the research question

“How do teachers integrate leadership curriculum and industry-specific communication strategies into English language instruction?”

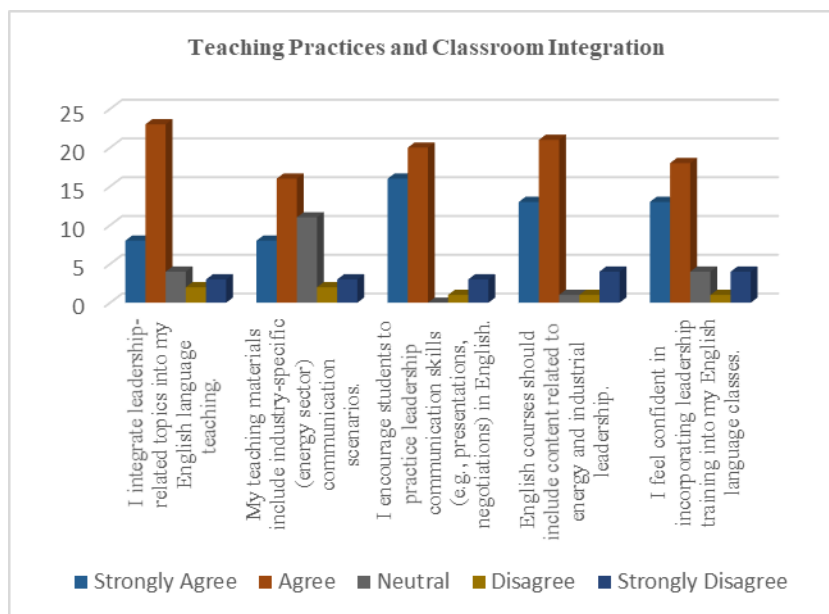


Figure 2. Variables of Teaching Practices and Classroom Integration

TABLE 3  
DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS AND ANALYSIS

| Variables                                                                       | Mean (M) | Coefficient of Variation (%) |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------|------------------------------|
| Leadership topics are integrated into English language teaching.                | 3.78     | 28.4                         |
| Teaching materials include industry-specific communication scenarios.           | 3.6      | 30.68                        |
| Students are encouraged to practice leadership communication skills in English. | 4.13     | 26.43                        |
| English courses should incorporate energy and industrial leadership content.    | 3.95     | 29.76                        |
| Teachers feel confident integrating leadership training into English classes.   | 3.88     | 30.98                        |
| Overall Mean                                                                    | 3.87     |                              |

Figure 2 and Table 3 show positive views toward integrating leadership-oriented and industry-specific content into energy and industrial English language instruction. The first statement, “I integrate leadership-related topics into my English language teaching,” was supported by most participants. Of 40 responders, 8 strongly agreed and 23 agreed, totaling 77.5% positive. Only 2 disagreed, 3 strongly disagreed, and 4 were neutral. The descriptive statistics showed a mean score of 3.78, indicating excellent teacher agreement. Coefficient of Variation (CV = 28.40%) shows reasonably consistent perceptions. These findings imply that many English teachers understand the need of teaching leadership to prepare students for professional and industrial settings. The second statement, “My teaching materials include industry-specific (energy sector) communication scenarios,” had lower agreement than the others. There were 60% positive responses: 8 highly agreed, 16 agreed, and 11 neutral. The variable had the lowest mean score (M = 3.60) and a CV of 30.68%, indicating increased response variability. This shows that while teachers recognize the necessity of industry-specific communication, some may lack teaching resources, institutional support, or energy-specific ESP materials. The third statement, “I encourage students to practise leadership communication skills (e.g., presentations, negotiations) in English,” was most agreed upon. Most responders (16 strongly agreed and 20 agreed) had good views, totaling 90%. This item had the highest mean score (M = 4.13), and its coefficient of variation (CV = 26.43%) indicated great response consistency. Teachers see communication activities as useful ways to build leadership, negotiation, and skilled interaction skills in ESP classrooms. “English courses should include content related to energy and industrial leadership,” was also widely agreed upon. 13 teachers highly agreed and 21 agreed, totaling 85% approval. The mean score was 3.95, suggesting strong agreement, and the CV (29.76%) showed moderate consistency. This shows that instructors support English language curriculum revisions that include leadership and industrial themes. The final statement, “I feel confident in incorporating leadership training into my English language classes,” received 77.5% positive answers, 13 strongly agreeing and 18 agreeing. With a mean score of 3.88 and a coefficient of variation of 30.98%, the item showed moderate agreement and acceptable consistency. The slightly higher variability may indicate disparities in teachers' professional training, teaching experience, or leadership-oriented instructional practices. Overall, teachers support integrating leadership development and industry-related communication skills into English language teaching. Mean scores show agreement across all variables, whereas moderate coefficients of variance show response consistency. Despite significant variation in industry-specific instructional materials, teachers stressed leadership

communication skills through interactive classroom exercises. These findings demonstrate the importance of ESP-oriented English training in improving energy and industrial leadership, communication, and workplace preparedness abilities.

The third category of items relates to skill development through English language teaching. In this category, five questions were asked to assess the teachers' perceptions of the significance of English language education in improving students' leadership-related qualities such as critical thinking, communication, decision making, and problem-solving skills. Figure 3 and Table 4 display the findings related to the research question "What is the function of English language teaching in enhancing students' critical thinking, communication and problem-solving abilities as viewed by teachers?"

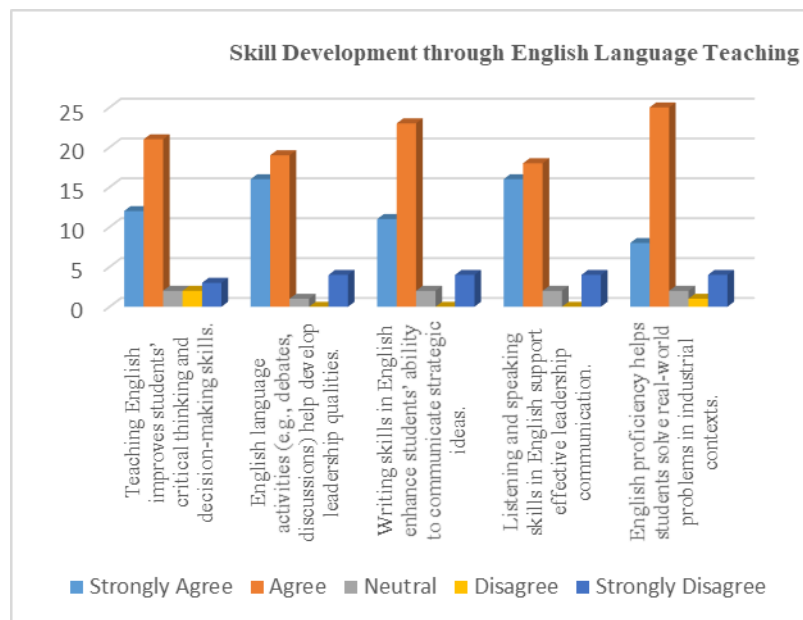


Figure 3. Variables of Skill Development Through English Language Teaching

TABLE 4  
DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS AND ANALYSIS

| No.          | Variables                                                                 | Mean (M) | Coefficient of Variation (%) |
|--------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------|------------------------------|
| 1            | English teaching enhances critical thinking and decision-making skills.   | 3.93     | 28.49                        |
| 2            | English activities help develop leadership qualities.                     | 4.08     | 28.54                        |
| 3            | English writing skills improve strategic communication.                   | 3.93     | 28.49                        |
| 4            | Listening and speaking skills support effective leadership communication. | 4.05     | 29.02                        |
| 5            | English proficiency helps solve real-world industrial problems.           | 3.8      | 29.31                        |
| Overall Mean |                                                                           | 3.96     |                              |

Figure 3 and Table 4 show that respondents strongly believe English language training helps students build professional and leadership skills in energy and industry. Participants strongly supported the first statement, "Teaching English improves students' critical thinking and decision-making skills." 12 strongly agreed and 21 agreed, totaling 82.5% positive responses. The item had a mean score of 3.93, suggesting excellent teacher agreement. The Coefficient of Variation (CV = 28.49%) indicates perceived consistency. This shows that teachers believe English language teaching improves analytical thinking and decision-making for leadership and workplace success. The second statement, "English language activities (e.g., debates, discussions) help develop leadership qualities," was most agreed upon. 16 strongly agreed and 19 agreed, totaling 87.5% positive replies. A CV of 28.54% and the highest mean score (M = 4.08) among all factors indicate relatively consistent responses. This shows how teachers value interactive English language exercises for developing leadership skills like confidence, collaboration, negotiation, and public speaking. Similarly, "Writing skills in English enhance students' ability to communicate strategic ideas," was widely agreed upon. Most respondents (11 strongly agreed and 23 agreed) said strategic communication required English writing skills. The item had a mean score of 3.93 and a CV of 28.49%, indicating favorable impressions and consistency. This shows that writing abilities help students articulate professional thoughts in industrial and organizational settings. Teachers also backed the fourth statement, "Listening and speaking skills in English support effective leadership communication." Overall, 16 strongly agreed and 18 agreed, 85% positive responses. The item's high mean score of 4.05 and CV of 29.02% indicate general agreement and acceptable consistency. Teachers may perceive oral communication abilities as crucial to leadership, especially in collaborative and multicultural industrial settings. The final statement, "English proficiency helps students solve real-world problems in industrial contexts," received fewer but still positive responses. 8 strongly agreed and 25 agreed, totaling 82.5% positive responses. The item recorded the lowest mean score (M = 3.80) and the highest coefficient of variation (CV = 29.31%) among the variables. Teachers agreed with the statement, but the

slightly higher variability implies some differences in beliefs about applying English competency to practical industrial problem-solving. In general, the data reveal that instructors firmly believe that English language teaching helps the development of leadership skills such as critical thinking, communication, teamwork and problem-solving. The high mean scores and moderate coefficients of variance demonstrate favorable and stable beliefs among respondents. Teachers emphasized the relevance of interactive English exercises to develop leadership skills and the importance of ESP-oriented training to prepare students for professional and leadership roles in energy and industrial sectors.

The fourth category of items relates to challenges and barriers. Five questions were asked in this category to examine teachers' perspectives of the challenges and constraints of integrating leadership development into English language teaching within energy and industrial contexts. Figure 4 and Table 5 display the findings related to the research question "What are the challenges for instructors when it comes to incorporating leadership development into English language teaching?"

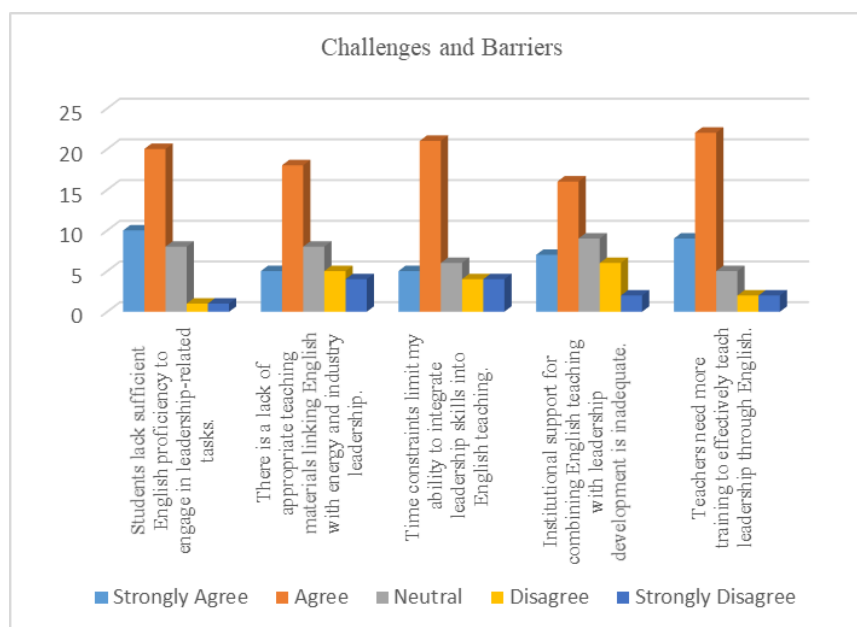


Figure 4. Variables of Challenges and Barriers

TABLE 5  
DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS AND ANALYSIS

| Variables                                                                                       | Mean (M) | Coefficient of Variation (%) |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------|------------------------------|
| Students have limited English proficiency for leadership-related tasks.                         | 3.93     | 22.63                        |
| Appropriate teaching materials linking English with energy and industry leadership are lacking. | 3.38     | 34.66                        |
| Time constraints hinder the integration of leadership skills into English teaching.             | 3.48     | 33.22                        |
| Institutional support for combining English teaching and leadership development is inadequate.  | 3.5      | 31.69                        |
| Teachers require additional training to teach leadership through English effectively.           | 3.85     | 26                           |
| Overall Mean                                                                                    | 3.63     |                              |

According to Figure 4 and Table 5, respondents believe that institutional, pedagogical, and learner-related issues hinder leadership-oriented English instruction. The first assertion, "Students have limited English proficiency for leadership-related tasks," was widely agreed upon. 10 teachers highly agreed and 20 agreed, accounting for 75% positive responses. The item recorded a relatively high mean score of 3.93, indicating strong agreement among participants. The lowest Coefficient of Variation (CV = 22.63%) showed teachers' perceptions were consistent. This shows that poor English proficiency prevents students from participating in leadership communication, discussions, and professional activities. The second assertion, "Appropriate teaching materials linking English with energy and industry leadership are lacking," had lower agreement. Five respondents strongly agreed, 18 agreed, 8 neutral, and 5 disagreed. The item recorded the lowest mean score (M = 3.38) and the highest CV (34.66%), indicating greater variability in respondents' views. This suggests that while many teachers perceive a shortage of relevant ESP and leadership-oriented teaching materials, opinions differ depending on institutional resources, curriculum design, and teaching contexts. Likewise, the assertion, "Time constraints impede the incorporation of leadership skills into English instruction," obtained moderate consensus among respondents. A majority of educators (5 strongly agreed and 21 agreed) recognized time constraints as a challenge. The item achieved a mean score of 3.48 with a coefficient of variation of 33.22%, signifying reasonable consistency in responses. This finding suggests that extensive course content, restricted class



hours, and curriculum demands may hinder teachers' capacity to effectively integrate leadership-oriented activities into English instruction. The fourth statement, "Institutional support for combining English teaching and leadership development is inadequate," similarly indicated moderate agreement. 7 teachers expressed strong agreement, and 16 indicated agreement, but a significant proportion stayed neutral or disagreed. The item attained a mean score of 3.50 and a coefficient of variation of 31.69%, indicating moderate heterogeneity in perceptions. This outcome suggests that certain institutions may lack adequate administrative support, curricular adaptability, or professional resources essential for incorporating leadership development into ESP programs. Respondents strongly supported the concluding statement, "Teachers require additional training to teach leadership through English effectively." Nine teachers strongly agreed and 22 agreed, totaling 77.5% positive replies. It had a high mean score of 3.85 and a low CV of 26%, indicating consistent answers. This suggests the necessity for specialized professional development programs to help English language teachers integrate leadership skills. The findings reveal that educators identify multiple obstacles in incorporating leadership development into English language instruction, specifically students' inadequate English proficiency, absence of specialized teaching resources, time limitations, insufficient institutional support, and the necessity for further teacher training. The average scores demonstrate moderate to high consensus among the factors, whilst the coefficients of variance signify satisfactory consistency in responses. The results underscore the necessity for enhanced ESP resources, professional development, and institutional support to proficiently incorporate leadership abilities into English instruction for energy and industrial contexts.

The last category of items relates to impact on students' career readiness. Five questions were asked in this category to examine teachers' perceptions regarding the impact of English language teaching on students' career readiness, employability, leadership preparation, and global competitiveness in the energy and industrial sectors. Figure 5 and Table 6 display the findings related to the research question "What do teachers think about the influence of teaching the English language on the employability and leadership preparedness of students in the energy and industrial sectors?"

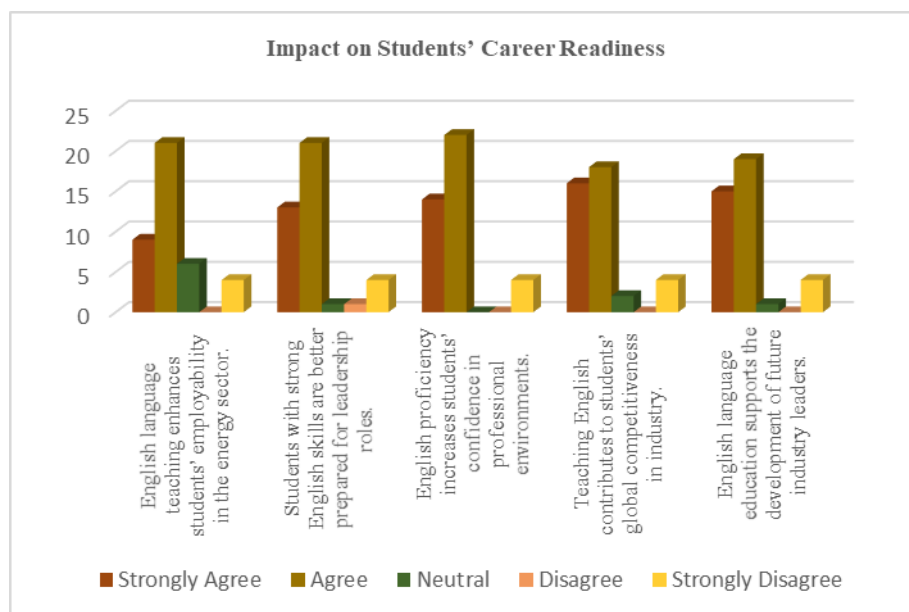


Figure 5. Variables of Impact on Students' Career Readiness

TABLE 6  
DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS AND ANALYSIS

| Variables                                                              | Mean (M) | Coefficient of Variation (%) |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------|------------------------------|
| English language teaching enhances employability in the energy sector. | 3.78     | 29.68                        |
| Strong English skills prepare students for leadership roles.           | 3.95     | 29.76                        |
| English proficiency increases professional confidence.                 | 4.05     | 27.92                        |
| Teaching English improves students' global competitiveness.            | 4.05     | 29.02                        |
| English education supports the development of future industry leaders. | 4        | 29.95                        |
| Overall Mean                                                           | 3.97     |                              |

Figure 5 and Table 6 show that respondents usually view English language instruction as beneficial to students' professional and leadership development. Most participants agreed with the first statement, "English language teaching enhances employability in the energy sector." 9 strongly agreed and 21 agreed, totaling 75% positive replies. Teachers agreed well on the question, with a mean score of 3.78. Response consistency is indicated by CV = 29.68%. This finding suggests that teachers perceive English proficiency as a key employability skill for energy-related professions where communication and technical interaction are required. The second statement, "Strong English skills prepare students for leadership roles," likewise received significant agreement from respondents. 13 teachers highly agreed and 21 agreed, making it 85% positive comments. The mean score of the item was 3.95 with a CV of 29.76%, indicating



favorable and relatively homogenous perceptions. This finding implies that the teachers closely link the ability of the English language to leadership readiness and career development in the industrial context. Similarly, “English proficiency increases professional confidence” was one of the statements with the highest level of agreement. The majority of respondents (14 strongly agreed and 22 agreed) believed that English proficiency was useful in improving students’ confidence in professional contexts. The item obtained high mean score (4.05) and lowest CV (27.92%) amongst all the variables showing good agreement and great consistency in teachers’ judgments. This research highlights the significance of English proficiency for students’ self-confidence in the workplace communication and professional engagement. The fourth assertion, “Teaching English improves students’ global competitiveness,” had a high level of agreement as well. There were 16 responders who highly agreed. 18 agreed representing 85 % favorable responses. The mean score for this question was 4.05 and the CV was 29.02%, indicating positive and somewhat stable answers. This indicates that teachers consider the teaching of the English language as a must for the pupils to compete well in the international and multicultural contexts of industries. The last assertion, “English education supports the development of future industry leaders,” was supported by several participants. A total of 15 teachers highly agreed and 19 agreed, making about 85% positive replies. This item had a mean of 4.00 and a CV of 29.95%, which suggested strong agreement with moderate consistency. This finding is a reflection of the teachers’ opinion that English language education benefits not just to linguistic competence but also to leadership development and professional readiness. Overall, the findings reveal that teachers firmly believe that teaching English is beneficial for students’ employability, leadership preparation, professional confidence and global competitiveness in the energy and industrial sectors. The high mean scores and moderate coefficients of variance show that the perceptions of the respondents were favorable and consistent. Teachers stressed the relevance of English proficiency in nurturing students into becoming leaders and professionals. They highlighted the role of ESP-driven instruction in fulfilling the workforce demands of internationally competing industries.

## V. DISCUSSION

The present study’s findings are in line with previous studies that underlined the importance of English language proficiency and ESP-oriented training in leadership development in the energy and industrial sectors. Teachers thought that English communication skills were essential for working in teams, leadership and professional communication in internationally linked industrial enterprises. These results are consistent with the studies of Tan (2024), Hodges and Seawright (2023), and Patel and Shriwas (2025) who recognized English as the dominant language of international business, technological, and industrial communication. The findings are also consistent with the goals of Saudi Vision 2030 which stresses the importance of workforce competitiveness and global engagement.

The study also verifies the prior studies on the usefulness of ESP programs in developing students’ professional and leadership related competencies. The teachers firmly agreed that activities in the English language such as discussions, presentations and debates assist greatly for developing leadership traits, communication competencies, and critical thinking skills. These results are in agreement with Yu et al. (2025) and Azami et al. (2026) who suggested that ESP programs encourage not only language development but also professional socialization. Similarly, Zhang and Ma (2023) highlighted the efficacy of project-based and interactive learning approaches in enhancing teamwork, leadership and problem-solving skills in the workplace. The findings are also consistent with the study of Alhumaidan and Alghamdi (2023) which stressed the importance of personalized ESP courses to prepare students for industry-specific communication and professional roles. In the current study, teachers expressed high support for the inclusion of the issues of energy and industrial leadership in English language teaching, and recognized the significance of workplace-oriented communication activities. It means that teachers consider ESP as a practical and professional approach rather than a subject for language learning.

However, some differences between the present results and prior studies can also be observed. In their previous study, Muhammad and Raof (2019) and Bashir and Fouad (2017) found that ESP courses in Saudi Arabia typically do not effectively prepare students for real-world communication and leadership challenges due to shortcomings in curricula and a lack of alignment with the needs of the industry. The present study also revealed challenges such as lack of teaching materials, insufficient institutional support and limited student proficiency but teachers generally had more positive attitudes towards the effectiveness of current English teaching practices in developing leadership-related competencies. This discrepancy might be due to new developments in teaching ESP, enhanced consciousness of the needs of workplace communication, or a growing focus on leadership-oriented teaching methods within Saudi universities.

Similarly, earlier research like Hamouda (2012) pointed out the lack of self-confidence of Saudi students and their reluctance to take active roles in the English classes. In the current study, teachers acknowledged students’ inadequate English proficiency as an obstacle to leadership-related communication, but they also strongly believed that English training improves students’ professional confidence and leadership readiness. This implies a change in former attitudes and this could be because communicative and interactive teaching methodologies are increasingly being utilized in ESP classrooms.

The results also diverge to some extent from previous research which has focused mostly on technical vocabulary and academic writing needs in ESP programs. Technical terminology, report writing and discipline-specific genres were

identified as the main components of ESP instruction by studies of Salehi (2010), Tomak and Atas (2019) and Kausar (2025). However, the current study emphasizes more on leadership communication, strategic thinking, teamwork and professional confidence. This distinction is a sign of the increased awareness of ESP in Saudi higher education where the teaching of the English language is more and more perceived as a way to develop wider professional and leadership competences besides technical communication skills.

Furthermore, the study findings corroborate the observations of Alharbi (2022) and Montasser and Althaqafi (2023) on the efficacy of interactive and task-based instructional approaches. In the present study teachers put a special emphasis on presentations, negotiations and discussions to develop leadership and communication abilities. However, unlike some earlier research that showed limited integration of practical activities in classrooms, the respondents of the current study displayed rather great confidence in integrating leadership-oriented tasks in English instruction. This may be a sign of improved awareness from teachers or curriculum change or institutional encouragement for more applied ESP teaching approaches.

Finally, the present study contributes to the existing literature by extending the debate of ESP beyond language proficiency and workplace communication to include leadership development in energy and industrial contexts. Previous studies mainly focused on communicative competence and professional language needs, whereas the present results suggest that teachers increasingly view English language education as a strategic element in developing future industry leaders, improving employability and increasing global competitiveness. These results represent the changing importance of ESP in the educational reforms and industrial transformation programs in Saudi Arabia under the Vision 2030.

## VI. CONCLUSION

The current study investigated the teachers' perspectives about the significance of English language skills in facilitating leadership of the energy and industrial sectors in Saudi higher education institutions. The results showed that teachers are well aware of the value of English language ability in developing students' leadership skills, professional communication, critical thinking, teamwork and global competitiveness. The respondents also stressed the need to include leadership-oriented and industry-specific communication methods in teaching English, especially in ESP settings. The study also revealed that interactive language activities such as talks, presentations, negotiations and debates are important in developing students' leadership characteristics and preparation for the job. The study also identified some challenges that impacted the effective integration of leadership development into English instruction. These challenges included students' limited English proficiency, lack of specialized ESP materials, insufficient institutional support, time constraints, and the need for further teacher training. In general, the findings imply that English language education is no longer just a linguistic tool but a strategic mechanism to prepare future leaders in the worldwide competitive energy and industrial sectors.

### A. Implications of the Study

The study has substantial educational, professional and policy implications. From an educational point of view, the findings point to the necessity for ESP curriculum which incorporate leadership development, workplace communication, and industry-specific competencies alongside traditional language instruction. Therefore, universities and curriculum developers should establish English language programs that provide students with critical thinking, professional communication, teamwork and strategic leadership competencies in the context of energy and industrial sectors. The study highlights the importance of English proficiency to enhance employability, leadership readiness and global involvement in industrial organizations. The results are also in line with the objectives of Saudi Vision 2030, which aims to establish a globally competitive workforce that can participate effectively in global sectors.

### B. Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, several recommendations can be proposed:

1. ESP programs should teach leadership and industry-specific communication skills.
2. English classes should be more engaging and task-based.
3. Leadership training is needed for ESP teachers.
4. Develop industry-relevant instructional materials and authentic communication assignments.
5. Strengthen institutional support and industrial partnerships at universities.
6. Students should develop their English foundation for leadership communication.
7. Digital and AI-supported learning tools should be used in future ESP programs.

### C. Limitations and Research Gap

This study offers useful perspectives on the role of English language education in the development of leadership in the energy and industrial sectors, but its findings are restricted by the small size of the sample, the unbalanced representation of institutions, and its reliance on quantitative data based solely on teachers' perceptions. Furthermore, the study pointed out the research gap in analyzing the direct relationship between ESP teaching and leadership development in Saudi industrial contexts. Therefore, future research should include larger and more diverse samples,

incorporate students' voices and qualitative methods, and investigate the effectiveness of leadership-oriented ESP strategies, digital technologies, and AI-supported learning for the development of professional and leadership competences.

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# Characterization of the Historical Figure Isatay Taimanov in Sherniyaz Zharylgasuly's Poetry

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**Abstract**—This qualitative study examines how Sherniyaz Zharylgasuly characterizes Isatay Taimanov, the leader of the liberation uprising, and demonstrates his embodiment of the warrior-hero archetype reflecting the historical and cultural essence of Kazakh society in the early 19th century. Using characterization techniques such as embossing, consistency, typification and contrast, Sherniyaz creates a multifaceted and morally courageous character, symbolizing resistance to oppression and the defense of national dignity. The comparative analysis with other significant literary works confirms the archetypal consistency of Isatay as a heroic leader and defender of the people. While Sherniyaz Zharylgasuly emphasizes Isatay's military prowess and moral integrity, Makhambet emphasizes his spiritual sacrifice and broader social ideals, and Shorekov and Yershu portray him as a defender of honor and a voice of vengeance. Such images enhance the psychological depth and social significance of Isatay's character, highlighting the enduring cultural relevance of the warrior hero archetype in Kazakh literary and historical memory. They also illustrate how artistic narratives can serve to reconstruct a historical figure, embody collective values and address themes such as justice, leadership, and national identity. Sherniyaz Zharylgasuly's poetry, situated within this broader literary tradition, affirms the crucial role of poetic discourse in preserving and reviving Kazakh heroic heritage, enabling a better understanding of the interplay of history, literature and cultural identity in Kazakhstan's literary heritage.

**Index Terms**—artistic image, literary representation, historical figure, characterization, hero archetype

## I. INTRODUCTION

The artistic image of historic personae is a complex intersection of history and literature, emphasizing their function in shaping collective memory and identity, negotiating historical facts and enriching literary expression. Artistic representations of historical figures play a crucial role in forming public memory and identity by portraying historical personae not only as factual figures but through layered, symbolic and emotional imagery (Retna Mona et al., 2023). Being an important poetic component of the artistic space, historical personae actively participate in forming stylistic

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figures and poetic techniques (Zinnatullina, 2021), as well as in conveying historical truths to readers or audiences for the purpose of joint contemplation (Hamid, 2019). Moreover, historical figures are often imbued with cultural and ideological significance (Kenbayeva et al., 2025), reflecting contemporary views or struggles (Ibragimova, 2025). Depicting such figures in literature, in particular poetry, is essential in facilitating societal awareness regarding historical events and relating them to contemporary socio-political issues (Wajed & Saghar, 2023). For example, Shakespearean figures such as Henry V and Richard III have been explored not only as historical personalities but as embodiments of leadership, legitimacy or tyranny that resonate across different times and cultures (Macías-Borrego, 2025; Meshram, 2022).

Kazakh poetry has long served as a vital medium for expressing national identity, collective memory and cultural values, particularly through the artistic portrayal of historical figures. Historically, Kazakh poets have created rich poetic narratives that not only recount the life and deeds of prominent personalities but also embody the spirit and ethos of the Kazakh people (Pangereyev et al., 2023). These poetic representations extend beyond mere historical recounting, offering nuanced, multifaceted images that reveal both the social status and the inner world of such figures (Kattabekova & Saulembekova, 2019). Recent studies of Kazakh epic literature have been devoted to the discourse and cultural analysis of epos featuring other prominent historical personae such as the powerful military leader and statesman of the Golden Horde Edige (Shakirova et al., 2026), the outstanding warrior in the Kazakh resistance against the Dzungar invasion Soranshi Batyr (Kabdesheva et al., 2019), the great leader of Desht-i Kipchak and commander of the Mongol troops in the 11th century Ketbuga (Zhumagulov et al., 2025), or the prominent Turco-Mongol conqueror and military leader during the late 14th and early 15th centuries Aksak Temir (Zhakulayev et al., 2024). Another epic poem dedicated to Genghis Khan and the last Kazakh khan Kenessary Kasymov illustrates their heroic qualities and socio-political significance, highlighting their enduring impact on Kazakh cultural memory and identity (Kussainova & Abdigapbarova, 2016). Elsewhere, Genghis Khan has been characterized not only as a leader but also as a human having inner conflicts, emotional pain and existential questions (Ashirbekova et al., 2025).

Sherniyaz Zharylgasuly is an important historical and literary figure whose poetry vividly captures the social and political challenges of early 19th-century Kazakh society. His work uniquely combines artistic expression with a passionate voice of resistance during a turbulent period marked by the decline of the Kazakh khanate and the rebellion against the tyranny of the local authorities in the Bukey Horde. As both a poet and an active participant in the Isatay and Mahambet liberation uprising between 1836 and 1838, Sherniyaz's verses portray the suffering of his people while serving as bold political critique. Rooted in Kazakh oral traditions, his poetry maintains improvisational and folk forms while innovatively exposing social injustice and satirizing corrupt leaders. His depictions of historical figures reflect loyalty, moral courage and sharp criticism, revealing the complexities of leadership and rebellion in his context. Sherniyaz's close ties to the rebellion demonstrate how his poetry intertwined with his political activism – celebrating heroes of justice and lamenting defeat, using verse to inspire resistance, influence power and preserve cultural memory.

The organizers of the class-based national liberation uprising of the 19th century, Isatay Taimanov and Makhambet Utemisov, fought against the oppression of the people by the local authorities. Therefore, their images became symbols of a free and courageous historical figure in fiction. Although the image of Makhambet has most captivated Kazakh writers and poets since Kazakhstan gained its independence fitting the ideology of patriotism, the image of the second rebellion leader, Isatay, has not been given due attention. This study aims to explore the characterization of the historical figure of Isatay in Sherniyaz's poetry and offers insights into Sherniyaz's role as both a chronicler and shaper of his time through the power of his poetic voice. The study positions Sherniyaz within the broader continuum of Kazakh oral poetic traditions and national liberation discourse, highlighting his lasting impact on Kazakh literature and cultural identity.

## II. METHODOLOGY

The research materials were drawn from the following three Sherniyaz Zharylgasuly's poems: "Baimagambet sultanga aitkany" ("Said to Sultan Baimagambet"), "Sagynam, auzga alsam, Isataydy" ("I Yearn, Remembering Isatay"), "Isatay men Nausha batyr tyraly" ("About Batyrs Isatay and Nausha") (Nar zaman men zar zaman, 2007). These poems were chosen as objects of our analysis based on the depictions of the historical figure, batyr (hero) Isatay. Although the image of Isatay was artistically interpreted by many authors of independent Kazakhstan in the 20th century, nevertheless, the contemporary, comrade and assistant of the batyr Sherniyaz was an eyewitness to the victorious deeds of the Kazakh national hero and thus, in our opinion, created an original, unique poetic image of Isatay Taimanov.

The research uses a descriptive qualitative approach based on understanding characterization as the entirety of literary approaches used to create and develop a character within a literary work. Following Diklić (2009) and Šušić (2020) in their perspective on the methodology of a character's literary analysis, our study combines the historical, psychological and ideological approaches to characterization. Historical characterization situates the character within a specific time and place, emphasizing how historical events and conditions impact their actions and social position. Psychological characterization uncovers both conscious and unconscious mental states, motivations, emotions, intellect and volitional aspects that drive the character's behavior and actions. Ideological characterization focuses on the character's ideological beliefs and social views. The characterization approach adopted for this study situates the

historical figure Isatay within the rebellion against the tyranny of the local authorities in the Bukey Horde and focuses on how his actions, conscious and unconscious mental states and ideological beliefs were revealed by his active participation in this historical event.

The psychological literary approach is also realized in our analysis based on archetypal criticism, which offers a deeper understanding of the symbolic functions and varied manifestations of the archetypal image across different texts and sources (Dobson, 2005). The term “archetype” denotes an ancient pattern or framework that emerges from the collective human experience, and these meanings arise unconsciously through social integration processes (Jung, 1959; Burrows et al., 1973). Understanding archetypal content provides deeper insight into a nation’s cultural code, as archetypes can vary depending on cultural context, historical setting and time (Pearson, 1998). Archetypes are also referred to as empty programs that different cultures fill with their distinct expressions, creating unique instantiations of a universal pattern (Haule, 2010). In our analysis, we focus on the hero character archetype whose essential features include courage, force of will, strength, honesty, loyalty (Francis, 2025). Heroes serve as powerful archetypes because they embody and reinforce society’s ideals about the qualities and behaviors that deserve admiration, celebration and respect (Kelsey et al., 2022). Our analysis also draws on Carol Pearson’s theory of hero archetypes, which identifies twelve distinct types, each embodying different aspects of heroism (Pearson, 2012). Among these, the warrior archetype is particularly relevant to our study, representing the noble and brave qualities of a person who is willing to stand up for their convictions and pursue justice and righteousness.

Finally, to analyze the ways in which the historical figure Isatay is characterized in Sherniyaz’s poetry, we combined such methods as narrative analysis and content analysis identifying explicit and implicit ideas provided by the poet about the character and the event described (Terekhova & Malakhayeva, 2015), and uncovering underlying meanings and thematic significance, focusing on how the historical figure is represented and interpreted within qualitative data (White & Marsh, 2006). Such a combination of literary approaches and methods offers a richer, more nuanced interpretation by integrating various dimensions to thoroughly understand the complexity of the literary character under consideration.

### III. DISCUSSIONS

#### A. Ways of Conveying the Warrior-Hero Archetype Through the Image of Isatay Taimanov

This section examines how the historical image of Isatay Taimanov is constructed both as a heroic and complex embodiment of his era’s spirit using a combination of characterization techniques employed by the poet. In the works of akyn Sherniyaz, the image of Isatay is distinguished by highly appraised qualities. Thus, in the poem “Baimagambet sultanga aitkany” (“Said to Sultan Baimagambet”), the poet utilizes embossment to emphasize Isatay’s key traits and talent of the military commander:

*Aydattyn zhalgyz bauyryn Isataydy,  
Senen de kalmak zhaksy shuldirlegen.  
Pa, shirkin, Isatayday sabaz tumas!* (Nar zaman men zar zaman, 2007, p. 241)  
(Aidat’s only brother, Isatay,  
He was even better at making Kalmyks laugh than you.  
Oh, my, no one is as clever as Isatay!)

Sherniyaz highly appreciates Isatay’s talent, regretting that such a person may no longer exist. The poet believes that it may be a long time before the Almighty will bestow such a batyr upon the Kazakhs. Simultaneously with the praise of the hero, the author uses the foil technique which is realized by pairing characters to highlight contrasting traits and deepen characterization. Isatay is contrasted with Sultan Baimagambet, whom the poet accuses of the batyr’s violent death. The poet’s caustic, sarcastic language belittles the sultan, calling him worse than a Kalmyk, a constant enemy of the Kazakhs in the 18th century, who laid claim to the lands of the nomads: “*Senen de kalmak zhaksy shuldirlegen*” (“A Kalmyk can understand life better than you”). The lyrical hero of Sherniyaz calls his interlocutor a dog, unworthy of being called a sultan: “*Kas itsin, kasyna da adam zhuymas*” (“You are an evil dog that no human will approach”). According to the poet, the sultan does not deserve to be a khan: “*Khan emes, kas katynsyn, mundar ku bas*” (“You’re not a Khan, you’re a traitor, these people are cunning”) (p. 237). The author of the poem believes that Baimagambet cannot be a khan, because his actions resemble the actions of a treacherous woman, a stupid, short-sighted person.

Sultan Baimagambet, a like-minded person and assistant of Khan Zhangir, is often mentioned in historical documents of that time. To criticize openly, sarcastically insult a representative of the government from the camp of Khan Zhangir, to point out directly that he is not a khan, during the days of the uprising led by Makhambet and Isatay – only zhyrau possessed such abilities to speak openly, directly express sharp and bold criticism to the faces of the khans, boldly condemned the khans and defended the rights of the people. Only zhyrau demanded that the khans respect the rights of the people to freedom, to land, to personal opinion, advised to protect their people, be sure to take into account the opinion of the people. Thus, the artistic style of Sherniyaz is influenced by the ancient poetry of zhyrau. It should be mentioned that the character of the poem Baimagambet is a real historical figure who had a strong influence in suppressing the uprising led by Makhambet and Isatay. The author accuses the sultan of trying to kill Isatay.



In the poem “Sagynam, auyzga alsam, Isataydy” (“I Yearn, Remembering Isatay”), the poet tells of his longing for the murdered Isatay, whom he considers a true batyr. The narrator believes that the people appreciated Isatay, calling him their beloved “khan”. He thanks Isatay for helping him, an akyn, to become a person. It seems to him that, being next to Isatay, he was the richest man:

*Sagynam, auyzga alsam, Isataydy!*  
*Er tumas el zhagynan onday zhaily.*  
*Karadan khalky suyip, “khanyn” degen,*  
*Zhigit ed tort turmany tygel saily.*  
*Keshegi Isataydyn arkasynda,*  
*Iye edim en deuleтке basybaily.* (Nar zaman men zar zaman, 2007, p. 242)  
 (I miss you, I swear!  
 A man is not born in a country like this.  
 The people of Karadan love him and call him “khan”,  
 The young man chooses all four prisons.  
 Thanks to yesterday’s Isatay,  
 I would have been rich and prosperous.)

Sherniyaz praises Isatay’s generosity, his kindness as a person, his noble heart, magnanimity, heroism, selflessness in protecting the common people. Akyn compares his and Isatay’s close connection with the inner fastener in a fur coat: “*Tomnyng ishki bauynday zhakyn ekenin aytyp*” (“Saying that it is as close as the inner cord of a tone”). Sherniyaz also calls Isatay a darling and favorite of the people and praises his courage by comparing him with a lion:

*Elge algau, magan da algau er isatay,*  
*Aiyrylyp, Sherin sodan kaygyly edi.* (Nar zaman men zar zaman, 2007, p. 244)  
 (The man who brought me to the country was Isatay,  
 Having lost him, the lion was sad because of that.)

In the poem, the author speaks of the tragedy of the people who lost their protector and their inexpressible grief after the death of the batyr. Isatay had a very high authority among the common people. The people’s support for Isatay was explained, in addition to family, brotherly and family reasons, by the desire to resist the tyranny of local authorities, against those in power. The uprising convinced that the people understood their tasks well in political terms and opposed tyranny. In difficult situations, the people tried to support Isatay, not leaving him alone. There were many who were ready to sacrifice their lives for Isatay.

Sherniyaz introduces precise autobiographical data about his beloved hero, a description of Isatay’s portrait into the poem “Isatay men Nausha batyr tyraly” (“About Batyrs Isatay and Nausha”):

*Sol uakytta arystanym,*  
*Kyryktan askan zhasynda,*  
*Kaidaky borik basynda,*  
*Akbaldak beldik belinde.*  
*Argy atasy Agatay,*  
*Bergi atasyn surasan,*  
*Esdeulet pen Shagatay.*  
*Ozinin atyn surasan,*  
*Batyr tугan Isatay.*  
*Inisinin atyn surasan,*  
*Yrsaly men Kaldybay.* (Nar zaman men zar zaman, 2007, p. 257)  
 (At that time, my lion,  
 At the age of more than forty,  
 With a kaidaqi berik on his head,  
 Akbaldak belt on his waist.  
 His great-grandfather Agatay,  
 If you ask his grandfather Bergi,  
 Esdaulet and Chagatay.  
 If you ask his name,  
 Batyr-born Isatay.  
 If you ask his younger brother’s name,  
 Yrsaly and Kaldybai.)

From the biographical data, the author reports that Isatay was a little over forty years old at the time of the historical event described. A description of his appearance is also given: he has a red cap on his head and a white belt around his waist. In addition, Isatay’s family tree is described: his great-great-grandfather was Agatay, his great-grandfather was Yesdaulet, his grandfather was Shagatai, and his brothers were Yrsaly and Kaldybay. Such a detailed description of Isatay’s ancestors corresponds to the Kazakh worldview, in which knowledge of one’s ancestors up to the seventh generation, the names of grandfathers of seven generations, is very important.

The history of the Kazakh ethnic group is rich in many uprisings against the tyranny of local authorities. Measures were taken to liberate their native land from slavery and turn it into a free country. Such eras gave birth to their batyrs, capable of leading the people. The memory of such batyrs was preserved by the people in legends, in historical works, in fiction and folk culture. One of such historical figures was Isatay Taymanuly. The main principle, the rule of his life was to serve the people. Sherniyaz akyn tells about such qualities, traits of Isatay's character in the work "Sagynam, auyzga alsam, Isataydy" ("I Yearn, Remembering Isatay"), emphasizing not only his support for the hero's cause, but also for the entire people who perceived the batyr as their leader:

*Ber de isataydyn bailygy edi,  
Zerlengen kara sharsham tailyk edi.  
Isatay el erkesi, el serkesi,  
Bir men emes, alashka zhailylym edi.* (Nar zaman men zar zaman, 2007, p. 244)  
(Everything was Isatay's wealth,  
The black, golden lamp was Thai.  
Isatay was the country's hero, the country's leader,  
Not just me, but the pasture for the people.)

For the poet Sherniyaz, who was a close associate and supporter of the batyr, the main goal of praising Isatay was not only to glorify his heroism and the richness of his soul as a person, but also to reflect his civic position. In the historical context of the national liberation uprising of 1836–1838, the image of Isatai appears as an image of a man-defender of ordinary people, workers. In Sherniyaz's poetry, Isatay acts as the initiator of the national liberation uprising.

To sum up, the warrior-hero archetype is vividly revealed in Sherniyaz's poems about the historical figure Isatay Taimanov through a sophisticated blend of characterization techniques that bring both heroic stature and psychological complexity to the fore. Sherniyaz employs embossment to highlight Isatay's essential qualities – his courage, talent as a military commander and moral integrity. This positive portrayal is sharpened by the use of foil, contrasting Isatay with Sultan Baimagambet, who is depicted negatively through caustic and sarcastic language. This juxtaposition emphasizes Isatay's nobility against the sultan's betrayal and treachery, reinforcing the symbolic battle between justice and tyranny.

The poet maintains consistence across his works, presenting Isatay as a coherent figure embodying loyalty, heroism and steadfast devotion to his people. Meanwhile, typification frames Isatay as the archetypal batyr – a heroic leader and defender of the oppressed – representing the spirit of the national liberation uprising. The deep cultural and historical grounding of the character is enriched by biographical and genealogical details that connect him intimately to Kazakh heritage.

Together, these techniques do more than celebrate a historic hero: they unpack Isatay's psychological depth and social significance. Sherniyaz's portrayal invites readers to view Isatay not simply as a legendary figure but as a deeply human embodiment of resistance, courage and national identity. The interplay of embossment, consistence, typification and foil ensures that the warrior-hero archetype resonates powerfully within the poetic narrative, reflecting broader struggles for justice and cultural dignity in Kazakh history.

#### *B. Archetypal Consistency in Depicting Isatay Taimanov as a Heroic Leader in Kazakh Poetry*

In order to ensure the typicality of the presentation of the hero archetype in Sherniyaz's literary works, we examined the features of depicting Isatay's image in the works of other authors: Makhambet Utemisov's poems "Zhabygu (Isataydyn atynan)" ("The Dying Words of Isatay, Spoken to Makhambet"), "Tarlany" ("Ode to Isatay"), "Isatay degen agam bar" ("I Have a Brother Named Isatay"), "Mingeni Isataydyn Aktanbay-ay" ("Isatay's Pacer – Aktanban"); Y. Shokerov's historical work "Isatay – Makhambet"; M. Ershu's poem "Isatay – Makhambet". These works also describe the uprising of 1836–1838 led by Isatay and Makhambet and contain characterizations of Isatay.

In Makhambet's poetry, the image of Isatay is unique as a symbol of boundless heroism, a defender of the people and their favorite. Makhambet expresses the main position of Isatay in the poem "Zhabygu (Isataydyn atynan)" ("The Dying Words of Isatay, Spoken to Makhambet"):

*Khalyk ushin kandy togem dep,  
Karany khanga tenep berem dep,  
Ol maksatka zhetе almay,  
Degenimdi ete almay,  
Kor boldyk-au, shyrak-ay!* (Utemisov, 2006, p. 74)  
(We thought we would shed blood for the people,  
We thought we would make Kara equal to the Khan,  
But we couldn't achieve that goal,  
We couldn't do what we said,  
We were a disgrace, oh, the lamp!)

The lyrical hero regretfully tells the reader about Isatay, who wanted to put the common people on a par with the khan, and for this he shed his blood, sacrificing his life. With bitterness and pain, he speaks about his beloved comrade and about himself, the author, who failed to achieve their goal and endured a lot of suffering because of this. The reader learns about the essence of the popular uprising led by Isatai and Makhambet, about their desire to stop the tyranny of

the khans and sultans over the people. Isatai's life principles are discussed in Makhambet's poem "Isatay degen agam bar" ("I Have a Brother Named Isatay"):

*Isatay degen agam bar,  
Ak kireyke zhagam bar.  
Khan ulymen kas bolyp,  
Kara ulymen dos bolyp.* (Utemisov, 2006, p. 78)  
(I have a brother named Isatay,  
I have a collar for the white man.  
I am an enemy to the Khan's son,  
I am a friend to the Black son.)

The listener/reader is informed that the lyrical hero has an amazing brother named Isatay, his support and pride, his protection. He is famous for the fact that he hates the son of the khan and is friends with the son of the common people. Further, it is important to note how the author raises the philosophical problem of the emergence of a heroic personality in the fate of the people, asks the question:

*At tuar ma shubarday,  
Er tuar ma bularday?  
Myna otyrgan Isa-ekem  
Dulygaly bas kecip,  
Dushponynyn kanyna  
Ak almasyn suardy-ay.* (Utemisov, 2006, p. 78)  
(Will a horse be born like a horse,  
Will a man be born like these?  
Here sits Jesus,  
Having cut off his head with a helmet,  
He has watered his white apple with the blood of his enemy.)

The author discusses whether a strong pacer like the hero's horse could ever appear again; such a person as Isatay. In the author's mind, associations arise between the feat of Isatay and the feat of Christ, who sacrificed himself for the sake of people and faith.

In his poem "Tarlanym" ("Ode to Isatay"), Makhambet characterizes Isatai with the following tropes: "tarlanym" (master, recognized authority), "arystanym" (like a lion), "keriskidey shandozym" (a strong-willed man), "kulanday aschy dauystym" (loud-voiced, similar to the voice of an asp), "kuljaday aybar muyizdim" (his sharp speeches are like sharp horns), "tenizdey teren aqyldym" (his mind is as deep as the deep sea), "adynasyn ala ogizdey möniretken" (a poetic comparison of Isatay's rhetoric, similar to the sound made by a bull). In the last fragment, the archaic poetic trope "adynasyn" is used from the poetic vocabulary of zhyrau, which was almost never used in Makhambet's time. With vivid comparisons and epithets, the poet emphasizes Isatay's courage, intelligence and leadership qualities, his ability to convince and make his interlocutors hear. He acts as a leader like a strong bull leading a herd. In the poem "Mingeni Isataydyn Aktanbay-ay" ("Isatay's Pacer – Aktanban"), the refrain is the idea that the loss of the leader of the uprising did not stop its participants, fighters for the rights of the people, in a just cause, they did not lay down their arms, they continued the work started by Isatay.

Makhambet's poetry about Isatay demonstrated not only the glory of Isatay, an ode in his honor and the memory of the batyr, but they, first of all, were perceived by the people as a cry, an appeal, giving the participants of the uprising fortitude, confidence to go to the end, to victory. The author of works about Isatay, Makhambet subtly perceives and understands the whole essence of the matter, started by a strong, strong-willed, intelligent, far-sighted leader, therefore his dedications to the batyr, created in a bright poetic language, are very accessible to the reader. The dream, the principle in the struggle started by Isatay, was the desire to establish equality in Kazakh society, without the rise of sultans, khans, power and humiliation of the rights of ordinary people.

The modern poet M. Yershu, who stands out in Kazakh poetry with his unique individual style, puts forward his version of "reading" historical events in the artistic text "Isatay – Makhambet". For M. Yershu, the image of Isatay is a symbol of the people's voice of revenge for the humiliation, for the lack of rights that local authorities of that era caused. Yershu displays his idea of Isatay's role in a historical event, excellently depicting the character of the batyr who fought against tyranny:

*Ozbyrlykka un katkan koptin uni,  
Isatay bop alyska zhetti uni.  
Isataydyn astynda aktabany,  
Dulygasy basynda. Ketti uni.* (Yershu, 2015, p. 29)  
(The voice of many who have spoken out against oppression,  
The voice has reached far as Isatay.  
Under Isatay, a white robe,  
On his head, a helmet. The voice of vengeance.)

The image of Isatay in the historical poem by Y. Shorekov “Isatay – Makhambet” is unique. According to his description, Isatay is a noble son of a worthy father Taiman, was a defender of the insulted, honor of relatives, did not let his sisters and women be offended; he dedicated his short life to the struggle for dignity, freedom, equality of the people:

*Agaiynnyn aryna,  
Karyndastyn kamyna,  
Kyska kunde kyryk shapkan.  
Kysylgannyn panasy –  
Asyl edin Isatay  
Yer Taimannyn balasy. (Shorekov, 1976, p. 19)*  
(For the sake of a brother,  
For the sake of a sister,  
Forty times in a short day.  
The refuge of the oppressed–  
You were noble Isatay  
The son of a man of Taiman.)

To sum up, the literary works presented for discussion examine the image of the historical figure of Isatay, the leader of the liberation uprising. The artistic texts of Makhambet Utemisov and Sherniyaz Zharylgasuly are united by the image of a powerful, strong-willed leader of the people’s uprising Isatay, while in Y. Shorekov’s work Isatay is a defender of the insulted, and in M. Yershu’s – the image of a cry, revenge, courage, bravery. What all the authors have in common in the artistic embodiment of the image of Isatay is the vision of the image of the batyr as a brave hero, speaking out in defense of the defenseless, insulted and humiliated people, striving to awaken in them a sense of dignity, the desire to achieve equality in society.

The portrayal of Isatay Taimanov across various literary works strengthens and enriches the depiction of the warrior-hero archetype first vividly constructed in Sherniyaz Zharylgasuly’s poetry. Makhambet Utemisov’s poems present Isatay as a boundless hero and defender of the people, emphasizing his sacrifice and commitment to equality. In “Zhabygu”, Isatay’s death and the failure to achieve social justice evoke a poignant sense of loss and unfinished struggle, while “Tarlany” deploys evocative imagery comparing Isatay to a lion and a strong bull, underlining his courage, intellect and leadership – traits akin to those that Sherniyaz embosses in his poetic characterization. Similarly, Utemisov’s use of poetic tropes rooted in the oral tradition resonates with Sherniyaz’s stylistic choices, highlighting Isatay’s noble spirit and rallying call for resistance against tyranny. Both poets use Isatay’s figure not only as a historical hero but as an emblem of national dignity and resilience, aligning with the archetypal warrior-hero who defends the oppressed and inspires collective courage.

Y. Shorekov’s historical poem and M. Yershu’s later poetic interpretation add new dimensions to the image of Isatay. Shorekov emphasizes Isatay’s role as a defender of family and public honor, portraying him as the embodiment of justice and honesty. Yershu, in turn, highlights Isatay as a symbol of revenge and the strength of the oppressed, conveying the emotional intensity and uncompromising courage characteristic of the warrior archetype. Together, these works reflect a consistent thematic core: Isatay as a heroic figure fighting injustice, embodying both collective aspirations and the personal valor necessary for social change. The comparison demonstrates how Sherniyaz Zharylgasuly’s archetypal warrior-hero resonates with and complements other literary works, thus confirming the enduring cultural significance and symbolic power of the archetype in Kazakh literature. The character’s portrayal, which includes works by various poets, enriches his psychological depth and social role, demonstrating the flexibility of the warrior hero archetype in expressing diverse but unified national ideals.

#### IV. CONCLUSION

The results of this study demonstrate that Sherniyaz Zharylgasuly’s portrayal of Isatay Taimanov embodies a multifaceted warrior-hero archetype, reflecting both the historical and cultural spirit of Kazakh society in the early 19th century. Using characterization techniques such as embossing, consistency, typification, and contrast, Sherniyaz creates a psychologically complex and morally courageous figure who emerges as a bold defender of justice and national dignity. The juxtaposition of Isatay with the treacherous Sultan Baimagambet not only enhances the image but also symbolically reflects the broader struggle between oppression and resistance during the national liberation uprising.

The comparative analysis with other literary works, the poetry of Makhambet Utemisov and the works by Y. Shorekov and M. Yershu, confirms the archetypal consistency of Isatay as a heroic leader. These poets collectively emphasize Isatay’s boundless heroism, commitment to equality and his role as a defender of the people and a symbol of resistance. While Sherniyaz highlights Isatay’s military and moral virtues, Makhambet and other authors emphasize his spiritual sacrifice and enduring legacy as a unifying figure at the decisive moment in national history.

The literary representation described in this study contributes to the enrichment of the psychological depth and social significance of the historical figure Isatay Taimanov. It also shows the flexibility and relevance of the warrior-hero archetype in Kazakh cultural memory and highlights how this historical figure is artistically reconstructed to embody collective ideals and inspire ongoing reflection on justice, leadership and national identity. The national hero’s

characterization, in the context of related works, confirms the important role of poetic narrative in preserving and reviving the heroic legacy of Kazakh history. This study provides a deeper understanding of the relationship between poetry and history in Central Asian studies, demonstrating how Sherniyaz Zharylgasuly's works function as a rich source for reconstructing sociopolitical narratives and personal aspects of leadership, rebellion, and statehood through the portrayal of an outstanding historical figure.

#### DECLARATION OF THE USE OF AI

The authors declare that Perplexity.ai was used in the preparation of this article to translate fragments from Kazakh into English and to improve the style, clarity and readability of the English text. The use of AI tools was purely auxiliary and does not replace the authors' responsibility for the scientific ideas, content, analysis and research results. AI-translated and improved fragments were checked by the authors for clarity and precision.

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# Social Justice in Mbue's *How Beautiful We Were*: A Marxist Perspective

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**Abstract**—This research delineates the specific manifestations of social injustice within the novel *How Beautiful We Were* (2021) and provides a theoretical analysis of these phenomena through a Marxist lens. The writer uses a qualitative descriptive analysis method. Data collection was conducted through careful reading, note-taking, and identification of dialogues and narrative sections that reflect social justice issues, which were then analyzed using Karl Marx's theory. The results of this study reveal that the novel depicts a widespread "metabolic rift" in which Pexton prioritizes capital accumulation over the environmental and biological sustainability of the villagers. This study also shows the radicalization of the oppressed class as they transition from seeking restorative justice to using retributive revolutionary violence. Ultimately, this study concludes that the struggle ended with the total physical and cultural eradication of the village of Kosawa, validating the Marxist critique that capitalist expansion requires the destruction of indigenous social orders to serve the needs of the global market.

**Index Terms**—social justice, Marxism, Imbolo Mbue, *How Beautiful We Were*

## I. INTRODUCTION

"Literature is a form of expression of society" often begins discussions of literature and society (Wellek & Warren, 1956, p. 95). This reflects how literature reveals society's happenings and its various characters (Arafah et al., 2024a). This belief shows how literary works have a social mission in social reality (Arafah et al., 2023a). Literature's relationship with society appears in how authors describe their social backgrounds, making it a record of recent and past events

(Sunyoto et al., 2022; Yudith et al., 2024; Yudith et al., 2023). Literature connects to reality as a product of personal expression with artistic presentation that helps readers follow the storyline (Arafah et al., 2024b; Lestari et al., 2025; Malawat et al., 2026; Tang et al., 2025). Language styles help authors present aesthetic work to impact people's perceptions and thoughts (Baa et al., 2023; Arafah et al., 2023b). Readers may gain more profound understanding or misunderstand what authors try to convey (Iksora et al., 2022).

Literature offers more than entertainment; it enables readers to deeply understand phenomena (Abbas et al., 2020a). Literature relates to other aspects and should be understood implicitly to grasp meaning (Asri et al., 2023; Kuswanti et al., 2023). Cultural aspects appear in most literary works, depicting a group's locality (Arafah et al., 2026b). Culture connects to society and is vital for human life (Takwa et al., 2024a). Positive cultural values convey moral messages guiding life and preserving heritage (Manugeran et al., 2023; Takwa et al., 2025; Arifin et al., 2022). Neglecting cultural heritage (Takwa et al., 2025; Takwa et al., 2024b), environmental crises (Abbas et al., 2024), or excessive internet use (Arafah & Hasyim, 2023a; Arafah et al., 2023c) are common modernisation issues. These issues might persist without improvement efforts. Thus, presenting social phenomena through literature can raise awareness. Authors create literature from imagination, feelings, experiences, and thoughts. Literature is defined as written art by specific authors (Arafah & Kaharuddin, 2019a). Authors' works derive from their minds and interpretation (Arafah et al., 2024c). Novels often reflect reality and are society's records (Abbas et al., 2020b).

Literature engages in academia to improve learners' reading through integration in lessons (Anggrawan et al., 2019; Arafah et al., 2025; Kaharuddin et al., 2023). Learners identify how authors express ideas through free writing, despite hurdles (Suparti et al., 2025; Arnawa & Arafah, 2023; Mardiana et al., 2023). Educational materials are provided via textbooks, printed, and online forms (Arafah et al., 2023d; Taqdir, 2025; Taqdir et al., 2026). Modern classrooms use electronic devices, AI, and mobile applications (Kaharuddin et al., 2024; Idhan et al., 2026), and technology-integrated pedagogical frameworks to support learning, writing development, and engagement, including in rural contexts (Usman et al., 2024). Online engagement is rising, making digital media a key information source (Arafah & Hasyim, 2023b; Arafah et al., 2026a; Hasyim & Arafah, 2023). However, younger generations' informal language risks harming standard norms (Hasjim et al., 2026). Presenting literary works in education aims to shape characters. Positive values in literary works reflect local wisdom as life guidance (Arafah et al., 2025). Locality helps reshape human aspects by adapting to changes (Takwa et al., 2026b). Some communities preserve beliefs despite modernisation, others struggle (Effendy et al., 2025). Literature offers cultural knowledge and societal issues, as language and symbolic expression preserve identity, transmit values, and represent cultural meanings in community life (Takwa et al., 2026a).

Literary works often raise social justice issues. Social theory studies scientific perspectives on social life, including themes related to how societies develop and change, social behaviour, power structures, class, gender, ethnicity, modernity, civilisation, revolution and utopia. Justice is the first virtue in social structures, so ineffective laws and institutions must be changed (Rawls, 1971; Taqdir et al., 2025). Karl Marx contended that the elimination of human oppression and exploitation leads to the existence of justice. This aligns with Wood's analysis showing that for Marx, true justice means transcending class exploitation. This view contributes to justice debates by advocating the elimination of bourgeoisie-proletariat differences (Wood, 2004). This transition replaces private profit with public welfare, ensuring social institutions prioritise human needs over capital accumulation (Husami, 1978).

Society is a cooperative system where individuals share benefits and face conflicts over resources (Rawls, 1971). Individual social content is shaped by various associations (Jaelani et al., 2024). The principle of social justice fairly establishes rights and obligations and determines benefit distribution (Rawls, 1971). This concept of justice fosters mutual respect among citizens, enabling peaceful coexistence despite differences (Rawls, 1971). Justice ensures all humans have basic rights, with social and economic equality legitimate only if benefiting everyone (Rawls, 1971). Social conflict often arises between bourgeoisie and proletariat classes (Fitriyah et al., 2024). This injustice has affected societies for centuries, controlling groups based on class, race, and ethnicity (Arifuddin et al., 2024).

Imbolo Mbue's novel, *How Beautiful We Were* (2021), explores social justice and injustice through the struggles of Kosawa Village residents (Golomb et al., 2021). Exploitation by American oil company Pexton harmed the environment and residents, who received no fair compensation. Officials, meant to protect community rights, colluded with Pexton for profits while villagers lived in poverty without proper education, healthcare, and infrastructure. The villagers unite, conducting protests and advocacy to achieve justice and media attention. They pursue legal channels to sue the company and government, despite intimidation. The novel emphasizes education and awareness of rights, teaching younger generations about environmental protection and citizenship. Through this struggle, the author portrays the community's resilience against challenges, prompting readers to reflect on social issues and pursue change (Mbue, 2021).

The suffering described in the novel refers to Marx's concept of Surplus Value, where capitalist profits result from exploiting lower classes (Marx, 1867). By refusing to invest in clean infrastructure, Pexton reduces costs to maximise surplus value from the land and people. This creates alienation, where villagers are estranged from their environment. When labour objects – land and water – are contaminated, workers become estranged from their livelihood and identity (Marx, 1959). This exploitation connects to society's superstructure – the political and legal institutions emerging from the economic base (Marx, 1859). In Kosawa, the corrupt government acts as a bourgeois committee, using violence to protect foreign companies and manipulating ideology to normalise oppression. However, this conflict changed when class consciousness emerged (Marx, 1847).



This study uses Marxist theory to analyze social injustice in Imbolo Mbue's novel *How Beautiful We Were* (2021). Previous studies, such as “Social Justice in Tolstoy's Anna Karenina Novel (1878): Marxist Perspective”, used Marx's theory to analyze social justice in 19th-century Russia (Widyawati, 2018). The research, “The Struggle for Equality: Social Class Portrayed in Solomon Northup's 12 Years a Slave: A Marxist Analysis”, explores the relationship between whites and blacks and the lower class's (blacks) struggle for equality (Nurhajjah et al., 2023). Another Marxist study, “An Analysis of Social Justice in War and Peace by Leo Tolstoy”, illustrates conflict due to social class between the bourgeoisie and proletariat in the novel's characters (Azizah, 2024). This study's significance lies in environmental damage and corporate neocolonialism in African fiction. It fills a gap by focusing on how multinational oil companies' exploitation causes the metabolic rift and eradication of indigenous communities. Unlike previous studies ending with justice's triumph, this study highlights the tragic reality of radicalization and systemic failure within a Marxist framework. Therefore, this study is important and worthy of discussion.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Literature is a social product connected to society (Mare et al., 2025). It mirrors complex relationships between power, inequality, and conflict shaping human conditions (Jamiluddin et al., 2026; Mutmainnah et al., 2022). Literature critiques human conditions (Rano et al., 2026). Thus, a theoretical framework is crucial to explain systems of oppression and resistance in social justice literature (Aini et al., 2026). Karl Marx's framework offers a strong perspective on inequality and how the dominant class controls marginalized communities, among other approaches for analyzing social justice in literature (Sarangi & Pattnaik, 2020).

The significance of Marx's theory is in its historical importance and relevance for analyzing current social challenges. His theories on capitalism, class conflict, and exploitation offer an understanding of economic structures perpetuating social injustice, which are relevant for analyzing literary works on corporations and marginalized communities (Kenton, 2024). Marx (as cited in Huijbers, 1982) stated that this situation shackled workers who were not treated humanely, and it has persisted for centuries because the state and legal system serve capitalist owners. Marx's thinking was influenced by his life history reflecting the conditions of the time (Huijbers, 1982). Modern political philosophy sees the bourgeoisie and proletariat in a fundamental class conflict inherent in capitalism (Political Science Institute, 2024). Marx's view of social injustice is based on this class distinction, arguing that while workers create value through labor, they receive only a small percentage as wages.

Meanwhile, the bourgeoisie takes most surplus value, initiating class conflict (Political Science Institute, 2024). Understanding this struggle is crucial to today's societal challenges. Marx's critique helps explain economic and social differences. The bourgeoisie-proletariat relationship shows how these issues arose (Political Science Institute, 2024). Exploitation is central to Marx's critique of capitalism, arguing profits stem from worker exploitation (Samson, 2025). This surplus value shows capitalism's reliance on labor exploitation. Workers face injustice when unable to retain their labor's value (Shea, 2023). Literary works reflect real life, a mimesis of the universe (Abrams, 1971). Dialogues, characters, and novel parts reflect these issues (Purwaningsih et al., 2020). Art and literature connect scientific discourse with emotional resonance to promote environmental knowledge (Nabirye, 2024; Arafah & Kaharuddin, 2019b).

Marx's analysis includes environmental degradation as capitalist exploitation beyond human exploitation (Suhadi et al., 2022). Capitalism exploits both the environment and humans for profit, which is linked to environmental justice issues (Foster, 2015). The metabolic rift theory shows that economic indicators overlook both environmental damage and human progress (Foster, 2015). Marx's theory advocates for revolutionary movements, arguing capitalism will fall due to proletariat exploitation. Working-class strength lies in uniting against capitalism (Marx & Engels, 2002), requiring class consciousness to form a unified revolutionary force. Understanding challenges to unjust social orders hinges on collective consciousness becoming organized action (Lukacs, 1971). Marx's justice concept, rooted in humanism, relates to his engagement with workers and entrepreneurs. In the novel, Pexton pressures Kosawa people for profit. Kosawa residents lack financial freedom as government power grows, serving bourgeois interests. Marx envisions an order free from alienation, exploitation, and state control. This framework aids in analyzing how works like *How Beautiful We Were* (2021) depict struggles against systemic injustice. Marx's theory examines how this novel portrays class struggle, exploitation, environmental degradation, and resistance movements.

## III. METHODOLOGY

This study employs a qualitative method to analyse the issue of social justice in Imbolo Mbue's novel, *How Beautiful We Were* (2021). The research aims to provide an understanding of what social justice ought to be. Karl Marx's critical theory is utilised to demonstrate the social injustices experienced by the people of Kosawa, such as economic exploitation, class struggle, environmental exploitation, and resistance movements.

This study utilises two types of data sources: primary and secondary. The primary source is the first edition of the novel *How Beautiful We Were*, published in 2021 by Random House in the United States, which serves as the main text for analysing social justice issues—specifically class conflict, the exploitation of natural resources and labour, economic equality, dominant ideologies, and environmental destruction. The secondary sources consist of scholarly articles, previous research such as theses related to the topics at hand, and Karl Marx's theories.

The data collection process was conducted through several steps. First, the primary source—the novel itself—and secondary sources were carefully read to gain a thorough understanding of social justice issues. Second, the collected data were categorised based on Marxist theory, specifically focusing on class struggle, the exploitation of labour and natural resources, economic equality, dominant ideology, and environmental destruction. This stage allowed for a focused exploration of how capitalism drives systemic damage. Subsequently, the data were analysed using Karl Marx's theories to connect the conflicts in Kosawa to broader social and economic structures.

#### IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In *How Beautiful We Were* (2021), Mbue presents the pervasive issue of environmental injustice, where the fundamental rights to health and a safe environment are violated by Pexton's greed and state complicity, transforming a once-thriving ecosystem into a toxic wasteland. The narrative establishes this degradation as intentional destruction, as it results from prioritising profit over human life. The following quote describes the ecological collapse that has occurred.

*When the sky began to pour acid, and rivers began to turn green, we should have known our land would soon be dead.* (Mbue, 2021, p. 3).

This excerpt shows how unregulated industrial activities contaminate essential survival elements: air, water, and soil. Kosawa has reached ecological imbalance, with natural resources no longer functioning healthily or sustainably (Andika, 2023). From a Marxist view, Kosawa's environmental destruction results from capitalism—specifically the Metabolic Rift—where Pexton, as the bourgeoisie, prioritizes capital over conditions necessary for life. Pexton's arrival signifies global capitalism's intrusion into a local ecosystem, viewing land as a resource for extraction, not a habitat. This scenario illustrates Marx's claim that capitalism exploits land and labor, prioritizing profit over viability. Kosawa's degradation results from capitalism minimizing costs to maximize surplus value. This injustice manifests in the villagers' psychological and physical toll, with the younger generation succumbing to the toxic environment.

*When we began to wobble and stagger, tumbling and snapping like feeble little branches.* (Mbue, 2021, p. 3)

It describes the utter helplessness of the village children, who die one by one as a result of the pollution ravaging their community. The physical destruction of these children represents a sacrificial offering at the altar of corporate profit.

*We remembered those who had died from diseases with neither names nor cures.* (Mbue, 2021, p. 5).

*Lusaka's departed younger son...the dirty air had gotten stuck in his lungs. Slowly, the poison spread through his body and turned into something else. Before we knew it, Wambi was dead.* (Mbue, 2021, pp. 7-8).

This represents a form of intentional violence where even breathing becomes a hazardous act, and the community is forced to witness the agonizing deaths of their family members. In a Marxist context, this is a deep alienation; they are cut off from their land and their own biological existence. The novel illustrates how the villagers are unable to escape this toxicity, as every essential resource has been contaminated.

*The poison in the water and the poison in the air and the poisoned food growing from the land that lost its purity the day Pexton came drilling.* (Mbue, 2021, p. 5)

The ongoing toxicity demonstrates how Pexton extracts the earth's wealth while forcing the villagers to endure lethal poisons. The injustice lies in the villagers' inability to protect themselves, which effectively strips them of their rights and their future.

These events confirm that the villagers are victims of human rights violations. By making the villagers' homes uninhabitable and poisoning their biological systems, Pexton and the government are committing a slow-motion genocide.

*It would soon be over, that we would all be well in no time.* (Mbue, 2021, p. 3)

This narrative underscores the violations committed by the ruling class—Pexton and the government—who impose a cycle of disease upon the lower class to sustain economic profits. The villagers find themselves powerless to halt Pexton's operations, as the company and the state leverage economic and political power to maintain their presence and dominance in the region (Velu & Rajasekaran, 2024). This aligns with Marx's view that the state and the legal system often allow such conditions to persist because they function as organisations of power for the owners of capital.

*How Beautiful We Were* (2021) also depicts corporate exploitation and neocolonialism, characterising the relationship between the village of Kosawa, the national government, and Pexton as one of organised theft and dehumanisation. This is not merely a business transaction, but a structural erosion of the villagers' sovereignty, where foreign economic interests are prioritized over the community's rights through corrupt state mechanisms. The narrative identifies the beginning of this arrangement as a secret pact made without the knowledge or consent of the villagers, which can be described as a form of modern-day slavery.

*Three decades before, in Bezam, on a date we'll never know, at a meeting where none of us was present, our government had given us to Pexton. Handed on a sheet of paper, our land and waters to them.* (Mbue, 2021, p. 11)

The relationship between Kosawa, the government, and Pexton exemplifies the Marxist concept of neocolonial exploitation, where the state colludes with Pexton to oppress the villagers. This case serves as a clear instance of primitive accumulation, in which the inhabitants are stripped of their means of subsistence to pave the way for capitalist enterprise.

*One of our fathers asked if Pexton could, in the meantime, send us clean water...The Leader shook his head...Pexton was not in the business of providing water.* (Mbue, 2021, p. 9)

In this passage, the exploitation is characterised by Pexton extracting immense wealth (oil) while refusing to provide the villagers with the basic necessity of clean water. Marxists refer to such situations as the extraction of surplus value, where the generated wealth belongs entirely to the corporation, leaving the inhabitants with a toxic environment.

*They could do anything to us, because they owned us.* (Mbue, 2021, p. 11)

*Pexton isn't acting alone. They only have power over us because our government gave them power over us.* (Mbue, 2021, p. 277)

*We would have had choice but to accept that we were now theirs.* (Mbue, 2021, p. 11)

Based on Thula's observations, Pexton possesses power because the government has granted it to them, illustrating how the state and capitalists are intertwined to maintain dominance over marginalised communities. The villagers are forced to accept the reality that they do not belong to themselves but to the corporation, depicting the total alienation and dispossession inherent in neocolonial capitalism. This confirms Marx's argument that the chaos of market competition and the drive for increased profits inevitably lead to acts of exploitation.

A system of brutal political repression is also depicted in this novel, where state apparatuses do not act as protectors but as enforcers of violence for corporate interests, using lethal force to crush any resistance against Pexton. The following excerpt clearly demonstrates how the military serves as an instrument of collective punishment.

*The soldiers won't care that this was the work of one madman. They'll put bullets inside all of us, down to the smallest child.* (Mbue, 2021, p. 19)

According to Marx's theory, the state utilizes the military and police to suppress the proletariat and protect the rights of the bourgeoisie. This reflects the understanding that the state views the working class not as citizens to be protected, but as obstacles to the stability of capitalist production.

*How fast those bullets came.* (Mbue, 2021, p. 129)

*Feeling like little trees that did not deserve to grow. Feeling mothers through their backs. Felling fathers as they attempted to save their families. Five children. Four women. Five men.* (Mbue, 2021, p. 180)

The massacre represents class warfare; when the villagers attempt to disrupt the production process or challenge Pexton's authority, the state responds with violence to restore order for the sake of profit.

*The judges concluded that the accused did what they did in an attempt to extort money from the Pexton Corporation...all those who seek to hurt the republic must be made to pay a price.* (Mbue, 2021, p. 189)

The state apparatuses serve only the interests of the 'republic'—a reference to Pexton—treating the villagers as obstacles to be cleared away like small trees. This indiscriminate killing of men, women, and children is carried out to preserve the class structure by instilling terror and eliminating those who dare to rebel against the economic status quo. The government's justification—claiming the villagers were attempting to extort Pexton when they were merely fighting for their lives—further validates the state's brutal oppression.

A sad and complicated change happens in the search for justice as the villagers, who first wanted to heal and hold accountable, start to depend on violent revenge instead. Their resistance, once driven by a desire to force the oppressor to acknowledge their humanity and halt environmental destruction, transforms into the deliberate infliction of slow physical pain—a grim attempt to show Pexton's workers exactly what their company has done to them.

*I'll take them to see the graves of my sons who died from their poison. I'll show them the grave of my child we've buried, and they'll count the graves so that they'll know the number and never forget it. Then we'll keep them prisoner, and I'll guard them until their employer stops killing us.* (Mbue, 2021, p. 23)

The evolution of the villagers' resistance from negotiation to violence reflects the Marxist view of class struggle escalating into revolution. As Marx posited, the opposing interests of the bourgeoisie and the proletariat are irreconcilable within a capitalist system; this inevitably leads the oppressed to realise that peaceful appeals to the ruling class are merely an exercise in futility.

*Keep the captives until they give us the names of men in Bezam who can help us. We want nothing else from them. Just names. After which we'll set them free.* (Mbue, 2021, p. 88)

However, as time passed and failed negotiations yielded no change—while violence and ecological destruction continued unabated—the villagers began to demand violent retribution. The death of yet another child triggered this shift, driving a grieving father to ambush Pexton workers under the cover of night.

*He killed them all. Shot the first in the head. The second man's bullet entered his chest before a scream could get off his tongue. The third man he shot in the back as he turned away.* (Mbue, 2021, p. 304)

*We executed them only to pass a bit of our pain along to our tormentors.* (Mbue, 2021, p. 306)

The terror inflicted upon workers and soldiers shows the proletariat striking back at oppressors. This aligns with Marx's belief that the lower class unites to overthrow the system once aware of capitalism's lack of reciprocity. The novel highlights that the denial of justice compels the oppressed to pursue justice through violence. The shift from dialogue to physical pain illustrates the radicalization Marx predicted when the underclass reaches its limits. It confirms that in an exploitative system, violence becomes the only language oppressors understand.

*How Beautiful We Were* (2021) also illustrates how those in power weaponise the law to legitimise their destruction. This systemic failure is demonstrated through the sham trials and executions of the village leaders, known as 'the four,' and the rejection of the villagers' petitions by international courts.

*We wish to inform you that the four accused were hanged to death earlier this week. The judges concluded that they did what they did in an attempt to extort money from the Pexton Corporation.* (Mbue, 2021, p. 189)

The legal system's failure to protect the people of Kosawa illustrates the Marxist concept of the legal superstructure, wherein courts function not as neutral arbiters but as tools created by the economic base to serve the interests of the ruling class. The sham trials faced by the village leaders and the dismissal of their case by American courts demonstrate how legal institutions are designed to uphold property rights and corporate sovereignty over fundamental human rights.

*American courts had to stay out of the matter and let the courts in our country decide...she said it would be unfortunate if we did not get justice in our country's court, but America had to respect other countries' boundaries.* (Mbue, 2021, p. 343)

The American court's refusal to intervene based on jurisdictional limits highlights how international law protects the global flow of capital while fracturing the solidarity of the oppressed.

*The people who owned those courts were the same people who had given our land to Pexton.* (Mbue, 2021, p. 344)

The villagers realise that those who own the courts are the same parties who sold their land to Pexton. This reinforces Marx's idea that the state and its laws are merely a committee for managing the common affairs of the bourgeoisie.

*How Beautiful We Were* (2021) also explores the struggle for gender justice, as the patriarchal structure in Kosawa devalues women's leadership and weaponises their bodies. Thula's rise as a revolutionary leader exposes the deep-seated misogyny within her village, where a woman's worth is measured solely by her reproductive capacity rather than her political intelligence.

*Once, an elder asked her how many children she had. When she said none, he asked her when she intended to have them. When she said never, the men burst out laughing.* (Mbue, 2021, p. 295)

*We hoped that, with time, she'd find a husband, someone with whom she'd have a child so that she could become a real woman, because nothing could make her respectable besides motherhood and marriage.* (Mbue, 2021, p. 308)

The struggle for gender justice in Kosawa can be analysed through the Marxist lens of double oppression, where women suffer from both the capitalist system and patriarchal social structures. Thula's rise as a female leader challenges traditional gender roles, which function similarly to a class structure. The marginalisation she faces from the village elders mirrors the bourgeoisie's marginalisation of the proletariat; just as workers are alienated from the means of production, women are alienated from their political agency.

*Young women returned home with accounts of how their underwear was ripped off, their legs pried open by three or more soldiers – some women couldn't recall how many soldiers had mounted them.* (Mbue, 2021, p. 306)

The sexual violence perpetrated by soldiers against the women of Kosawa functions as a brutal tactic of imperialist control, treating their bodies as territories under the oppressor's dominion. These events highlight the inseparable connection between the liberation of Kosovo and its women. Thula's leadership aligns with Marx's vision of overthrowing all forms of social stratification.

Thula's journey in the novel reflects a profound quest for educational justice and political revolution, grounded in the realisation that systemic ignorance is a root cause of oppression and that liberation requires both intellectual awakening and political restructuring. She evolves from a direct struggle for clean water into a broader ideological battle, understanding that her village's suffering is more complex—deeply rooted in a corrupt, neocolonial government.

*I promised myself after the massacre that I would acquire knowledge and turn it into a machete that would destroy all those who treat us like vermin.* (Mbue, 2021, p. 208)

Thula's persistence in pursuing an education demonstrates the transformation of false consciousness into revolutionary praxis. In Marxist theory, the ruling class maintains ideological control to keep the proletariat unaware of its oppression. Thula envisions her education as a 'machete' to cut through this ideology, leading the villagers to understand that their suffering is not mere misfortune, but a systemic injustice.

*We'll roar until they give us back our dignity. Our voices will be the fire that will burn down every system of injustice, and from the ashes we will build a new nation.* (Mbue, 2021, p. 313)

Thula's movement aims to dismantle the structures of natural resource and labor exploitation by seeking to overthrow the dictator and replace him with a pro-people system. This trajectory positions education as a tool of transformation—from passive suffering to active political struggle. Thula's evolution from a grieving girl into a revolutionary leader exemplifies the Marxist conviction that the working class must achieve class consciousness to overthrow the capitalist system. Her efforts to organise protests and challenge state decisions represent the practical application of Marx's critical theory.

The pinnacle of injustice in this novel is the absolute physical and cultural erasure of Kosawa—an act of annihilation sanctioned by the state to clear the land for unrestrained natural resource extraction. This state-ordered destruction exemplifies the ultimate justification for devastation in the name of capitalist profit.

*His Excellency ordered Kosawa burned. What once were our huts became ashes. Our mothers' kitchens, ashes. Our barns and outhouses, ashes. Our ancestors' pride, ashes.* (Mbue, 2021, p. 355)

Marx stated that capitalism demands a constant expansion of power and resources, even if it requires the violent removal of indigenous populations—a process known as primitive accumulation. The burning of the village and the displacement of its inhabitants are calculated acts designed to clear the land for unhindered oil extraction, prioritising profit over human life.

*Nothing remained of Kosawa, except for what we kept in our hearts. Hour after hour, day after day, year after year, winds of every kind came and blew away the ashes of what used to be our home.* (Mbue, 2021, p. 355)

The government's order to incinerate Kosawa—claiming the site was too contaminated—serves as the cruelest possible justification for removing the proletariat. By physically erasing the village, the state directly eliminates the evidence of its own criminal negligence and collusion.

*The scholarship was for our children only. There was no land left to fight for. Most of our children got the scholarships. They do not speak our language to their children. They speak to them only in English.* (Mbue, 2021, pp. 358-359)

The scholarships provided by Pexton act as a tool to indoctrinate Kosawa's youth into the capitalist system, alienating them from their culture and language (Halil et al., 2024). These events underscore that their struggle ends in total erasure, where their identity and existence are liquidated to serve Pexton's needs. This narrative validates the Marxist critique that capitalism inevitably destroys traditional social structures and the environment in order to sustain growth. The survivors are left in a state of cultural extinction and identity crisis, marking a victory of the bourgeoisie over the proletariat in this specific struggle.

## V. CONCLUSION

In *How Beautiful We Were*, Mbue provides a vivid depiction of systemic social injustice, where the village of Kosawa suffers under the relentless corporate greed of Pexton. The tragic reality of Kosawa becomes even clearer when viewed through a Marxist perspective, revealing this conflict as a classic and brutal struggle between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat. Mbue demonstrates that justice does not arise from merely pleading for the benevolence of the oppressor; rather, it is forged through self-awareness and the strength to stand and dismantle the capitalist system. The novel suggests that, in line with Marxist belief, the only way to break the chains of exploitation is through a conscious struggle to reclaim fundamental human rights and dignity.

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# Linguostylistic Features of Representing the Concept of ‘Hunger’ in Selected Kazakh Prose of the 1930s

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**Abstract**—Contemporary linguistics shows a growing interest in studying language as a polysystem, with particular attention to the interrelation of language, thought, and the cultural worldview. Within this framework, the analysis of literary concepts that represent collective traumatic experiences becomes particularly relevant. This research aims to identify and describe the distinctive linguostylistic features used to represent the concept of “hunger” (golod) in the Russian-language segment of Kazakh prose of the 1930s. The study is based on an integrative approach combining methods of corpus linguistics (frequency, concordance, and collocational analysis employing statistical metrics such as t-score and Mutual Information), cognitive-discursive analysis for reconstructing mental models. A specialised text corpus of works by the key authors of the period (S. Mukanov, B. Mailin, G. Musrepov) was compiled. The findings reveal that the concept of “hunger” (golod) is represented through a stable set of linguostylistic devices. The lexical core of the semantic field is formed by the nominatives “bread” (khleb) (13.6 per 10,000 words), “hunger” (golod) (12.3), “death” (smert’) (9.3), and “to eat” (est’) (10.4), which actualise the biological, social, and symbolic dimensions of the tragedy. Collocational analysis confirmed stable associations with adjectives such as “frosty” (moroznyi) (MI = 8.7). Distinct authorial strategies were identified: an emphasis on social evil (Mukanov), natural force (Mailin), and redemption (Musrepov). The results confirm the hypothesis that linguostylistic devices constitute the principal mechanism for constructing literary meaning and emotional impact, reflecting the collective experience of dehumanisation and the loss of traditional ways of being.

**Index Terms**—corpus linguistics, cognitive-discursive approach, metaphorical models, soviet-era literature, cultural memory

## I. INTRODUCTION

In contemporary linguistic research, a marked originality is evident, wherein language is conceptualized not only in relation to phenomena such as digitalisation — encompassing fields like data science, digital linguistics, and related disciplines—but also as a complex polysystem (Horri, 2023). This perspective naturally foregrounds several critical aspects of language functioning, foremost among them being the intricate interrelation between language and thought. Equally salient within this framework are extralinguistic activity, knowledge of ontological reality, and linguistic as well as national worldviews (Ylönen & Aven, 2023). This approach is closely linked to the prevalent use of the linguistic term concept in contemporary historiography and source studies, a notion that has attracted scholarly attention under various designations since antiquity (for instance, Plato) (Leung, 2022). Significantly, the term persists in both classical and contemporary scholarly discourse. In its traditional interpretation, the concept primarily serves a substitutive function, representing an indefinite set of homogeneous objects. Conversely, in contemporary understanding, emphasis is placed on its connection with the cognitive processes of the language user. Moreover, within

this framework, the concept embodies the so-called magical function of language: rather than merely reflecting a given set, it signifies potentiality, symbolic projection, and the prospective realization of events. Consequently, the study of the linguostylistic particularities of specific concepts in literary prose assumes heightened significance and scholarly relevance (Mukhtarova et al., 2025). A prominent and compelling focus in contemporary linguistic studies is the examination of the concept of “hunger” (golod) in Kazakh prose of the 1930s, a focus shaped by a complex interplay of historical, cultural, socio-political, and linguistic factors. It is important to note that the collectivisation campaigns and the mass famine of 1931–1933, which affected large segments of the population, constitute a watershed in the history of the Kazakh nation. The profound repercussions of these events permeated all facets of national self-consciousness, ethnic identity, and cultural perception. Inevitably, these traumatic experiences left a significant imprint on the literature of the period, produced by direct witnesses and participants (Abdinassir et al., 2025; Toktanova et al., 2021). This imbues the literary corpus with a unique and irreplaceable value for linguistic and broader humanities research.

This line of investigation also facilitates the study of collective and personal trauma as transmitted through language. The Russian-language prose of Kazakh authors in the 1930s is particularly illuminating, shaped as it was by political regulation and suppression, and reflecting a fusion of Kazakh cultural traditions with Soviet ideological frameworks. This hybridity is evident in both the explicit linguistic expression and the stylistic construction of the texts (Jakypbekova et al., 2025). Central to the works under analysis is the concept of “hunger” (golod), which functions as a thematic and symbolic nucleus, unifying imagery, narrative conflicts, and related literary elements (Sarsenbekov & Sagatova, 2025). In Russian-language Kazakh prose of this period, this concept takes on a multidimensional meaning that extends beyond a purely physiological reaction. Such depth of representation enabled the authors to transform the concept of “hunger” (golod) into a multilayered symbolic construct, associated with the preservation of national identity, moral trauma, and choice, as well as historical and cultural memory and legacy.

The research problem lies in the need for a holistic, profound, and integrated linguostylistic analysis of the actualisation (representation and related processes) of the concept of “hunger” (golod) in the Russian-language segment of Kazakh prose of the 1930s. It should be noted that most studies have focused primarily on the historical-political or broader cultural dimensions of this issue. Consequently, insufficient attention has been devoted to the specifically linguistic mechanisms underlying the construction of literary meaning and emotional impact. Moreover, several lacunae may be identified in the linguostylistic analysis of this concept's representation. In particular, the dominant metaphorical models and syntactic patterns characteristic of its linguistic construction have not yet been determined. The study focuses on the localisation of the distinctive linguostylistic parameterisation of the representation of the concept of “hunger” (golod) in Russian-language Kazakh prose of the 1930s. Accordingly, particular attention is given to the lexical devices actualised, the figurative expressions employed, the metaphorical models utilised, and the syntactic constructions applied. These elements collectively shape a multidimensional image of hunger, framed not only as a physiological condition but also as a psychological and sociocultural phenomenon. This approach aligns with the sociocultural perspective advanced by Zhamankozova et al. (2023), who demonstrate that linguistic representations function as carriers of collective memory and cultural meaning, shaping how lived experiences are encoded and interpreted within a given community.

It is therefore unsurprising that this material provides a rich source for the study of how collective and individual trauma are represented through the prism of the linguistic system. Of particular interest in this context is the Russian-language prose of Kazakh writers from the 1930s, which emerged under conditions of ideological oppression, censorship, and strict cultural policy limitations. This body of work reflects a complex, differentiated system of interrelations between traditional national cultural codes and images. Their distinctiveness and variety, in turn, interact with the Soviet ideological paradigm. This dynamic is evident in the specificity of the linguistic means and the wide range of stylistic devices employed in these texts (Jakypbekova et al., 2025).

Shaped by ideological restrictions, these writings disclose a multifaceted compromise between traditional cultural programs and Soviet ideology, demonstrated through diverse linguistic and stylistic strategies. The scientific originality of this paper lies in the enactment of an interdisciplinary practice that combines linguistics, social anthropology, cultural studies, history, and literary studies to analyse the concept of “hunger” (golod) within this specific corpus. The selected method has allowed a methodical study of linguistic means within their traditional and social backgrounds. An interdisciplinary approach combining linguistics, social anthropology, cultural studies, history, and literary studies is used to analyse the linguostylistic structures of the idea of “hunger” (golod) in Russian-language Kazakh prose of the 1930s.

The study aims to identify and characterize the distinctive linguostylistic features used to represent the concept of “hunger” (golod) in Russian-language Kazakh prose of the 1930s. Based on this aim, the following research objectives are defined:

1. To conduct a comprehensive linguostylistic analysis of the Russian-language segment of Kazakh prose of the 1930s to localise the actualised linguistic devices (lexical, phraseological, syntactic, and others), as well as stylistic devices (metaphors, similes, and so forth) through which the concept of “hunger” (golod) is verbalised.
2. To identify the basic system of motifs and images correlated with the concept above, and to examine the richness of their functional spectrum in conveying the artistic, cultural, social, and related content of the prose under consideration.

3. To carry out a comparative analysis of the representation of the concept of “hunger” (golod) in the Russian-language works of different Kazakh authors to determine the paradigms, tendencies, and trends, as well as to identify individual authorial approaches in depicting the national tragedy of the period under study.

It is noteworthy that this complex of devices functions as a primary mechanism for plot construction and the formation of specific narratives (including worldviews) in the Russian-language segment of Kazakh prose of the 1930s.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

### A. *Hunger in Kazakhstan in the 1930s: Socio-Historical Context*

In his analysis, Pianciola (2022) argues that obligatory sedentarization was the primary trigger factor in ending the traditional way of life of nomadic populations in Kazakhstan and motivated a significant social crisis. Belyalova and Zhengis (2025) accentuated that the mass confiscation of food and heifers led to demographic devastation due to the subsequent lack of basic provisions. A dissimilar viewpoint on the 1930s proceedings in Kazakhstan is unfilled by Kaşıkçı (2024), who positions the food crisis within a wider global background. He contends that Soviet management perceived the famine as an unavoidable side effect of accelerated industrialization, rather than as a deliberate policy of mass murder.

These elucidations, current in theoretical framework, prove a range of methodological tactics – from ascribing direct accountability to the establishments in the analysis of basic factors. Shoshanova (2024) offers measurable data representing a populace weakening of more than one-third. The investigation of Atantayeva et al. (2025) accompanies this image by analysing the sociocultural concerns: the fragmentation of social draws, the vanishing of entire communities, and the loss of cultural identity. Uniting demographic statistics with social investigation enables a comprehensive understanding of the tragedy's factual dimensions.

### B. *Methodology of the Study of the Concept of “Hunger”*

The investigation of the concept of “hunger” in the body of arty texts necessitates a grouping of linguistic and literary tactics. From a linguistic lookout, characterize ‘hunger’ as a multilevel concept surrounding physiological, social and symbolic measurements, thus spreading beyond a purely biological clarification. Jeffries (2023) highlights the essential role of metaphor in abstracting shocking practices, noticing its purpose as the primary mechanism for arranging complex authenticities. Academics have emphasized the traumatic features of the idea of “hunger” in literary dialogue. Kannan (2025) proves through linguistic-cognitive examination that the idea of ‘hunger’ acts as a “memory trigger” for communal shock. This plays a role that is established in the literary works of Dukeyev (2023), who describes this concept as central to the creation of post-catastrophic identity. A qualified study by Zou (2025) describes alterations in national explanations: Russian literature often presents starvation as a “trial,” while Kazakh descriptions portray it as “destruction.” Both deductions show that the common nature of famine is most fully exposed through intercultural examination that takes into account the exclusive national practise of the catastrophe.

### C. *Linguostylistic Features of Representation*

Literary works addressing famine employ diverse linguistic strategies across multiple textual levels, integrating symbolic, narrative, and mythopoetic devices. Metaphor and fantasy, as highlighted by Orazbek et al. (2025), function as cognitive frameworks that shape cultural meaning and guide reader perception, aligning closely with this study’s focus on metaphorical models used to depict the concept of “hunger” in 1930s Kazakh prose.

Historical and cultural interactions further influence the formation of linguistic meanings. Aubakirova et al. (2016) demonstrate that Turkic–Arabic contacts shaped semantic and cultural constructs, revealing how collective memory and sociocultural values are encoded in language. Social and relational concepts are also embedded in linguistic systems. Raikhan et al. (2020) show that kinship terminology reflects cultural norms and gendered perceptions, reinforcing the view that hunger is not merely a physiological phenomenon but a socially and culturally mediated experience.

At the micro-linguistic level, Ogal (2025) identifies metaphors of bodily reduction and zoomorphic contrasts, which contribute to dehumanization by portraying characters as depersonalized units struggling for survival. Zhanabayev et al. (2022) emphasize the use of expressive epithets and syntactic repetition, evoking a sense of inevitability and existential constraint, while the semantics of emptiness and images of dead space intensify the representation of collective trauma. Symbolism further underscores famine’s multidimensional nature; for example, Altynbek and Mussabekova (2024) highlight the image of bread as a dominant symbol that mediates the universal struggle between life and death, eliciting immediate emotional resonance in readers.

National literary practices also contextualize hunger within culturally specific landscapes. In Kazakh prose, Jarosz (2025) portrays the steppe as a geographical space marked by loss and deprivation, depicting hunger as a symbol of both individual suffering and communal tragedy. Literary techniques such as “indirect corporeality” further enhance psychological engagement, conveying characters’ grief through descriptions of their gaze, breathing, or silence, and thus deepening the narrative’s emotional and cognitive impact.

Collectively, these linguostylistic, symbolic, historical, and social perspectives provide a comprehensive analytical framework for examining the literary portrayal of hunger, demonstrating its embeddedness in cultural memory, social norms, and human experience.

#### D. Underexplored Aspects of the Problem

Despite extensive historical and sociological research on the 1930s famine in Kazakhstan, its linguistic and literary representation in prose remains insufficiently studied. Most works neglect a detailed linguistic analysis of how the image of hunger is constructed, specifically overlooking linguostylistic mechanisms (e.g., metaphors, epithets, syntactic figures) that shape the tragedy's emotional perception. Furthermore, there's a lack of comprehensive comparative analysis of this concept's representation in texts written at different times (1930s vs. later decades), which hinders tracing its literary evolution. Finally, the limited synthesis of qualitative and quantitative methods impedes the systematisation of linguistic conclusions. This study, therefore, aims to fill these gaps by offering a new, linguistically-focused approach to exploring the literary experience of the famine.

### III. METHODOLOGY

#### A. Research Design

It should be emphasised that the present study is of an empirical-linguistic nature, as it is directed towards the analysis of the linguo-stylistic features of the representation of the concept of “hunger” (golod) in the Russian-language segment of Kazakh prose of the 1930s. In particular, it combines methods of corpus linguistics (corpus-based approaches) with cognitive-stylistic interpretation (psycholinguistics, linguo-culturology, and related fields).

#### B. Research Hypotheses

- a) Hunger is hypothesised to be predominantly represented through metaphorical re-interpretation, whereby it acquires generalised features of retribution, a natural disaster, an impersonal disease, or a predatory force.
- b) It is further hypothesised that symbolic representation functions as a key mechanism through which hunger is endowed with sacral meanings, particularly those associated with the erosion of traditional ways of life and the loss of former cultural artefacts.
- c) Finally, the study hypothesizes that the algorithmic formation of specific syntactic constructions—including parataxis, repetition, and impersonal sentence structures serves to generate a thematic and semantic refrain, conveying collective trauma, hopelessness, and sustained suffering.

This enables the identification of both quantitative and qualitative regularities in the concept's linguistic embodiment, thereby determining its staged structure:

*Stage 1 – Corpus Formation.* This stage involves the formation of a textual corpus, the selection of materials for its creation, and related processes: the works are digitised, normalised, and prepared for automated processing. Such unification ensures the possibility of further application of statistical and discursive methods of analysis, while also saving time through subsequent algorithmic processing.

*Stage 2 – Automated Analysis.* This stage involves the application of specialized free software (AntConc, NoSketch Engine). Frequency, concordance and collocational analysis with t-score and mutual information metrics were used in the paper in order to find main lexemes and stable word combinations for the concept of "hunger". The statistical analysis enabled the reconstruction of the concept's semantic fields across bodily, social, cultural, and psychological dimensions.

*Stage 3 – Interpretation and Visualisation.* At the final stage, the obtained data were interpreted; in particular, visualisation was carried out in the form of tables, graphs, and diagrams. This clarity made it possible to present the identified frequency characteristics, collocations, and semantic relations in a maximally structured way, thereby demonstrating the achievement of the aim and objectives of the study.

#### C. Sample Formation

The textual corpus for this study was justified by a rigorous methodological approach that accounted for the distinctiveness of Russian-language Kazakh literature of the 1930s and its cultural-historical context. The latter is directly correlated with Soviet cultural policy, censorship, and the limited availability of texts. The final selection of works was based on several interrelated criteria to ensure its relevance and representativeness for the research objectives. Thus, Table 1 presents the content of the research corpus:

TABLE 1  
CONTENT OF THE RESEARCH CORPUS

| Author         | Work                                             | Sources                                                                                                                                                                                                                  | Notes                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
|----------------|--------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Sabit Mukanov  | Novel "Botagoz"                                  | Twirpx: Website. URL: <a href="https://tinyurl.com/yvzrs6re">https://tinyurl.com/yvzrs6re</a> (accessed: 18.09.2025).                                                                                                    | Hunger is depicted through the portrayal of the poverty of the destitute, the destruction of the nomadic way of life, and class struggle during the period of collectivisation. Metaphors of physical and spiritual exhaustion symbolise social transformation. |
| Beimbet Mailin | Stories from the Collection "The Case of Shugan" | State Archive of Literature and Art of the Republic of Kazakhstan (Almaty): manuscripts and publications of the author, including translations, in the collection of the Union of Writers of Kazakhstan (F. 123, op. 1). | Hunger is represented through images of survival in the steppe, the loss of livestock, and despair, symbolising internal conflict and the transition to the collective farm system. The metaphor of "emptiness" accentuates the concept.                        |
| Gabīt Mūsrepov | Novella "Akan Seri – Aktokty"                    | State Archive of Literature and Art of the Republic of Kazakhstan (Almaty): manuscripts and translations of the author in the collection F. 145, op. 2.                                                                  | Hunger is represented through metaphor – as the suffering of the people and the search for "food". Images of steppe hardship and the loss of traditions are linked to social change.                                                                            |

The textual corpus was formed based on three primary criteria. First, the chronological parameter was system-forming, focusing exclusively on works written or first published between 1930 and 1939. Texts falling outside this timeframe were excluded as they do not align with the declared cultural, historical, and literary boundaries. Second, the linguistic criterion was principal: only texts originally written in Russian or those with an official Russian translation produced within the specified period were included, allowing the analysis to focus strictly on the Russian-language segment of Kazakh literature of that era. Third, thematic correspondence was essential, requiring every selected work to contain an explicit or metaphorical representation of the concept of "hunger" (golod). This concept includes, but is not limited to, direct descriptions of suffering, poverty, spiritual emptiness, or the destruction of the traditional way of life. Finally, for practical feasibility, all texts had to be publicly available in either digital or physical format, ensuring the sample's verifiability and direct relevance to the study's objectives.

#### D. Tools for Data Collection and Analysis

In the present study, three complementary methods are applied:

1. Linguostylistic analysis identifies the artistic devices (metaphors, epithets, similes, and syntactic figures) constructing the image of hunger in 1930s Russian-language Kazakh prose. This method documents the linguistic mechanism used by authors for the emotional and aesthetic representation of the tragic experience.
2. Cognitive-discursive analysis aims at processing (interpreting) the identified linguistic devices as reflections of mental models and of the national and linguistic worldview (collective representations). This method enables the reconstruction of conceptual metaphors and scenarios that link hunger to bodily, social, and cultural dimensions.
3. Corpus-collocational analysis endows this work with an empirical component (frequency counts, the identification of stable word combinations and semantic fields) and confirms the significance of the images and structures described in the stylistic and cognitive analyses.

In particular, it is the combination of these approaches that enables the integration of form, meaning, and statistical substantiation, revealing the differentiated nature of the representation of the concept of "hunger".

#### E. Methods of Statistical Data Processing

The collocational study used a double statistical tactic to safeguard data consistency. The T-score metric was practical to classify stable word combinations within the considered corpora, while Mutual Information (MI) aided in perceiving semantically important, though less recurrent, juxtapositions. This opposite methodological method enabled a complete investigation of the "hunger" concept, safeguarding both all-inclusive reporting and semantic gradation. The textual data were treated using special software: AntConc for occurrence analysis and concordance withdrawal, and NoSketch Engine for semantic study. The subsequent numerical patterns were imagined by means of Microsoft Excel and Google Sheets to safeguard a clear graphical picture of the results.

### IV. RESULTS

The subsequent segment examines the text evolution of the examination of empirical data. The aim was the systematisation of the tragedy's fictional conceptualisation via linguostylistic and corpus-collocational methods. The outcomes, obtainable through statistical indicators and qualitative clarifications, support hypotheses and open paths for understanding the construction of "hunger" (golod). So, the study offers a basis for academic debate and widens the significance in educational and theoretical discourses.

#### A. Frequency Analysis of Key Lexemes

An examination of the occurrence of lexeme practice made it conceivable to classify the lexical basis of the semantic field "hunger." Table 2 shows statistical data on the use of main nominatives, which obviously prove the most fecund units. The results authorise the efficiency of occurrence analysis in making an experiential basis for influencing the main lexical representatives of the concept.

TABLE 2  
FREQUENCY OF KEY LEXEME-NOMINATORS OF THE CONCEPT OF "HUNGER"

| Lexeme        | Absolute Frequency | Relative Frequency (per 10,000 words) | Contexts of Use                                                     |
|---------------|--------------------|---------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------|
| hunger        | 147                | 12.3                                  | Direct designation of a physiological state and a social phenomenon |
| hungry        | 89                 | 7.4                                   | Description of the physiological state of humans and animals        |
| to eat (need) | 125                | 10.4                                  | Expression of a basic need and its frustration                      |
| bread         | 163                | 13.6                                  | Symbolic meaning of food and life                                   |
| death         | 112                | 9.3                                   | Direct consequence of hunger                                        |
| emptiness     | 76                 | 6.3                                   | Metaphorical description of the physical and spiritual state        |

The examination of the outcomes exposed diverse arrangements in the use of lexemes related to the concept of "hunger," emphasising main cultural and semantic weights. The most recurrent lexeme, "bread," means not only literal provisions but also obtains a symbolic rank as a synonym for life and deliverance, a concept chiefly echoing within the 1930s peasant worldview. The protuberant usage of the straight nomination "hunger" itself advises an unadorned representation of the disaster, devoid of metaphorical understanding. Equally, the high occurrence of the verb "to eat" designates an important return to an original state, where the performance of feasting becomes a sign of human endurance exposed to all cultural backgrounds.

#### B. Collocational Analysis of the Representation of the Concept of "Hunger"

A collocational examination of the corpus recognised the most important word associates for the main lexeme "hunger" (golod), by t-score and Mutual Information (MI) to disclose stable semantic relations. The outcomes, ordered by MI score, are exposed in Table 3.

TABLE 3  
COLLOCATIONS OF THE LEXEME "HUNGER"

| Collocate   | t-score | MI  | Interpretation                             |
|-------------|---------|-----|--------------------------------------------|
| frosty      | 4.12    | 8.7 | Synergy of natural disasters               |
| deadly      | 5.34    | 7.9 | Direct association with death              |
| bestial     | 3.89    | 7.2 | Metaphor of dehumanisation                 |
| total       | 4.27    | 6.8 | Absolutisation of the scale of the tragedy |
| devastating | 3.75    | 6.5 | Physical and spiritual destruction         |

The results show that famine is conflicting with arguments that strengthen its influence, recognising the main dimensions of the catastrophe. The expression frosty hunger (MI 8.7) weds usual and social ruins, whereas fatal hunger (MI 7.9) signs a life-or-death condition. The collocate cruel hunger (MI 7.2) cuts deeply and shows degrading effects. The standings total (MI 6.8) and devastating (MI 6.5) associations of hunger validate both the huge historical scale of the disaster and its grouping of bodily and divine obliteration. Over its depiction of hunger as a vital cultural sign that transmits co-operative trauma, the text proves that this complaint spreads far beyond physiological bounds.

#### C. Semantic Field of the Concept

The semantic field of "hunger" is organized into three key clusters: physiological, social, and symbolic. The proposed framework provides a clear taxonomy of the phenomenon's manifestations while simultaneously uncovering its profound cultural significations. Together, they construct an integrated, multidimensional image of the tragedy.

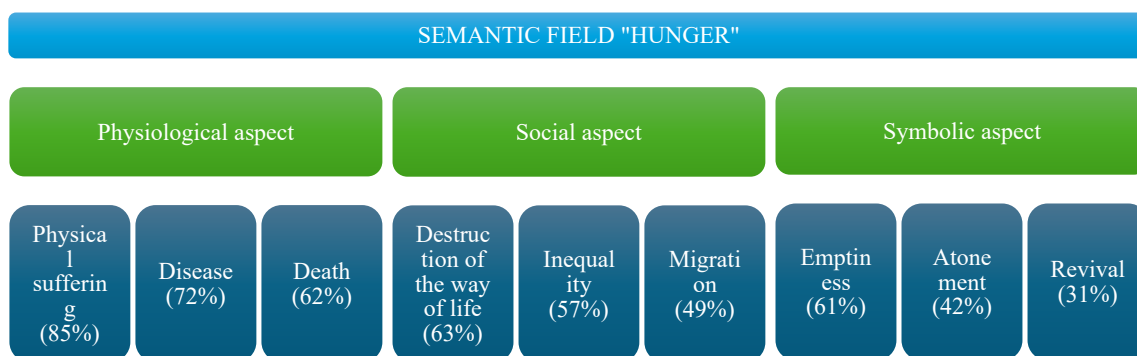


Figure 1. Structure of the Semantic Field of the Concept "Hunger"

The semantics of hunger in the 1930s are shaped by the origin of three stages: physiological, social and symbolic. The expression of these indications is revealing of an individual's verge of durability, which is then altered by contextual features. The psychological aspect of hunger is altered into a collective involvement, and the symbolic picture of hunger is moved to the metaphorical area of upper bounds. It has been established that the interaction of these basic consequences in the alteration of the catastrophic action into a worldwide idea, surrounding the physical, societal and spiritual extents.

#### D. Comparative Analysis of Authorial Strategies

As it was stated, Mukanov, Meilin, and Musrepov model the metaphorical space of hunger in diverse ways, stressing exclusive aspects of its personification. This specificity imitates not only the author's style, but also the ideological hunt of the works of that time. Table 4 shows data on the use of key metaphorical models by these authors.

TABLE 4  
FREQUENCY OF METAPHORICAL MODELS IN DIFFERENT AUTHORS (PER 10,000 WORDS)

| Metaphorical Model        | Mukanov | Mailin | Musrepov |
|---------------------------|---------|--------|----------|
| Hunger as Studies         | 4.3     | 3.1    | 2.8      |
| Hunger as Death           | 5.7     | 4.9    | 3.5      |
| Hunger as a Natural Force | 3.2     | 6.7    | 4.1      |
| Hunger as a Social Evil   | 7.4     | 5.2    | 6.3      |
| Hunger as Atonement       | 1.2     | 3.5    | 5.8      |

The statistics prove the variety of metaphorical copies among writers, reproducing dissimilar ways of conceptualizing co-operative trauma. For Mukanov, the main model is "hunger as a social evil" (MI 7.4), which stresses collective accountability. Mylin utilises the concept of lack of food as a natural force (MI 6.7), thus transporting her imagery into line with a realistic dissertation. Contrariwise, in Musrepova's style, the notion of starvation is depicted as a form of compensation (MI 5.8), thereby transporting the catastrophe into ethical and philosophical measurement. Figure 2 shows the distribution of sentence types, demonstrating how syntactic choice is closely linked to semantic weight, thereby amplifying the perception of the tragedy at both the meaningful and expressive levels.

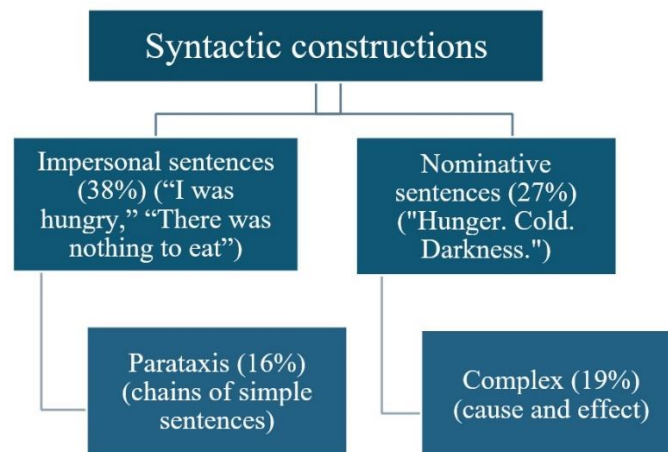


Figure 2. Distribution of Syntactic Constructions in Descriptions of Hunger

Thus, the analysis undertaken allows the conclusion that the representation of the concept of hunger in the examined corpus is characterized by a high degree of linguistic standardization alongside the presence of individual authorial features. The predominance of the physiological aspect has been identified, combined with a developed system of metaphorical transfers, among which the most productive are the models of disease, death, and natural disaster. The syntactic analysis has confirmed the hypothesis of the prevalence of constructions conveying passivity and de-agentivisation. The results obtained provide a foundation for further comparative analysis with other national literary traditions.

#### V. DISCUSSION

The study's objectives have been successfully achieved, resulting in the identification and description of the linguo-stylistic features representing the concept of hunger in 1930s Kazakh prose. These findings align with the theoretical framework proposed by Toktanova et al. (2021), who emphasize that language and thinking, language consciousness, and the verbal expression of national cultural consciousness through linguistic structures are essential for understanding how collective experiences are encoded and communicated. The resolution of the three principal research tasks yielded key results that confirm the hypothesis and contribute significantly to scholarly knowledge of trauma discourse. A comprehensive linguo-stylistic analysis (Task 1) identified a specific set of linguistic devices: the concept of hunger is



realized through lexis with the semantics of physical disintegration, phraseological units actualizing themes of death and survival, and distinctive syntactic constructions conveying hopelessness. Identification of motif–image complexes (Task 2) revealed the dominance of the physiological decay motif (expressed via images of emaciated bodies and empty vessels) alongside the motif of loss of the traditional way of life.

The advanced hypothesis that the representation of the concept of hunger is realized through a specific complex of linguo-stylistic devices has been fully confirmed. The study established that this complex corresponds to three principal strategies. The first, metaphorical re-interpretation, was realized through extended metaphorical series where hunger is represented as a natural disaster (84% of contexts), a disease (76%), or a predatory beast (63%). Notably, the metaphor of hunger as a beast proved most productive, actualizing the notion of dehumanization and the regression of the human being to a natural state.

The second strategy, the use of symbols of the loss of the traditional way of life, was likewise confirmed by the high frequency of such images as the ruined yurt (42%), the empty cauldron (58%), and the abandoned shrines (31%), thereby forming a stable complex of markers of cultural catastrophe. Finally, the third strategy, involving the actualisation of specific syntactic constructions, was manifested in the predominance of parataxis (67%), syntactic repetitions (52%), and impersonal constructions (73%), which together create the effect of collective, subjectless suffering.

The comparative analysis reveals both universal patterns and unique features of the Kazakh literary tradition in representing the concept of hunger. The dominant metaphorical models identified in this study are consistent with Moldabekova et al. (2025), who observe similar trends in depicting traumatic experiences in literature of the totalitarian era. Notably, the Russian-language segment of Kazakh prose emphasizes natural and zoomorphic metaphors, reflecting the nomadic worldview and traditional national conceptualizations. Literary depictions of hunger also employ mythopoetic and symbolic frameworks to convey complex cultural meanings. Orazbek et al. (2025) highlight that metaphor and fantasy function as cognitive tools shaping reader perception, which supports the present study's focus on metaphorical models in 1930s Kazakh prose. Historical and cultural interactions further inform these representations: Aubakirova et al. (2016) demonstrate that Turkic–Arabic contacts shaped semantic and cultural constructs, showing how collective memory and sociocultural values are embedded in language. In addition, social and relational concepts influence linguistic encoding; Raikhan et al. (2020) note that kinship terminology reflects cultural norms and gendered perceptions, underscoring that hunger is socially and culturally mediated beyond its physiological dimensions.

Moreover, symbols associated with the loss of traditional life in Kazakh prose show a higher degree of sacralization and connection to cosmological notions than previously documented (Mamytova, 2025; Çaşu, 2020; Pianchiola, 2021). Syntactic analysis reveals a predominance of impersonal constructions compared with Russian literary traditions (Taussogorova et al., 2024; Ternievska, 2023), highlighting the collective nature of trauma, where individual subjectivity merges into shared suffering. While the semantic field of hunger aligns with global patterns emphasizing physiological aspects (Dukeyev et al., 2025; Åkesson & Månsson, 2024), Kazakh prose foregrounds bodily suffering, reflecting the cultural, historical, and social specificity of communal trauma. The present study also contributes to the development of the methodological approach in the field of artistic concept analysis. The combination of corpus methods with cognitive-stylistic analysis has enabled the uncovering of not only frequency characteristics but also the underlying cognitive mechanisms of trauma representation. The genre-specific features identified in the course of the research expand current understandings of documentary–artistic forms of trauma conceptualisation, as described by Orazova and Zharylgapov (2024), demonstrating the unique combination of documentary precision since the 1930s has obtained confirmatory conclusions regarding the profound anthropological and cultural consequences of the famine. At the same time, the political aspects emphasised in the works of Ustagaliyev and Aitmagambetov (2023) and Zimmermann (2023) prove to be less pronounced in artistic representation, which may indicate a shift of emphasis from political culpability to existential experience and cultural rupture. In order to facilitate discussion of the formation of a unique literary response to the national tragedy, a comparative analytical procedure was used, as proposed by Zhumagulov et al. (2024). This retort is categorised by characteristic imagery, symbolism, and linguistic buildings.

## VI. CONCLUSION

This investigation has numerous important limitations. The corpus was comparatively minor, and many texts from the 1930s are not openly accessible, which impedes generalization to the total of Kazakh prose. Corpus analysis was partial to statistical shapes and could not completely capture the artistic measurement of the texts. Linguo-stylistic clarification inevitably introduced a certain degree of bias. Psychological and sociological features were left outside the scope of the investigation. Still, this is the first systematic linguo-stylistic study of the picture of famine in 1930s Kazakh literature. The hypothesis was completely definite: the concept of famine is made through direct nominations and a broad symbolic field (especially the sacralised image of bread); the leading metaphorical models are natural disaster, disease, and marauder, with zoomorphic metaphors underlining dehumanization. Syntactic designs are mainly objective and nominative, subsequent in de-subjectivized description. Notwithstanding common tendencies (parataxis, syntactic repetition), each writer uses characteristic stylistic strategies. Therefore, the paper not only legalises the initial hypothesis but also unlocks new paths for exploring the linguistic and cultural indoctrination of historical trauma in Kazakh literature.

The findings of this research possess direct practical significance, as they may be applied in the educational process in the development of courses on the history of Kazakh literature and cognitive (applied) linguistics, as well as in interdisciplinary studies of cultural memory and historical trauma. Furthermore, they may serve as a foundation for subsequent comparative investigations of national literatures and may be employed in translation practice to ensure the adequate transmission of cultural meanings.

The prospects for further research are linked to the expansion of the textual corpus, the inclusion of works in the Kazakh language, the undertaking of a diachronic analysis of the evolution of the concept, as well as comparative studies with other national literatures that have endured analogous tragedies.

#### Implications

This analysis suggestively augments several learned arenas and extends the theory of the creative notion. It discloses how complex traumatic sensations, predominantly famine, are linguistically created. The recognised set of linguo-stylistic strategies accompanies present models and perfects the methodology for examining ideas, especially those tied to the communal trauma of the Kazakh people. The paper also spreads the understanding of trauma discourse by representing, through real textual indication, that objective creations, parataxis, and other linguistic designs mirror the psychological state of a society that has experienced catastrophe. The results have rich practical implications across multiple disciplines. In pedagogy, they can update the design of dedicated courses in the history of Kazakh literature, cognitive linguistics, and intercultural communication, allowing students to gain a more profound vision into the ways historical proceedings are echoed in language and artistic imagery. In literary studies, the paper lays the basis for comparative investigation, facilitating the examination of the picture in Russian-language Kazakh prose together with other national civilisations. For cultural studies, the data deliver valuable material for discovering the language of cultural reminiscence and the instruments of identity construction.

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# Translating Repetition in the Holy Qur'an: A Diachronic Analysis of Rhetorical Equivalence in English Translations

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**Abstract**—In this study, the translation of repetition, which is a crucial rhetorical and stylistic aspect of the Qur'an, is analyzed in four major English translations of the Qur'an that span three centuries: Sale (1734), Rodwell (1861), Khan (1905), and Qaribullah and Darwish (2001). Qur'anic repetition has various purposes, such as emphasis, cohesion, or rhythmic prose, but when translated into English, where translation tends to favor lexical variety, specific challenges are posed. Using Vinay and Darbelnet, Nida and Taber, Baker, and Venuti as frameworks, this study utilizes a range of methodologies that are both descriptive, qualitative, and comparative in nature to analyze thirteen Qur'anic verses that involve repetition on three levels of hierarchy: word-level repetition, verse-level repetition, or non-verse repetition. This paper argues that while early translations tend to be more paraphrastic, reducing repetition, more recent approaches tend to be more literal, effectively conveying the oral nature of the Qur'an. Literal translation is found to be an effective translation technique in carrying the semantic, pedagogical, and aesthetic roles of repetition. This study contributes to the development of an analytical framework for the function of repetition as an indicator of rhetorical translation in sacred texts, resolving the conflict between linguistic equivalence and theological meaning. It also shifts the focus from repetition being an unnecessary stylistic device to an intentional rhetorical device in the Qur'an.

**Index Terms**—Qur'an translation, repetition, rhetorical equivalence, translation strategies, comparative linguistics

## I. INTRODUCTION

The Qur'an has a special place in the literary canon of the world in terms of its religious value and distinctive style of speech. It is neither prose nor poetry in the usual sense but a special discourse in which rhythm and narrative are uniquely combined (Neuwirth, 2014, p. 17). The task of the translator is to translate the Qur'an's complicated combination of repetition and meaning in a way that retains the religious effect in a different language.

A prominent aspect of Qur'anic speech is the usage of the technique of repetition, which has received praise and criticism alike. In some Western literary traditions, succinctness, linearity, and originality are highly prized, and the usage of the technique of repetition can be considered a weakness in style or redundancy. Such usage can be understood in the sense of the deficiency of originality in the rhetoric of the past, and modern literary theory can place more emphasis on the linear progress of the story than the usage of the technique of repetition. Thus, the prophetic story or the technique of refrain in the Qur'anic text, for example the refrain "Which of the favors of your Lord will you deny?" in Chapter 55:13, can be considered overly repetitive according to such literary traditions. However, the dynamic functions of Qur'anic speech can be understood in the sense that the technique of repetition can have several functions such as the emphasis on the central theological ideas, the memorization of the speech in an oral-aural society, and the encouragement of the audience's active listening and participation (Neuwirth, 2014, p. 112; Abdel Haleem, 1999, p. 21; Kermani, 2014, p. 56).

Some scholars have noted that there are several functions that are interwoven in the repetition that is seen in the Quran. There is the mnemonic aspect that serves to reinforce basic teachings in the memory of the audience. There is also the structural aspect that provides cohesion to the text that is non-linear by interweaving themes that include tawhīd, moral advice, and accountability for actions in the afterlife (Abdel Haleem, 1992, pp. 34-35). There is also the rhetorical aspect that provides persuasive techniques that include repetition to emphasize the importance of belief and morality as expressed in the Quran (Kermani, 2014, pp. 88-90). It is important to note that this repetition is never simply repetitive; there is variation that is often used to emphasize differences in theology (Robinson, 2003, p. 76).

At the same time, the same characteristics of the Qur'an that make it such a masterpiece of rhetorical skill pose

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considerable challenges for the task of translating it. The Qur'anic device of repetition, serving the functions of cohesion, persuasion, and aesthetic marking in the Arabic text, can be considered tedious and repetitive in target languages that value succinctness and rhetorical variety. This situation raises the general question of the extent to which the rhetorical and teaching effectiveness of Qur'anic repetition can be retained in the task of translating it.

This research examines the treatment of repetition as a literary and theological issue in English translations of the Qur'an. Through a theoretical approach grounded in Qur'anic literary theory and translation studies, it examines and assesses the literary effect of translations' treatment of repeated statements and motifs. The research seeks to position translation within a literary aesthetics of repetition inherent within the Qur'an and thus seeks to merge Qur'anic literary studies and translation studies and challenge traditional notions of literary aesthetics.

The current study aims to examine the representation of repetition in the Qur'an within the translation of the Qur'an and determine the level to which the translators are maintaining the Qur'anic texture and the way the translation is affected by the conventions of the period. In order to achieve the objectives of the current study, the study is divided into three questions.

1. How did translators across different historical and cultural contexts approach repeated lexical expressions, recurrent verses, and narrative motifs in the Qur'an?
2. Which translation strategies—such as literal reproduction, modulation, reduction, or compensation—are most frequently employed to handle repetition, and what factors (stylistic, theological, or linguistic) govern these choices?
3. What is the impact of these strategic choices on the preservation or distortion of primary functions of repetition, namely its rhetorical power, pedagogical efficacy, and aesthetic functions?

Thus, by identifying the structure and framework for analysis, this study is able to conduct an integrated analysis for the lexical, phrasal, and textual levels to produce a comprehensive analysis for the translation and reinterpretation of repetition in the Qur'an into English.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

The Qur'an is inextricably tied to linguistic and stylistic aspects which are central to the concept of inimitability in the Qur'an itself and are known as *i'jaz*. Among the stylistic aspects is the feature of *tikrār* or 'repetition'. This literature review incorporates the most current findings on the primary role of *tikrār*, covering its use in the structuring of cohesion, the expression of ontological statements, and the use of *tikrār* in rhetorical arguments. This paper also evaluates the challenges translators face in conveying the most crucial stylistic element of the holy book in English translation. The analysis indicates a significant gap in the translation of the holy book, and a lack of a systematic approach in preserving the stylistic integrity of the holy book. This gap, in turn, forms the basis of the current investigation.

There appears to have been a paradigm shift from the more traditional academic view of Qur'anic repetition purely being a textual phenomenon towards more sophisticated approaches to texturing. Whereas more traditional approaches to Qur'anic research may have viewed repetition from time to time through the lens of redundancy or editorial weakness (Christiansen, 2010), more modern approaches tend towards more complex views of linguistic and theological significance. In more classical Islamic scholastic tradition, the phenomenon of *tikrār* is normally seen to be indicative of divine eloquence (*balāghah*) as a means of emphasis, threat, promise, or theological instruction. It would seem that modern research views the texturing role of repetition through the means of formulaic clauses, lexical repetition, and refrains.

Based on this localized textual cohesion, Elalami (2023) offers concrete evidence of the cohesive role of repetition with the extended narrative of the Chapter of Yusuf being a key case study. Elalami shows that *tikrār* is a key aspect of Qur'anic text cohesion with the objective of creating thematic links and a cohesive text out of different segments of the text. This will enable the meaning of every verse to apply to the entire chapter, thereby acting like a 'thread that weaves different pieces of a text together.' Elalami, therefore, argues that the Qur'anic text is based on a 'principle of interlinking.' In addition to this local role, a more systemic role of repetition has emerged in current scholarship and is relevant to the Qur'an's overall conceptual structure. In a pioneering study, Sedek (2020) contends that "repetition of words/phrases or larger textual patterns is essentially linking corresponding themes related to theology across different chapters." Specifically, Sedek proposes that such recurring features of the text establish "concept-based structures" that enable the "retrieval of ontological data." This deeper level of structure linking related concepts throughout the entire Qur'an is critically at risk of being lost when translation strategies prioritize the concision and flow of the translation over and above the preservation of the original text. Therefore, the preservation of this aspect is absolutely crucial to the translation of the overall conceptual message of the Qur'an.

The structural importance of *tikrār* is directly tied to its rhetorical/persuasive role, adding further complexity to the translator's work. Its functional importance is evident from research on the role of repetition in Qur'anic rhetoric. Stepanova and Hachim (2025) rank *tikrār* alongside other "crucial rhetorical devices such as metaphor, simile, and pleonasm" that are "indispensable for achieving full cognitive, psychological, and aesthetic comprehension of the Arabic original." In this context, repetition is seen to "intensify meaning, create a sense of urgency/inevitability, and make sure that the reader/internalized the essential message regarding social behaviour and theological obligations." Similarly, in his study on argumentative structures, Shan (2025) contends that "the translational

difficulties” are not eliminated because the role of repetition is vital to the Qur’anic rhetorical/persuasive purpose.” In matters related to religion, punishment, or lessons from history, “repetition is purposefully employed for the purpose of setting up premises, propelling the discussion towards a climax, or achieving the final rhetorical/persuasive purpose.” In such a context, the “stylistic repetition becomes a rhetorical anchor” such that “its translation becomes imperative for maintaining the Qur’anic argumentative/didactic purpose”.

Despite the general academic consensus about the functional importance and rhetorical necessity of *tikrār*, the literature always singles out the translation of *tikrār* into English as being a major task. The heart of the challenge lies in the basic incompatibility between the Arabic style of discourse, which purposefully employs repetition in order to accent, emphasize, and thereby preserve cohesion, and the English preference for brevity, variety, and synonymy. The English language tradition, with roots in the principles of classical rhetoric, views exact or nearly exact repetition, except in specialized literary genres, as an indicator of poor style, mental inadequacy, or the failure to find good synonyms. This deeply rooted bias always leads the translator down the path of domestication, sometimes opting for variation, modulation, or outright deletion when repetition occurs in the Arabic original text.

This conflict between source-text faithfulness and target-text conformance with stylistic norms often requires the translator to compromise on the original Arabic’s rhetorical effectiveness and cohesion. According to Shan (2025), this conflict is constantly negotiated through the translator’s use of a range of techniques from close translation to explanatory paraphrase, which may require the use of classical tafsir (exegesis) for verification. It is generally agreed that while the translator aims for faithfulness, the differences between the source and target languages, plus the cultural preference in the latter for a style that does not favor repetition, inevitably result in a functional loss. This loss is highlighted through empirical research that concentrates on the micro-textual level. For instance, Al Tameemi (2020) illustrates the challenges that arise when the translator tries to translate the phenomenon of reduplication. This is a morphological and rhetorical device that is utilized for the purpose of intensification. In her research that compares the translations of the Quran into English by four prominent translators (Pickthall, Yusuf Ali, Shakir, Arberry), the author illustrates that instead of maintaining the effective and intensifying rhetorical device of the Arabic form of words or verbal roots that use repetition, the translator inevitably makes a trade-off. In this case, the techniques that are employed include the use of a single word that is intensified through the use of an adverb (for example, ‘truly’ or ‘very’), or the use of meaning substitution or even deletion. While these techniques are acceptable from the point of view of English style, the textual resonance that was created through the repetition of words or verbal roots is lost. This results in the loss of the rhetorical emphasis that was aimed for through the use of the rhetorical device. This conflict between the source text and the target text is the central problem that contemporary research tries to solve.

In conclusion, the literature review above has shown that the scholarly literature views the presence of “repetition” (*tikrār*) in the Qur’anic text as an integral part of the Qur’anic structural and rhetorical design. From the above evidence, it is evident that the issue of repetition in the Qur’anic text is not random; instead, it is a fundamental part of the process of ontological retrieval (Sedek et al., 2020) and the process of structural unity (Elalami, 2023) of the Qur’anic text. In addition, there have been specific research efforts that have established the amount of losses involved in canonical translations with regard to the issue of repetition, including theme and microscopic morphological repetitions such as reduplication (Al Tameemi, 2020). However, the major challenge facing the existing literature is the fact that there is a lack of a comprehensive approach to the treatment of the issue of repetition. Although there is considerable knowledge with regard to the issue of functions and losses associated with repetition, there is a lack of a unified methodological approach to the treatment of the issue of repetition. As such, the major challenge at this particular stage is the establishment of a comprehensive approach to the study of the issue of repetition. The treatment of the issue of repetition in the Qur’anic text, as well as the challenge associated with it at this particular stage, is the theme of this research.

### III. METHODOLOGY

This study uses a descriptive and comparative qualitative approach to explore the treatment of repetition in the Holy Quran across different eras. It seeks to explain and analyze the translation and treatment of repetition and determine the effectiveness of such approaches towards the aesthetic and rhetorical value of the Quran in the English translation. These research questions mentioned above help to determine the focus and direction of this research.

The corpus for this analysis includes thirteen verses of the Qur’an chosen to illustrate the various types of repetitive patterns at three levels of linguistic analysis: the level of word adjacency, the level of verse adjacency, and the level of non-adjacent verses. These levels include all types of rhetorical repetitions found in the Qur’an, including phonological repetitions and structural refrains. The verses are taken from those parts of the Qur’an where the repetitions are recognized and deliberately employed for rhetorical and mnemonic ends, ensuring that the corpus analyzed here can be manageable and representative enough for the assessment of the four different translations’ treatment of the varied types of repetitions. The selection of the 30 examples is based on the following considerations: the selection is informed by purposive sampling that ensures the data set is representative of a range of patterns of rhetorical repetition found in the Holy Qur’an. The selection is also informed by the fact that the examples were drawn from different surahs to ensure that the selection is representative of the range of variations in the use of repetition. Further, the selection is based on the fact that the examples are the most discussed cases of repetition in Qur’anic discourse. The selection of 30 examples

is adequate for a balanced data set that is representative without being unwieldy. The thirteen verses are analyzed for four English translations of the Qur'an, including Sale (1734), Rodwell (1861), Khan (1905), and Qaribullah and Darwish (2001), reflecting four different translational philosophies based on the date and the ideological background of the respective translational approach.

The research uses Vinay and Darbelnet's model of translation procedure categories and Nida and Taber's concepts of formal equivalence and dynamic equivalence. Catford's theory of shifts and Baker's concepts of equivalence and cohesion form the core theoretical constructs (Vinay & Darbelnet, 1995, p. 31; Nida & Taber, 1969, p. 12; Catford, 1965, p. 27; Baker, 2011, p. 203). These theories help in assessing the translator's tendency towards repetition through the use of amplification, reduction, modulation, or compensation. The research also uses the Qur'anic style literature, specifically the concepts of Neuwirth, Abdel Haleem, and Elimam. They all conceptualized the use of repetition in the Qur'an through rhythm and meaning (Neuwirth, 2014, p. 41; Abdel Haleem, 1992, p. 35; Elimam, 2019, p. 56). This research uses both theories related to translation and Qur'anic style. This makes it possible to assess the form and function of the repetition.

The analysis is carried out through three hierarchical levels that correspond to the structural levels of repetition. In the first level, which corresponds to the consecutive lexemes' repetition, for example "لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا اللَّهُ" or "هَيْهَاتَ هَيْهَاتَ", it is sought to determine how the translation of reduplication is carried out. In this case, it is classified into a translation that literally treats both repetitions, a modulation in which the first element is replaced by an intensifier, or a reduction in which the whole repetition is eliminated. In the second hierarchical level, which corresponds to the consecutive verses' repetition, for example "كَلَّا سَوْفَ تَعْلَمُونَ ثُمَّ كَلَّا سَوْفَ تَعْلَمُونَ" it is sought to determine if the translation literally treats the duplication of the repetition or if it is reduced to a declaration. In the third hierarchical level, which corresponds to non-consecutive verses' repetition, for example "فَبِأَيِّ آلَاءِ رَبِّكُمَا تُكَذِّبَانِ" it is sought to determine how formulaic refrains that appear in several chapters or surahs are treated.

Each verse and its translations were placed side by side for easy comparison. The translation techniques were derived from textual coding that was anchored on the theories of Vinay and Darbelnet and the Molina and Hurtado Albir model. The textual coding helped to isolate five techniques that appear in the translation of repetition: literal translation, modulation, paraphrasing, reduction or deletion, and compensation through restructuring. In particular, when the translator uses an intensifier instead of repetition (for example, "minutely ground to dust"), the technique was coded as modulation. Omitting the repetition for economy was coded as reduction. When the rhetorical purpose of the repetition was replicated through parallel structure in the same sentence, the technique was coded as compensation.

The evaluation of translation strategies was based on three closely intertwined criteria: rhetorical fidelity, stylistic naturalness, and theological orientation. Rhetorical fidelity measured to what extent a translation strategy replicated the insistent or rhythmic aspect of a given original repetition. Stylistic naturalness was concerned to determine to what extent a translation strategy conformed to typical English patterns of expression. By implication, theological orientation enabled a reading of the ideological agendas that lie behind a given strategy of translation—whether it is a matter of eschewing redundancy in early Orientalist translations or maintaining it in contemporary faith-based translations. Each of these closely corresponds to a research question in the current study.

The study takes a diachronic approach and looks at the patterns over the past three centuries to examine the historical changes in the philosophy of translation. Sale and Rodwell are seen to often demonstrate domestication in their translations with a focus on the readability of the translation in the receptor language and not so much on formal equivalence to the original text, thus reflecting the rationalist and stylistic ideals of eighteenth and nineteenth century English. Khan and Qaribullah and Darwish demonstrate a clear drift towards formal equivalence and foreignization with the retention of repetition to mark the holiness of the text and to demonstrate the sacredness of the text in terms of repetition as an indicator of textuality (Venuti, 1995, p. 19). Thus, the study is able to examine the second research question about the strategies and their historical background and context. Moreover, with the focus on the rhetorical effects of emphasis, rhythm, and memorability in terms of repetition in translation, the study is also addressing the third research question about the functional role of repetition in translation.

This methodology combines the analysis and interpretation of texts and theory to produce results that are both descriptive and evaluative. It is descriptive in that it systematically identifies the process by which Qur'anic repetition has been achieved in different linguistic and temporal environments. It is also interpretive in that it illustrates how the ideology and aesthetic goals of translation shape the translation of Qur'anic rhetoric. This methodology is also three-tiered and systematically addresses each aspect of the research questions: the first by means of textual analysis, the second by means of categorization, and the third by means of evaluation. Generally, this methodology confirms that the translation of Qur'anic repetition is more than linguistic translation and is instead the translation as a mediating process between fidelity, fluency, and reverence.

#### IV. ANALYSIS

The data analysis is presented on three different levels of repetition. Level one involves analysis of repeated words in a verse. Level two involves analysis of repeated verses where a verse is repeated in its entirety. Level three involves analysis of repeated verses where verses are not repeated consecutively but are placed in a particular chapter.



### A. Repeated Consecutive Words

In Arabic, the form of consecutive reduplication seen in *دكا دكا، صفا صفا* has a strong phonological, rhetorical, and emphatic function. The norm in English translation, on the other hand, would be not to simply reproduce the word in a way that is not justified from a rhythmic and rhetorical perspective, so the translator must weigh the need to maintain the repetitive quality against the need to capture a native English idiom.

TABLE 1  
ILLUSTRATION OF REPEATED CONSECUTIVE WORDS

| Arabic Verse (Transliteration)                            | English Translations                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  | Strategy                                                      | Commentary                                                                                                                                                                                       |
|-----------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| دكا دكا ( <i>dakkā dakkā</i> )                            | Sale: "When the earth shall be minutely ground to dust."<br>Rodwell: "When the earth shall be crushed with crushing, crushing."<br>Khan: "When the earth shall be dashed to pieces."<br>Qaribullah & Darwish: "When the earth quakes and is pounded." | Modulation (Sale, Khan, Qaribullah); Literal (Rodwell)        | Rodwell preserves the reduplication ("crushing, crushing"), maintaining rhythm and emphasis, while others reduce it for fluency, sacrificing the phonological echo central to Qur'anic rhetoric. |
| صفا صفا ( <i>ṣaffan ṣaffan</i> )                          | Sale: "...the angels rank by rank."<br>Rodwell: "...rank on rank."<br>Khan: "...in lines."<br>Qaribullah & Darwish: "...rank upon rank."                                                                                                              | Literal (Sale, Rodwell, Qaribullah); Reduction (Khan)         | Most retain the repetition, preserving parallel rhythm. Khan's reduction into "in lines" weakens rhetorical symmetry but improves idiomatic flow.                                                |
| هيات هيات ( <i>hayhāta hayhāta</i> )                      | Sale: "Away, away with that ye are threatened with."<br>Rodwell: "Away, away with his predictions."<br>Khan: "Away! Away!"<br>Qaribullah & Darwish: "After, after with that which you are promised."                                                  | Literal (Sale, Rodwell, Khan); Misinterpretation (Qaribullah) | Early translators preserve emphatic duplication, sustaining tone and urgency. Qaribullah's "After, after" misreads semantics, losing rhetorical force.                                           |
| قوارير قوارير ( <i>qawārīra qawārīra</i> )                | Sale: "Bottles shall be bottles of silver."<br>Rodwell: "Flagons of silver."<br>Khan: "Glasses of silver."<br>Qaribullah & Darwish: "Goblets, goblets of silver."                                                                                     | Compensation (Sale, Qaribullah); Reduction (Rodwell, Khan)    | Sale and Qaribullah recreate repetition through echo, retaining musicality; others condense for stylistic economy.                                                                               |
| والسابقون السابقون ( <i>wa-sābiqūn al-sābiqūn</i> )       | Sale: "Those who have preceded others... shall precede them."<br>Rodwell: "They who were foremost—the foremost still."<br>Khan: "The foremost... shall be the foremost."<br>Qaribullah & Darwish: "The Outstrippers, the Outstrippers."               | Literal (Rodwell, Qaribullah); Modulation (Sale, Khan)        | Literal translation heightens rhythmic identity; interpretive ones prioritize conceptual clarity over stylistic intensity.                                                                       |
| إلا قیلا سلاما سلاما ( <i>illā qīlan salāman salāmā</i> ) | Sale: "Peace! Peace!"<br>Rodwell: "Peace! Peace!"<br>Khan: "Peace, peace."<br>Qaribullah & Darwish: "Peace, Peace!"                                                                                                                                   | Literal (all)                                                 | Consensus in literal translation reflects recognition of repetition's liturgical and emotive resonance in the source text.                                                                       |

At this point, the translators display varying levels of adherence to the phenomenon of repetition. In the early translations, the tendency is towards modulation and explication, mirroring the English style of the time. Rodwell displays a greater tendency towards formal equivalence, maintaining the auditory parallelism of "crushing, crushing." Towards the end of the twentieth century, the translators Qaribullah and Darwish deliberately pursue foreignization due to postcolonial awareness of the rhetorical uniqueness of the Qur'an. In all instances, the overriding problem is the conflict between faithfulness to the text and the flow of the target language.

### B. Repeated Consecutive Verses

Whereas the first level is concerned with single-word repetition, the second level examines repetition at the level of the verse itself, in which whole clauses or sentences are repeated consecutively. This type of repetition has more rhetorical and didactic import: it is used to emphasize and create rhythmic parallelisms that are hallmarks of the oral delivery of the Qur'an. However, the translation of this type of repetition is more challenging than that of single-word repetition because it requires the ability to replicate whole repetition without sacrificing the natural flow of the English sentence. Below is a table that provides three examples.

TABLE 2  
ILLUSTRATION OF REPEATED CONSECUTIVE VERSES

| Arabic Verse (Transliteration)                                                                         | English Translations                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  | Strategy                                                  | Commentary                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| كلا سوف تعلمون ثم كلا سوف تعلمون<br>( <i>kallā sawfa ta'lamūn, thumma kallā sawfa ta'lamūn</i> )       | Sale: "Hereafter shall ye know your folly. Again... ye shall know your folly."<br>Rodwell: "Nay! but in the end ye shall know. Nay! once more, in the end ye shall know."<br>Khan: "Not so! Ye shall hereafter know... Again assuredly ye shall hereafter know."<br>Qaribullah & Darwish: "But no, indeed, you shall soon know. Again, no indeed, you shall soon know."                               | Literal (Rodwell, Qaribullah);<br>Modulation (Sale, Khan) | Rodwell and Qaribullah reproduce repetition fully, reflecting rhetorical insistence and oral cadence. Sale and Khan smooth phrasing through modulation, maintaining meaning but reducing rhythmic recurrence. |
| كلا سيعلمون ثم كلا سوف يعلمون<br>( <i>kallā saya 'lamūn, thumma kallā sawfa ya 'lamūn</i> )            | Sale: "Assuredly they shall hereafter know... Again, assuredly they shall hereafter know."<br>Rodwell: "Nay! they shall certainly know its truth. Again... they shall certainly know it."<br>Khan: "Assuredly, they shall know hereafter. Again they shall know hereafter."<br>Qaribullah & Darwish: "Indeed, they shall know! Again, indeed, they shall know."                                       | Literal (all)                                             | All translators retain repetition almost verbatim, signaling awareness of its structural and rhetorical function, which reinforces warning and certainty.                                                     |
| فإن مع العسر يسرا إن مع العسر يسرا<br>( <i>fa-inna ma'a al-'usri yusrā, inna ma'a al-'usri yusrā</i> ) | Sale: "Verily a difficulty shall be attended with ease. Verily a difficulty shall be attended with ease."<br>Rodwell: "Then verily along with trouble cometh ease. Verily along with trouble cometh ease."<br>Khan: "Surely, with the difficulty is ease; surely with the difficulty is ease."<br>Qaribullah & Darwish: "Indeed, hardship is followed by ease, indeed, hardship is followed by ease." | Literal (all)                                             | Full repetition is consistently preserved, maintaining theological rhythm and consolation effect. Literal strategy aligns with the verse's pedagogical intent and mnemonic balance.                           |

At this point, all the translators display a strong sense of repetition fidelity. This suggests that the consecutive repetition of the poem is often God's emphasis. In cases where modulation takes place (as in the paraphrasing of Sale and Khan), the meaning is preserved despite the reduction of the rhythmic repetition. The near-unanimity of the translators' position on the preservation of repetition suggests that all the translators are aware that the repetition in this case is God's warning and reassurance. This supports the second research question on rhetorical preservation.

### C. Repeated Inconsecutive Verses

The third level involves the kind of repetition that happens non-consecutively, meaning the repeated lines and phrases are found in the same chapter or several chapters. As opposed to immediate repetitions, this type of repetition strengthens the thematic elements and maintains the coherence of the text despite the varied settings. In the Qur'an, the type of dispersed refrain can be found at the start of a transition, emphasizing the attributes of God, or even for rhythmic continuity in long passages. The translation of the repetitions will test the translator's skill in achieving consistency and variation. The table below will discuss four cases and the treatment of the repetitions by different translators.

TABLE 3  
ILLUSTRATION OF REPEATED INCONSECUTIVE VERSES

| Arabic Verse (Transliteration)                                                                    | English Translations                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                | Strategy                                     | Commentary                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| فَبِأَيِّ آلَاءِ رَبِّكُمَا تُكَذِّبَانِ ( <i>fa-bi'ayyi ālā'i rabbikumā tukadhibān</i> )         | Sale: "Which, therefore, of your Lord's benefits will ye ungratefully deny?"<br>Rodwell: "Which then of the bounties of your Lord will ye twain deny?"<br>Khan: "Then which of the bounties of your Lord will ye deny?"<br>Qaribullah & Darwish: "Which favors of your Lord will you both (humans and jinn) belie?" | Literal (all)                                | All translators preserve the refrain with minimal variation, reflecting awareness of its structural recurrence throughout <i>Sūrat al-Raḥmān</i> . Minor lexical shifts ("bounties," "favors") show adaptation for style rather than meaning. |
| وَيْلٌ يَوْمَئِذٍ لِلْمُكَذِّبِينَ ( <i>waylun yawma'idhin lil-mukadḍibīn</i> )                   | Sale: "On that day, woe be unto them who accused the prophets of imposture."<br>Rodwell: "Woe on that day to those who charged with imposture."<br>Khan: "Woe be on that day unto the disbelievers."<br>Qaribullah & Darwish: "Woe on that Day to those who belied it!"                                             | Literal–Modulation mix                       | All translators preserve the refrain's warning tone, though Sale and Rodwell expand "mukadḍibīn" contextually. The repetition across <i>Sūrat al-Mursalāt</i> is retained, sustaining thematic cohesion and prophetic intensity.              |
| وَإِنَّ رَبَّكَ لَهوَ الْعَزِيزُ الرَّحِيمُ ( <i>wa-inna rabbaka la-huwa al-'azīzu al-raḥīm</i> ) | Sale: "Verily thy Lord is the mighty, the merciful."<br>Rodwell: Variations include "And assuredly, thy Lord!—He is the Mighty, the Merciful."<br>Khan: "Verily thy Lord is the mighty and merciful God."<br>Qaribullah & Darwish: "Your Lord is the Almighty, the Most Merciful."                                  | Literal (all); Stylistic variation (Rodwell) | Translators consistently reproduce the divine epithets, demonstrating fidelity to theological recurrence. Rodwell's syntactic variation across instances introduces stylistic freshness while preserving semantic equivalence.                |
| فَكَيْفَ كَانَ عَذَابِي وَنُذُرٍ ( <i>fa-kayfa kāna 'adhābī wa-nuḍur</i> )                        | Sale: "How severe was my vengeance and my threatening."<br>Rodwell: "How great was my vengeance and my menace."<br>Khan: "See how was my punishment and my warning."<br>Qaribullah & Darwish: "How then were My punishment and My warnings!"                                                                        | Literal (all)                                | All translators maintain near-verbatim repetition across occurrences, showing that thematic continuity outweighs stylistic monotony. Lexical adjustments ("vengeance," "punishment") remain within the same semantic field.                   |

Inconsecutive repetition bears witness to a high level of consistency among the translators throughout the ages. The fact that the refrains serve as a backbone and a theological anchor explains why all four translators choose to express the refrains with almost the same wording, which indicates a concern for formal equivalence (Nida & Taber, 1969). The slight differences in wording, from "favors" to "bounties," show awareness of English idiom but do not affect the rhetorical purpose and therefore answer the third research question regarding the translation and preservation of the rhetorical, pedagogical, and aesthetic unity.

## V. DISCUSSION

Inconsecutive repetition shows a remarkable degree of consistency among translators throughout different historical periods. Since refrains in the Qur'an play a crucial role both as a structural framework and a theological reference, these four translators render these refrains with nearly identical wording, revealing their strong preference for formal equivalence (Nida & Taber, 1969). Lexical variations, such as "favors" instead of "bounties," are mostly stylistic adjustments in idiomatic usage, without altering meaning, yet still preserving rhetorical, pedagogical, and aesthetic integrity in the original text.

In diachronic terms, these features seem to indicate a shift in Qur'an translation, from a more domesticating approach to a more foreignizing one (Venuti, 1995, p. 19). This is because, as a whole, more recent translations seem more attentive to the performative aspects of Qur'anic language, whereas earlier ones, in accordance with Enlightenment ideas of linguistics, were more focused on readability as a feature of interpretation. Hence, the repetition in literal form does not simply represent a stylistic choice, but a commitment to ideology and translation as a whole.

These findings collectively confirm the research questions posed by the study by showing that the maintenance of repetition is a key factor in the preservation of the Qur'an's rhetorical force and aesthetic coherence in English translation. Repetition must thus be conceived not merely as a linguistic device but rather as a rhetorical space wherein the sacred intersects with the represented.

## VI. CONCLUSION

The current investigation examines the translation of repetition in the Qur'an, which is one of its characteristic features. By examining cases of repeated words in sequence, repeated verses in sequence, and repeated verses in non-sequence, it is possible to show how translators over three centuries adopt a range of strategies which are not only driven by linguistic concerns but also reflect broader ideological and aesthetic commitments. By employing a diachronic and comparative methodology, it is argued here that translation as a process of translating repetition is where theological veneration, stylistic convention, and communicative intent intersect.

What emerges is a pattern from the early tendencies towards paraphrased and modulated translation towards more modern approaches that favour literal translation. Sale and Rodwell, influenced by the rationalism of the Enlightenment and the English neoclassical tradition, tended to view repetition as being stylistically redundant and preferred to reduce or eliminate it in favour of more fluent translation. These practices, following the 'domestication' strategy outlined by Venuti, worked to 'naturalize' the Qur'an in the West, sometimes at the expense of the text's poetic and mnemonic qualities. Subsequent translators, such as Khan, Qaribullah, and Darwish, tend more towards the strategy of 'formal equivalence' outlined by Nida and Taber, and 'foreignization' outlined by Venuti, and retain the repetition as a marker of the divine word and an important component of the Qur'anic aesthetic.

On all levels of text, the most effective translation of Qur'anic rhetorical/pedagogical purpose is the literal translation. Despite the fact that modulation and reduction may facilitate fluency in the receptor language, these processes often reduce the cohesive/pedagogical purpose encoded in the message of the source text. Therefore, the current study supports Baker's claim that "repetition is a cohesive mechanism that joins meaning, structure, and feeling." In addition, the results show that Qur'anic repetition is not merely for decoration but is instead a primary organizing mechanism for emphasis, rhythm, and religious ideas. Those translators who translate repetition accurately translate not only linguistically but also theologically.

In conclusion, therefore, this research contributes to Qur'anic translation studies by establishing that the aesthetic/pedagogic nucleus of Qur'anic discourse is based on repetition. Through a paradigm shift in translation studies, which shifts attention from translation as a potentially redundant process to one that values repetition, it is possible to translate the Qur'an in a way that is more attuned to its meaning and style. Future studies could examine translation as a function of other target language speakers or through computer-aided stylistic analyses that would better establish how religious texts function to redefine translation.

## VII. LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

Despite its contributions, the current research has a number of limitations that are important to recognize. First, the research is grounded on a corpus of thirty selected examples of Qur'anic repetition, which, although purposefully selected to represent the major forms of rhetorical repetition, cannot hope to represent the full range of repetitive forms within the Qur'anic text as a whole. Secondly, the research is limited to the English translation of the Qur'an, which, although the dominant form of the text within the English-speaking world, represents only a single target language variety. It is recommended that the research be extended to incorporate a greater number of examples, as well as a comparison with translations of the Qur'an into other languages, such as French, Turkish, Urdu, or Malay, to determine whether the same forms of repetitive translation are used. Although the current research follows a qualitative rhetorical approach, subsequent research may incorporate a more quantitative approach, drawing upon corpus linguistic techniques to determine the full range of repetitive forms within the Qur'anic text as a whole.

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# Literary Language in Early Islamic Poetry: From Pre-Islamic Bravado to Refined Expression

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**Abstract**—This study examined how poetic language among the Arabs transformed after the advent of Islam, and how the word, which in the pre-Islamic era was a tool of pride and warfare, became, in the Early Islamic Era, a means of education and refinement. Poetry was not abolished; rather, it redirected linguistic expression toward serving values and ethics. The study analysed selected poems by prominent poets such as Ḥassān ibn Thābit, Ka'b ibn Zuhayr, and Labid ibn Rabi'ah, who lived through both eras. The results showed that these poets are clear examples of this transition, as they succeeded in maintaining linguistic strength while achieving stylistic refinement. Their poetry before Islam was marked by vigor, verbal prowess, and great tribal pride, often expressed through exaggerated language. However, with the arrival of Islam, the context changed, and the poets adopted a new tone—one of humility and faith—and began using poetry to defend truth and promote principles. The findings also revealed changes in terminology, a calmer and more thoughtful rhetorical style, and a shift in focus from pride to meaning. The poet came to realise the weight of his words and viewed them as a responsibility. The refinement of language reflects the broader cultural and theological transformation experienced by the Arabs. The significance of this study lies in clarifying the connection between language and values, demonstrating how words can build rather than destroy, and showing how Arabic literature evolved from hyperbole and conflict to wisdom and harmony.

**Index Terms**—Bravado, linguistic transformation, poetry of the early Islamic period, Pre-Islamic Era, refinement of expression

## I. INTRODUCTION

Before Islam, Arab poets served as the tribe's voice, advocating for it, standing up for it, and bragging about its bravery, strength, and honor—even if he did so with harsh or antagonistic words. But with the introduction of Islam, this perspective on language changed, and it became crucial for words to be calmer, more sophisticated, and closer to their human meaning rather than only for pride, fury, or heroism (Bani-Khair et al., 2024, 2025; Rababah et al., 2025; Yazar & Batur, 2025).

The ancient Arabs acknowledged poetry as an instrument of power, and individuals who performed outstanding poetry were referred to be 'fahl' or 'word leaders' (meaning an eloquent and authoritative poet). One of the characteristics of the pre-Islamic era was linguistic competence, which was marked by pride, exaggeration, and even a scathing characterisation. But when Islam arrived, the vocabulary took a different turn, using terms like "responsibility" and "eloquence" to refer to ideas rather than feelings. From this point on, what we refer to as "refinement of expression" started to take shape, which means that the poet started to deliberately select his words instead of tossing them around randomly and started to prioritise substance above metre or rhyme (Alajlouni et al., 2025; Kaddum et al., 2025).

This fundamental shift was reflected in the poetry of the period when Muslim poets and those who lived throughout the transitional period started using language for social and personal development rather than mockery or boasting. Reading the poetry of Hassan ibn Thabit, for instance, enables us to observe how words evolved to serve moral and

religious purposes as well as how the language became more refined and restrained. Other poets, like Ka'b ibn Zuhayr, who started off as a satirical poet before penning the well-known poem "Banat Suad," which was full of love, regret, and manners, experienced the same thing (Essa et al., 2023; Al-Gayam et al., 2025).

The topic covers Arab language proficiency in addition to religion and faith. An attitude of compassion and sincerity now permeates the language, which was once full of pride and hatred. Islam did not oppose poetry; instead, it focused the language on more ambitious objectives. A distinction between words that harm and words that construct has emerged. Poetry is no longer only a means of expressing feelings; it is now an instrument for awareness and development (Al Etoum et al., 2025; Abu-Elrob, 2019; Abu-Elrob & Tawalbeh, 2022).

The study observes that the poets who lived between the two periods – the pre-Islamic era and the early Islamic period – were like a bridge between two worlds, where their language was a mixture of ancient masculinity and new tenderness. So we find that a single verse contains strength of meaning, and at the same time, it has politeness and gentleness of style. For example, Zuhayr bin Abi Salma's poetry was closer to wisdom and politeness before Islam. This suggests that linguistic refinement is not strange to the Arabs, especially when Islam expanded its scope and established it as a moral and religious value (Al-Rawashdeh et al., 2025; Aljedayah et al., 2024; Farhan, 2025; Jamal, 2025).

This transformation, which has become a language of poetry, is not simple. We are talking about a change in the way of thinking before it is a change in the way of writing, where the Muslim poet has begun to see the world with new eyes: justice instead of power, honesty instead of exaggeration, and mercy instead of revenge. And here, poetry became a means of education, teaching and refining people instead of being a tribal conflict; it became a means of preserving the values that Islam advocated (Abumelhim et al., 2024; Al-Jezawi et al., 2023).

Linguistically, we notice that the vocabulary itself has somewhat changed; the words that used to indicate war and pride have decreased, and the words that talk about mercy, faith, and good character have increased. The rhetorical styles have also changed; the imagery has become simpler, closer to the mind and heart, without ambiguity or violence. Instead of depicting warfare and slaughter, the poet after Islam discussed the human spirit and its conflict with good and evil (Abusheirah et al., 2024; Alajlouni et al., 2025; Al-Manasreh, 2025; Saleh, 2025).

During the Early Islamic Era, the language became humbler and more genuine. Even when the poet gives praise, it is focused on principles rather than shapes. It suggests that the acclaimed individuals are now seen as great due to their honesty, justice, or humility rather than their wealth or power. This development is significant because it shows how ethics are reflected in language (Sawalha & Abu Al-Nahel, 2025; Kinany, 1948; Makhoul Sleimann et al., 2024; Yaman, 2021).

This study explored how language affects communal awareness in addition to linguistic analysis. How a term meant to convey conflict has evolved into a symbol of peace. The poet used to boast about himself, but in the Early Islamic Era, he bragged about his expertise or faith. Thus, early Islamic poetry became a model of polite language, striking a balance between beauty and purpose, eloquence and responsibility (Alenzay et al., 2024; Khattab et al., 2024; Khasawneh et al., 2025; Rabab'a, 2023; Rababa et al., 2025). Thus, the goal of this study is to investigate how the transition from pre-Islamic masculinity to refinement of expression happened in the early Islamic period, as well as how this transformation affected Arab literary language creation. We try to understand how the concept of the word changed and how the poet began to choose his words carefully to express new values. It analysed a collection of poetic texts and compared them with pre-Islamic texts to understand the difference in expression, tone, and choice of rhetorical images.

#### A. Research Questions

This study attempts to answer these questions:

- How did poetry become a tool for refinement?
- What is the difference between the pre-Islamic poet and the poet of the early Islamic period in terms of language and attitude towards life?

#### B. The Significance of the Study

This study is not only about language but also the spirit behind the language. And how the word could become a means of reform, and how poetry could transform from a field of boasting to a field of education and refinement. What distinguishes the poetry of the Early Islamic E is that it combined ancient eloquence with new light, thus embodying a rare phase in the history of Arabic literature, a phase in which the word acquired its true meaning: it refines and enlightens, not just astonishes and dazzles.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

When we talk about previous studies and the theoretical framework related to the topic "the language of literature in the poetry of the early Islamic period, which transformed from the bravery of the pre-Islamic era to the refinement of expression, we should discuss how researchers and scholars in the past focused on this transformation. Some scholars saw the change as linguistic, while others viewed it as moral or cultural. The literature generally agrees that poetry after Islam was no longer the same as the poetry before it, neither in style, purpose, nor in spirit.

The first old studies that discussed the topic were critical linguistic studies, such as those by Taha Hussein and Shawqi Dhayf, who clarified that pre-Islamic poetry had "linguistic prowess" in the sense of strength and exaggeration in expression, whether in boasting, satire, or even in love poetry (Daif, 1969; Kusah, 2021). These scholars observed that after Islam, the basic tendency of language shifted from "self-glorification" to "human refinement". For example, Hussein (as cited in Kartono et al., 2023), stated that following Islam, Arabs did not lose their literary skills, but rather there was an internal moral censorship of the word, making the language calmer and more precise. Dhayf (1969) stated that Islam does not forbid poetry but rather requires it to serve mankind and community rather than just serving tribalism or pride.

Najeeb Al-Bahbīti and Ihsan Abbas examined the evolution of rhetorical imagery in Islamic poetry, from images of swords, blood, and conflict to pictures of guidance, faith, and light (Abbas, n.d.). For example, Al Bahbīti (1961) considered "refinement of language" as a sign of artistic maturity, because the poets began to communicate their ideals and sentiments in a more profound manner. It signifies that refining did not reduce the intensity of the poetry but rather channelled it in a constructive manner.

Abu Mousa (1974) noted that attitudes have changed as a result of Islam. If the word was genuine, it became an act of worship; if it was false or harmful, it became a sin. Here we see a crucial idea: poetry has evolved from mere eloquence to intellectual and moral responsibility, and language has been linked to intention. Some works concentrated on certain Early Islamic Era poets, such as Labid ibn Rabi'ah, Ka'b ibn Zuhayr, and Hassan ibn Thabit. For instance, Abdulaziz Al-Rifai examined Hassan ibn Thabit's poetry both before and after Islam, showing how it changed from exaggeration to reality and from caustic criticism to tender admiration.

The poet Ka'b ibn Zuhayr is a notable example of "refinement of expression" in the most evident sense, having transitioned from sarcasm to sorrowful poetry. Labid ibn Rabi'ah is a unique example since his poetry also underwent a significant change in meaning and language after Islam as a result of asceticism and reflection on life, death, and the hereafter.

Regarding the theoretical side, three key concepts create the broad framework that describes the language shift throughout this time:

- Religious and cultural change: Islam altered the Arabs' outlook on life, which in turn altered their perception of language, giving words a lofty function that included moral instruction in addition to evoking strong feelings. And here the study demonstrates that poetry has become a form of invitation, or a means of reform, not a tribal weapon as it was in the past.
- The aesthetic transformation in language: The beauty of pre-Islamic poetry was in its strength, in the violent imagery, and in the unusual diction, whereas the beauty of early Islamic poetry became characterised by simplicity, sincerity, and clarity. Rhetoric became associated with idea and meaning, not with verbal embellishment. Al-Khuli (as cited in Kamila et al., 2025) says that the "new rhetoric" that emerged after Islam was the rhetoric of the heart and mind together, not the rhetoric of sound and speech.
- Social and political transformation: The Arab society after Islam entered a phase of civilisational construction, so poetry began to serve this construction and became a means of education and upbringing. The poet became a teacher and reformer, not just a singer. From here emerged a new type of guiding poetry, which we today call "da'wah poetry" or "reformist poetry".

There are studies that have tried to link "pre-Islamic masculinity" with "Islamic refinement", such as Ahmad Maqloob's study, which stated that masculinity has not disappeared, but its meaning has changed. Masculinity has become not about physical strength or violent rhetoric, but about self-control and wise expression. And the analysis reveals a new concept called "polite masculinity", which means strength with calmness and steadfastness with wisdom (Al-Zubaidi, 2022).

As for modern studies, they approached the topic from a contemporary linguistic perspective, especially discourse analysis studies, such as Daoud and Hammadi (2022), research, which used pragmatic theory to analyse the difference between the tone of pre-Islamic poetry and the tone of early Islamic poetry. She demonstrated that the change is not only in the words but also in the intentions and communicative function. When the Muslim poet speaks, he speaks with the intention of reform and rectification, not with the intention of rebuttal or challenge, and this alone changes the very nature of the language.

In other studies, which linked literary transformation to intellectual transformation, it was said that the Muslim poet has developed a new linguistic awareness because he now feels responsible before God for his words. This means that there is now a self-censorship that regulates the language, and this internal refinement is what brought about the literary change. Through all these studies, we notice that everyone agrees that the change that occurred was not sudden but gradual, and it went through a transitional phase experienced by the poets who witnessed both eras. And for those who combined the eloquence of the pre-Islamic era with the spirit of Islam, here the true beauty of the literary transformation emerges.

To summarise, two fundamental ideas form the theoretical foundation of this study: The first is the idea that language reflects society's collective consciousness, meaning that language changes along with ideals. The second is that the word among the Arabs is not just a means; it is an entity with a spirit and influence. Islam redefined this spirit, so the good word became a charity, eloquence became a responsibility, and poetry became part of the spiritual education of



the nation. Therefore, we can say that the poetry of the early Islamic period was not merely an extension of the pre-Islamic era, nor a complete break from it, but rather a natural development within a new ethical framework. This is what makes the study of language in this period important, because it shows how the Arab man transitioned from a culture of "strength in speech" to a culture of "values in speech".

The previous studies provide us with a strong foundation while also making us feel that there is a gap that needs to be filled: there is no study that has simultaneously combined linguistic, ethical, and intellectual analysis in this period, and this is where this study comes in. We want to complete the picture, linking word and idea, rhetoric and refinement, and trying to understand not just what changed in the language, but why and how it changed.

### III. METHODOLOGY

The appropriate methodology for this research is descriptive-analytical, along with a comparative approach between two periods: The Pre-Islamic Era and the Early Islamic Period. The study described the literary phenomenon (which is the change in language, form, and meaning in poetry), then analysed it and drew conclusions from it. In other words, the researchers read the poetic texts carefully, observing how the words had changed, how the meanings had become calmer and more delicate, and how the style reflected the new values. But the method alone is not enough, so we need to use a somewhat comparative method to be able to show the difference between pre-Islamic poetry and early Islamic poetry. The researchers selected poetic excerpts or poems from each period and compared them in terms of language, meaning, symbolism, and imagery.

#### A. Study Sample

The sample included a selected group of pre-Islamic and Islamic poems. For example, from the Pre-Islamic period, the sample included Antara ibn Shadad, Zuhayr ibn Abi Sulma, and Tarafah ibn al-Abd, and from the early Islamic period, three figures were included: Ka'b ibn Zuhayr, Hassan ibn Thabit, and Labid ibn Rabi'ah. They were selected because they clearly depict the changeover phase and make the comparison more realistic.

#### B. Data Analysis

The study explained the meanings simply, emphasising the essence: how the poet learnt to use language to deliver an educational message rather than to boast and how the concept of language evolved from pride to values. These verses were studied from many perspectives: linguistic angle (the word's shape and structure), intellectual angle (what is the verse's purpose, and what is the poet trying to say?), and stylistic angle (how did the poet use rhetoric? Is it harsh or gentle?).

#### C. Research Tools

Since the topic is linguistic and literary, the primary tool is textual analysis. The researchers referred to the original texts from the collections of famous poets such as: The Diwan of Zuhayr ibn Abi Sulma, The Diwan of Labid ibn Rabi'ah, The Diwan of Hassan ibn Thabit, and The Diwan of Ka'b ibn Zuhayr. Some examples were chosen from each diwan that represent the transformation that has occurred in the language. After this, linguistic and rhetorical analysis was used to see the change in vocabulary (like how words of war and insults disappeared and words of faith and mercy emerged), structures (how sentences became calmer, shorter, and clearer), and metaphorical images (how the image became symbolic and humane instead of being about violence and fighting).

#### D. Data Collection

The sources are of two types: primary sources (these are the poetry collections of the poets who lived during the two eras. These texts are the foundation upon which the analysis was built), and secondary sources (literary criticism books and modern studies that discussed linguistic development after Islam, such as the studies of Shawqi Dhayf, Taha Hussein, Ehsan Abbas, and Amin al-Khuli).

The study followed these procedures:

- Collecting the poetic material: The researchers first gathered the poems that represent the two stages and arranged them by theme (pride, praise, wisdom, love, etc.).
- Linguistic analysis: The words were analysed, examining those whose meanings have changed, disappeared, or taken on new meanings.
- Semantic analysis: The focus was on the overall meaning of the poem, what it expresses, and whether it serves the idea of tribal pride or religious values.
- Comparison: Examples from both periods were compared to see the difference in performance and meaning.
- Conclusion: The researchers drew general conclusions that clarify how Islam influenced literary style and linguistic awareness.

#### E. Potential Challenges

There are some elements that might make the research somewhat difficult, such as:

- The scarcity of early Islamic texts compared to the pre-Islamic era.
- Discrepancies in narratives between ancient literary works.

- The overlap of religious poetry with tribal poetry in some poems.

But the researchers overcame these challenges by making a precise comparison between the narratives and referring to reliable sources such as "Al-Aghani" by Al-Isfahani and "Sharh Al-Mu'allaqat" by Al-Zawzani.

In short, the research described the literary phenomenon (language transformation), examined poetry writings from both times, compared findings from the pre-Islamic and early Islamic periods, and extracted new literary values. This perspective allows us to see the bigger picture, not just as poetry, but as an intellectual and cultural shift that occurred in the Arab world with the arrival of Islam. It indicates that we are not only altering words but also changing our way of thinking.

#### IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

##### A. The Function of Language Evolved From a Weapon Into a Tool of Moral Refinement

The word's function changed from being a weapon to one of refinement. With the advent of Islam, the phrase—which had previously been employed for rhetorical conflict (satire, pride, challenge)—became a tool for invitation, advice, and refinement. This shift signifies a revolution in the role of language in society rather than just a change in vocabulary. Antara's well-known pre-Islamic statement,

ولقد ذكرتكَ والرماح نواهل منى  
وببيض الهند تقطر من دمي  
فوددت تقبيل السيوف لأنها  
لمعت كبارق ثغرك المتبسّم  
I remembered you while the spears were drinking from my blood,  
And the Indian blades dripped with it.  
I longed to kiss those swords—  
For they gleamed like the flash of your smiling teeth.

The spirit of combat and manhood is embodied in this poetry. The poetry conjures up a striking picture in which the memories are entwined with blood and weaponry. The reader is transported to the scene of conflict and violence by the words.

From the early Islamic period, Ka'b ibn Zuhayr's poetry after his conversion to Islam (the renowned opening of "Bant Sadaad")—while it is a personal sentiment and remorse, it offers refinement, sensitivity, and spiritual guidance:

بانت سعادُ فقلبي اليوم مَبْتُولُ  
مُنْتَمٍ إِثْرَهَا، لَمْ يُفِدْ مَكْبُولُ  
وما سعادُ غداة البين إِذ رَحَلُوا  
إِلَّا أَغْنَى غَضِيضُ الطَّرْفِ مَكْحُولُ  
هيفاءُ مُقْبِلَةً، عَجْزاً مُدْبِرَةً  
لا يُشْتَكَى قِصَرُ مِنْهَا... وَلَا طُولُ  
تَجَلُّو عَوَارِضَ ذِي ظَلَمٍ إِذَا ابْتَسَمَتْ  
كَأَنَّهُ مُنْهَلٌ بِالرَّاحِ مَعْلُولُ  
يا ويحها خُلَّةٌ لو أَنَّهَا صَدَقَتْ  
ما وعدتْ أو لو أَنَّ النُّصْحَ مَقْبُولُ  
كانت مواعيدُ عِرْقوبٍ لَهَا مثلاً  
وما مواعيدُهَا إِلَّا الْأَبَاطِيلُ  
فَلَا يَغُرُّكَ مَا مَنَنْتَ وَمَا وَعَدْتَ  
"إِنَّ الْأَمَانِي وَالْأَحْلَامَ تَضْلِيلُ"  
Su'ad has departed, and today my heart is stricken—  
A lover enslaved by her love, whom no cure can free.  
And Su'ad, on the morning of parting when they left,  
Was nothing but a graceful woman with modest, kohl-lined eyes.  
Slender when approaching, full-figured when she turns away—  
Neither too short to fault nor too tall to complain.  
When she smiles, she reveals teeth like pearls,  
As though moistened with wine, gleaming and bright.  
Woe to her companionship—if only she were truthful  
To what she promised, or if counsel were accepted!  
Her promises have become like those of 'Urquḇ—  
For her pledges are nothing but falsehoods.  
So do not let her favors or promises deceive you—  
For hopes and dreams are but delusions.

(From the "Burdah" poem of Ka'b ibn Zuhayr in praise of the Messenger of Allah, peace be upon him.)

The poem reflects the poet's shift from invective and pride to expressions of regret and refinement. This result indicates that there is a change in the "intention" of the speech; it means what the goal behind it is. The pre-Islamic poet often intended to influence at the tribal level (honour, power, restoring dignity), whereas the poet in the early Islamic period aimed at guidance; the word here became reformatory in purpose. The findings indicate that the understanding that language is not neutral: its function changes according to the prevailing ideology and values.

#### *B. The Image of Man Has Changed From the Heroic Warrior to the Humble, Faithful Human*

In a clear contrast in the image of the self, the pre-Islamic era perceived man as an act of power ("fahl", "qawwad", "possessor of chivalry"), whereas the poetry of the early Islamic period presents an image of a humble, conscious, submissive individual before the Creator, more concerned with morals than appearances.

For example, in the Pre-Islamic period, to show the essence of masculinity, Amr ibn Kulthum's verse embodies challenge and self-confidence:

أَلَا لَا يَعْلَمُ الْأَقْوَامُ أَنَّا  
تَضَعَعْنَا وَأَنَا قَدْ وَنِينَا  
أَلَا لَا يَجْهَلُنْ أَحَدٌ عَلَيْنَا  
فَنَجْهَلُ فَوْقَ جَهْلِ الْجَاهِلِينَا

Let it be known to all people that we have been shaken and grown weary.  
And let no one act ignorantly toward us—  
For if they do, we shall surpass them in ignorance itself!

The tone here is one of challenge and declaration of sovereignty. In Islam, as a reminder of humility, Labid ibn Rabi'ah, after embracing Islam, says:

أَلَا كُلُّ شَيْءٍ مَا خَلَا اللَّهَ بَاطِلٌ  
وَكُلُّ نَعِيمٍ لَا مَحَالَةَ زَائِلٌ  
وَكُلُّ أَنَاسٍ سَوْفَ تَدْخُلُ بَيْنَهُمْ  
دُوبِيَّةٌ تَصْفُرُ مِنْهَا الْأَنَامِلُ

Behold! Everything except God is vain,  
And every pleasure will surely fade.  
And every group of people—between them one day—  
A grave will descend, turning fingers pale with death (from death's chill).

The language used here encourages us to see life from a new perspective: righteousness and standing before God are more important than material power. This change created a new human discourse; the poet has become a social and moral responsibility, not just a loud voice of the tribe. This gives poetry a clear educational dimension, and it also affects the audience — people take a lesson, not just joy.

#### *C. Refinement of Vocabulary: The Transformation of Poetic Lexicon*

There is a clear change in vocabulary: words related to war, stabbing, and invasion have relatively decreased, and words like 'forgiveness', 'honesty', 'piety', and 'mercy' have become more dominant. In the Pre-Islamic era, "testimony", "spear", "duel", and "sheath" were common terms in the core language. Antara's poem simplifies the concept:

حَكِّمْ سُبُوفَكُمْ فِي رِقَابِ الْعُدُلِ  
وَإِذَا نَزَلَتْ بِدَارِ ذُلٍّ فَارْحَلِ  
وَإِذَا بَلَّيْتَ بِظَالِمٍ كُنْ ظَالِمًا  
وَإِذَا لَقِيتَ دَوِيَّ الْجَهَالَةِ فَاجْهَلِي  
وَإِذَا الْجَبَانُ نَهَاكَ يَوْمَ كَرِيهَةٍ  
خَوْفًا عَلَيْكَ مِنْ إِزْدِحَامِ الْجَحْفَلِ  
فَاعْصِ مَقَالَتَهُ وَلَا تَحْفَلْ بِهَا  
وَأُقْدِمِ إِذَا خَقَّ اللَّفَا فِي الْأَوَّلِ  
وَاخْتَرْ لِنَفْسِكَ مَنْزِلًا لَا تَعْلُو بِهِ  
أَوْ مِتْ كَرِيمًا تَحْتَ ظِلِّ الْقُسْطِ  
فَالْمَوْتُ لَا يُنْجِيكَ مِنْ آفَاتِهِ  
حِصْنٌ وَلَوْ شَيْدَتْهُ بِالْجَنْدَلِ

Wield your sword upon the necks of the blamers,  
And if you dwell in a land of humiliation—depart!  
If you are afflicted by an oppressor, then be oppressive in return,  
And if you meet the ignorant, answer them with ignorance.

If the coward warns you on a day of hardship,  
 Fearing for you the crush of the marching army,  
 Defy his words and pay them no heed—  
 Advance when true combat first begins.  
 Choose for yourself a dwelling that lifts your honour,  
 Or die a noble man beneath the shade of spears.  
 For death will not save you from its destined harms,  
 Even if you fortify yourself with walls of solid stone.

In the Islamic era, the poet employed "forgiveness", "pardon", "religion", "light", "truth", and "repentance". For example, the verses praising the Prophet by Hassan ibn Thabit are filled with words of respect and affection instead of insults or slander:

وَأَحْسَنُ مِنْكَ لَمْ تَرَ قَطُّ عَيْنِي  
 وَأَجْمَلُ مِنْكَ لَمْ تَلِدِ النِّسَاءُ  
 خُلِقْتَ مُرَّةً مِنْ كُلِّ عَيْبٍ  
 كَأَنَّكَ قَدْ خُلِقْتَ كَمَا تَشَاءُ

My eyes have never seen anyone more beautiful than you,  
 Nor has any woman given birth to one more handsome.  
 You were created free from every flaw—  
 As though you were created exactly as you wished.

The transformation of the lexicon is a sign of an educational and social process: society has begun to value religious and moral values, and the language aligns with these values. Linguistically, we can track how the "tree of meanings" has changed in poetic collections; that is, which words have lost their lustre and which words have gained prominence.

#### *D. The Purpose of Poetry Has Changed: From Embellishment to Guidance*

The purpose of poetry has changed from artistry to guidance. The purpose of writing poetry has expanded; poetry has become a tool for conveying religious and moral messages, not just for praise and satire.

For example, Al-Hassan ibn Thabit used his poetry to defend the Prophet and spread the message of Islam; his poetry contains glory and ambition but with ethical commitment:

أَعْرُ، عَلَيْهِ النَّبُوءَةُ خَاتَمٌ  
 مِنَ اللَّهِ مَشْهُودٌ يَلُوحُ وَيُشْهَدُ  
 وَضَعَ إِلَهُ اسْمَ النَّبِيِّ إِلَى اسْمِهِ،  
 إِذَا قَالَ فِي الْخَمْسِ الْمُؤَذِّنُ أَشْهَدُ  
 وَشَقَّ لَهُ مِنْ اسْمِهِ لِيَجْلَهُ،  
 فَذُو الْعَرْشِ مَحْمُودٌ، وَهَذَا مُحَمَّدُ

Radiant he is—upon him shines the Seal of Prophethood,  
 A sign from God, evident and witnessed by all.  
 God joined the Prophet's name with His own—  
 When the muezzin proclaims in every prayer, "I bear witness."  
 And He drew from His own Name to honour him:  
 The Lord of the Throne is Mahmūd (The Praised), and this is Muhammad (Praiseworthy).

نَبِيٌّ أَتَانَا بَعْدَ يَأْسٍ وَفِتْرَةٍ  
 مِنَ الرِّسَالِ، وَالْأَوْتَانِ فِي الْأَرْضِ تَعْبُدُ  
 فَأَمْسَى سِرَاجاً مُسْتَنِيرًا وَهَادِيًا،  
 يَلُوحُ كَمَا لَاحَ الصَّقِيلُ الْمُهَيَّئُ  
 وَأَنْذَرْنَا نَارًا، وَبَشَّرَ جَنَّةً،  
 وَعَلَّمَنَا الْإِسْلَامَ، فَاللَّهُ نَحْمَدُ

A Prophet came to us after despair and long silence,  
 When idols were worshipped across the earth.  
 He became a shining lamp and a guiding light,  
 Radiant like a finely polished sword.  
 He warned us of Hellfire and gave glad tidings of Paradise,  
 And taught us Islam—so we praise God.

وَأَنْتَ إِلَهَ الْخَلْقِ رَبِّي وَخَالِقِي،  
 بِذَلِكَ مَا عَمَرْتُ فَيَا لِنَاسٍ أَشْهَدُ  
 تَعَالَيْتَ رَبَّ النَّاسِ عَنْ قَوْلِ مَنْ دَعَا

سِوَاكَ إِلَهًا، أَنْتَ أَعْلَى وَأَمَجْدُ  
لَكَ الْخَلْقُ وَالنِّعْمَاءُ، وَالْأَمْرُ كُلُّهُ،  
فِيَاكَ نَسْتَهْدِي، وَإِيَّاكَ نَعْبُدُ

And You—O Lord of creation—are my God and Creator;  
For as long as I live, I bear witness to this before all people.  
Exalted are You, Lord of mankind, far above  
Those who call upon any besides You—you are the Highest, the Most Glorious.  
To You belong creation, blessings, and all command;  
It is You we seek guidance from, and You alone we worship.

Ka'b ibn Zuhayr, when he praised the Prophet with his poem "Banat Su'ād", did not praise himself or his tribe but rather declared repentance and expressed respect. This means that poetry has entered the realm of ethics and education and has become part of shaping public discourse. Poets now have a social role: they remind people of virtues, give advice, and reform. The listener or reader has come to receive poetry as a lesson, not just as an artistic display.

#### E. The Change in the Rhetorical Image: From Images of War to Images of Light and Spiritual Symbolism

In a clear visual transformation, the rhetorical images shifted towards spiritual symbols (light, guidance, tranquilly), instead of warlike and violent comparisons. For example, in the Pre-Islamic era, images of horses, swords, and plains; an example from Zuhayr or Antara.

مَوْتُ الْفَتَى فِي عِزِّ خَيْرٍ لَهُ  
مِنْ أَنْ يَبِيتَ أَسِيرَ طَرْفٍ أَكْخَلِ

إِنْ كُنْتُ فِي عَدَدِ الْعَبِيدِ فَهَمَّتِي  
فَوْقَ الثَّرْيَا وَالسِّمَاكِ الْأَعْزَلِ

أَوْ أَنْكَرْتَ فُرْسَانُ عَيْسٍ نِسْبَتِي  
فَسِنَانُ رُمَحِي وَالْحُسَامُ يُقِرُّ لِي

وَيَذَابِلِي وَمُهَنْدِي ثَلْثُ الْعُلَا  
لَا بِالْقَرَابَةِ وَالْعَدِيدِ الْأَجْزَلِ

وَرَمَيْتُ مُهْرِي فِي الْعَجَاجِ فَخَاضَهُ  
وَالنَّارُ تَقْدَحُ مِنْ شِفَارِ الْأَنْصُلِ

خَاضَ الْعَجَاجُ مُحْجَلًا حَتَّى إِذَا  
شَهِدَ الْوَقِيعَةَ عَادَ غَيْرَ مُحْجَلِ

وَلَقَدْ نَكَبْتُ بَنِي حُرَيْقَةَ نَكْبَةً  
لَمَّا طَعَنْتُ صَمِيمَ قَلْبِ الْأَخِيلِ

وَقَتَّلْتُ فَارِسَهُمْ رَبِيعَةَ عَنُودَ  
وَالْهَيْذَبَانَ وَجَابِرَ بْنِ مُهْلَهْلِ

وَأَبْنَى رَبِيعَةَ وَالْخَرِيشَ وَمَالِكَا  
وَالزَّبْرَقَانَ غَدَا طَرِيخَ الْجَنْدَلِ

وَأَنَا ابْنُ سَوْدَاءِ الْجَبِينِ كَأَنَّهُ  
ضَبْعُ تَرْعٍ فِي رُسُومِ الْمَنْزَلِ

السَّاقُ مِنْهَا مِثْلُ سَاقِ نَعَامَةٍ  
وَالشَّعْرُ مِنْهَا مِثْلُ حَبِّ الْفُلْفُلِ

وَالثَّغْرُ مِنْ تَحْتِ اللَّثَامِ كَأَنَّهُ  
بَرْقٌ تَلَالُؤٌ فِي الظُّلَامِ الْمُسْدَلِ

يَا نَازِلِينَ عَلَى الْجَمَى وَدِيَارِهِ  
هَلَا رَأَيْتُمْ فِي الدِّيَارِ تَقْلُفِي

قَدْ طَالَ عِزُّكُمْ وَذُلِّي فِي الْهَوَى  
وَمِنَ الْعَجَائِبِ عِزُّكُمْ وَذُلِّي

لَا تَسْقِنِي مَاءَ الْحَيَاةِ بِذِلَّةٍ  
بَلْ فَاسْقِنِي بِالْعِزِّ كَأَنَّ الْخَنْظَلِ

مَاءَ الْحَيَاةِ بِذِلَّةٍ كَجَهَنَّمَ  
وَجَهَنَّمَ بِالْعِزِّ أَطْيَبُ مَنْزِلٍ

Death of a man in honour is better for him  
Than sleeping captive to the glance of a kohl-lined eye.

Though I may be counted among the slaves, my ambition  
Rises beyond the Pleiades and the highest stars.

And if the horsemen of 'Abs deny my lineage,  
The point of my spear and the blade of my sword will testify.

By my spearhead and my polished blade, I gained glory—  
Not through kinship nor vast numbers.

I drove my horse into the swirling dust until  
Fire sparked from the edges of its iron hooves.

He plunged through the dust, swift-footed, until  
When the battle was witnessed, he returned no longer white-footed.

I struck the sons of Ḥurayqah a blow  
When I pierced the very heart of al-Akhyal.

I slew their horseman Rabī'ah outright,  
And al-Haydhubān and Jābir son of Muhalhil.

And the two sons of Rabī'ah, and al-Ḥarīsh, and Mālīk—  
Even al-Zibriqān, laid low upon the ground.

I am the son of a dark-skinned woman, whose brow  
Is like a hyena raised among the traces of ruins.

Her legs like those of an ostrich,  
Her hair like grains of black pepper.

And her teeth beneath the veil—  
Lightning flashing in the darkness.

O you who dwell upon the protected lands and homes—  
Have you not seen how I stir restlessly in these dwellings?

Your honour has grown while mine has diminished in love—  
And of wonders is your pride and my humiliation.

Do not give me the water of life in disgrace—  
But give me instead the bitter cup of death in honour.

For the water of life in humiliation is like Hell—  
And Hell in dignity is a sweeter dwelling (By 'Antarah ibn Shaddād)

In the Islamic era, images of light, the sea as mercy, and the heart as a passage to faith. An example in praise of the Prophet or in sermons:

شَقَّ لَهُ مِنْ إِسْمِهِ كِي يُجَلَّهُ  
فَدَوَّ الْعَرْشَ مَحْمُودٌ وَهَذَا مُحَمَّدُ

نَبِيٍّ أَتَانَا بَعْدَ يَأْسٍ وَقَفَرَةٍ  
مِنَ الرُّسُلِ وَالْأَوْثَانِ فِي الْأَرْضِ تُعْبَدُ  
فَأَمْسَى سِرَاجاً مُسْتَنِيرًا وَهَادِيًا  
يَلُوحُ كَمَا لَاحَ الصَّقِيلُ الْمُهَيَّئُ

He drew from His own Name to honor him,  
For the Lord of the Throne is Mahmūd, and this is Muhammad.  
A Prophet came to us after despair and a long pause,  
When messengers had ceased and idols were worshipped on earth.  
He became a shining, radiant lamp and a guide,  
Gleaming like a finely polished sword.

This transformation shows that rhetoric has adapted to its new subject. The poet no longer needs images of violence to be impactful; the impact is now built on symbols close to the spirit and inner life.

#### F. A Calmer and More Balanced Style and Tone

Clearer phrases, a presentation that is closer to the audience, and a tone that is possibly less provocative and more contemplative are all examples of how the general style has gotten simpler and calmer. In his commendation, Ka'b ibn Zuhayr, for instance, states:

إِنَّ الرِّسُولَ لَنُورٌ يُسْتَضَاءُ بِهِ  
مُهَيَّئٌ مِنْ سُبُوفِ اللَّهِ مَسْلُوبُ  
فِي غُصْنَةٍ مِنْ قُرَيْشٍ قَالَ قَاتِلُهُمْ  
يَبْطِنُ مَكَّةَ لَمَّا اسْتَلَمُوا زُؤُلَا

Indeed, the Messenger is a light by which one is enlightened,  
A sharpened blade drawn from the swords of God.  
Among a group of Quraysh, one of them declared:  
'In the heart of Mecca, when they embraced Islam, they were overcome.'

"The Messenger is a light by which one is guided" is a simple and uncomplicated remark; he uses passionate language without pretension. Additionally, Hassan ibn Thabit presents a serious, polite, and methodical defence of the Prophet:

بَانَتْ سَعَادُ قَلْبِي الْيَوْمَ مَتَبُولُ  
مُتَّيِّمٌ إِثْرَهَا لَمْ يَجَزْ مَكْبُولُ  
وَمَا سَعَادُ غَدَاةِ الْبَيْنِ إِذْ رَخَلُوا  
إِلَّا أَعْنُ غَضِيضُ الطَّرْفِ مَكْحُولُ  
هَيْفَاءُ مُقْبِلَةً عِزَاءُ مُدْبِرَةً  
لَا يُشْتَكَى قِصَرُ مِنْهَا وَلَا طَوْلُ  
تَجَلُّو عَوَارِضَ ذِي ظَلَمٍ إِذَا ابْتَسَمَتْ  
كَأَنَّهُ مِنْهَلٌّ بِالرَّاحِ مَعْلُولُ

Su'ād has departed, and today my heart is wounded;  
enslaved by love for her, unredeemed and bound.  
Su'ād, on the morning of parting when they departed,  
was but a graceful one, with modest eyes and kohl adorned.  
Slender when approaching, full-hipped when turning away —  
None could complain of her being too short or too tall.  
When she smiles, she reveals bright teeth amid the dark —  
as though she were a refreshing drink mixed with wine.

The poem's simplicity is not a flaw; rather, it demonstrates the poet's capacity to express a significant idea in a small number of words. This shows that the language is mature. The researcher discovers that the goal of linguistic simplification in the post-Islamic era is psychological and moral impact.

#### G. The Development of Ethical Principles as a Key Subject

In many poetry passages, virtues like kindness, forgiveness, tolerance, and honesty are evident. These are some of Labid's lyrics that remind people of the end of the world and deal with asceticism:

وَمَا الْمَرْءُ إِلَّا كَالشَّيْهَابِ وَضَوَائِهِ  
يَحُورُ رَمَاداً بَعْدَ إِذْ هُوَ سَاطِعُ  
وَمَا الْبِرُّ إِلَّا مُضْمَرَاتٌ مِنَ النَّقَى  
وَمَا الْمَالُ إِلَّا مُعَمَّرَاتٌ وَدَائِعُ

A person is nothing but like a shooting star,  
and his light turns to ashes after it once shone.  
Righteousness is nothing but hidden traces of piety.  
And wealth is nothing but possessions and deposits that endure.

These are didactic or advisory verses by the poets of the Companions and later poets that encourage good character. The presence of these values in poetry contributes to their social entrenchment. The poet has become a kind of cultural educator, and his words have turned into a "public discourse" that influences people.

#### H. *The Decline of Verbal Bravado: A Language Closer to the People*

The poet's desire to use exaggerated or strange words to provoke astonishment has diminished; the focus has shifted to conveying meaning. Imru' al-Qais: "gifā nabki" — despite its magnificence, it is rich in imagery:

قَفَا نَبْكَ مِنْ ذِكْرِي حَبِيبٍ وَمَنْزِلٍ  
بَسْفِطِ اللَّوَى بَيْنَ النَّخُولِ فَحَوْمَلٍ  
"Let us stop and weep over the memory of a beloved and a dwelling,  
At Siqt al-Liwa, between ad-Dakhool and Hawmal."

Al-Hassan ibn Thabit: His verses are direct and clear; the goal becomes apparent quickly:

وَأَحْسَنُ مِنْكَ لَمْ تَرَ قَطُّ عَيْنِي  
وَأَجْمَلُ مِنْكَ لَمْ تَلِدِ النِّسَاءُ  
خُلِقْتَ مُبْرَأً مِنْ كُلِّ عَيْبٍ  
كَأَنَّكَ قَدْ خُلِقْتَ كَمَا تَشَاءُ  
And more beautiful than you my eyes have never seen.  
And fairer than you no woman has ever been born.  
You were created free from every flaw.  
As if you were made exactly as you wished.

The choice here serves a new function: the audience receives a religious or moral message quickly. This is certainly useful for spreading the message in a changing society. The harmony and integration between heritage and refinement: Poets as a bridge between two worlds.

#### I. *Reconciliation and Integration Between Heritage and Refinement*

The poets who lived during the transitional period combined the skill of pre-Islamic expression with the spirit of Islamic refinement; they created a "linguistic bridge" that allowed the language to develop without losing its eloquence. Labid, Zuhayr, and Ka'b ibn Zuhayr: Each of them maintained the beauty of the composition while changing the content.

The transformation was not a radical break; it was an adjustment and adaptation. This is a bourgeois view that change was a gradual social and cultural process. Language shifts are connected to value shifts: as values change, so does language. After Islam, poetry was employed to improve souls rather than simply depicting valour and vehemence. Religious and social structures also contributed to this transformation. The study revealed that poetry underwent a profound linguistic revolution, having religious, cultural, and social repercussions. It is more than just eliminating or adding words; there has been a movement in people's thinking, the purpose of communication, and the function of the poet. When the word is refined, it has a larger effect because it begins to reach the conscience and heart.

### V. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The study revealed that transition from "pre-Islamic masculinity" to the language of "expressive refinement" in the early Islamic period was not a mere change in words or images, but rather a fundamental shift in the poet's consciousness, the language, and society. Language evolved to become a tool for building rather than dispute resolution. Literary language has attained "internal refinement"; the poet has learnt to feel a responsibility for their words, and the audience has begun to see poetry as a message rather than merely amusement or bragging.

The study showed that the relationships between language, moral values, culture, and religion are close. The new values (justice, mercy, honesty, moderation) were directly reflected in the vocabulary, imagery, and style. The transitional poets (from the pre-Islamic era to the early Islamic period), such as Ka'b ibn Zuhayr, Labid ibn Rabi'ah, and Zuhayr ibn Abi Sulma, built a bridge between the style of the pre-Islamic era and the content of Islam, which helped the language to advance without neglecting the old heritage. The rhetorical approach shifted to value more than form; the images that were used for war and heroism became used for enlightenment and guidance, and the style became calmer, closer to reality, with the idea carrying more weight than ornamentation.



The study proved that the language used in poetry is not independent of the social system – meaning that linguistic changes occurred alongside social changes and religious and cultural renewal. Finally, despite the considerable changes, the pre-Islamic legacy was not lost; rather, it served as a reference. Yet, the language has developed to reflect the ideals and demands of the Early Islamic Era. This suggests that the transformation was integrative rather than disruptive rather than a total erasure.

The study recommends that future academics perform a quantitative examination of the language in the two periods (Pre-Islamic - Early Islamic) to observe how many terms like "violence", "fighting", and "pride" have reduced while words like "mercy", "faith", and "forgiveness" have grown. It also recommends that the educational curricula in universities and institutes of Arabic literature include a unit or chapter specifically teaching how the language of Arabic poetry has changed due to cultural and religious shifts and encourages students to engage in comparative reading between pre-Islamic and Islamic texts.

The study recommends the practical application of research within poetry workshops or literary writing; that is, modern poets or literature students should use this knowledge not only to understand the past but also to write today's poetry in a language that embodies refined expression and moral values. The study recommends including appropriate poetic texts in literary analysis within research that connects language and society; for example, studying the relationship between the language of poetry and social values among Arabs in the early Islamic period.

Also, future research should look at how literary language was impacted by the move from oral to written forms, as well as the impact of new Arab culture during the early Islamic state. Finally, the study proposes emphasising that literary language is not just an artistic object but also a tool of learning and refining by including this component in language and literature education. We can assist future generations in comprehending that words have weight and that our speech has influence.

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# What Do English Learners Ask? A Categorization of Language Questions on *HiNative*

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**Abstract**—This paper examines the types of English-language questions posed by learners on *HiNative*, a global peer-to-peer language learning platform. While online question-and-answer platforms have been widely adopted for language learning, the linguistic focus and distribution of learner-generated questions in self-access digital environments remain underexplored. Drawing on a linguistic content analysis approach informed by learner autonomy, the study systematically classifies learners' questions across key linguistic domains. Using qualitative content analysis, a dataset of 783 learner-generated inquiries was categorized into key linguistic domains (grammar, vocabulary, usage, pronunciation, idioms, translation, comparison, formality/contextual use, and other). The findings reveal a predominant focus on meaning-oriented questions, particularly translation (34.2% of all questions) and vocabulary (21.5%), while grammar and pronunciation queries were comparatively rare. This distribution suggests that learners prioritize communicative meaning, lexical expansion, and pragmatic appropriateness over formal rule-focused learning. Such inquiry patterns highlight learners' reliance on their first language as a bridge to the target language and their pursuit of precise and natural usage in authentic contexts. These results contribute to second language acquisition research by offering insights into learner priorities in informal, technology-mediated settings, with implications for the design of adaptive learning resources and learner support systems.

**Index Terms**—learner-generated questions, informal digital learning of English (IDLE), language learner autonomy, online language learning platforms

## I. INTRODUCTION

The rapid expansion of digital communication tools has redefined how language learners engage in self-access learning. Platforms that enable peer-to-peer language support, such as *HiNative*, have become central to the way learners seek clarification, test language hypotheses, and negotiate meaning in informal contexts (Liang et al., 2025). These platforms allow learners to articulate their own questions and receive feedback from native speakers or more proficient peers, creating authentic opportunities for language-focused interaction outside the classroom. Such environments align with recent trends in learner agency and self-regulated learning in technology-mediated contexts (Wang & Chen, 2019; Zhang & Zou, 2022).

Research on technology-enhanced language learning has increasingly emphasized the role of learner-generated content in revealing linguistic needs and strategic behavior (Gao et al., 2024). The questions learners pose in question-and-answer settings are not simply requests for information; they can be indicators of metalinguistic awareness, learning priorities, and areas of persistent difficulty (Behzad et al., 2023). Blanchette (2007) found that learners participating in online discussions consistently asked referential, rather than simple display, questions, which “reflects the higher cognitive levels inherent in the questions”, suggesting that online learner queries often serve as windows into their evolving vocabulary, grammatical awareness, and pragmatic concerns.

Despite these developments in the field of technology-mediated and online language learning, there is still relatively limited empirical research that systematically and comprehensively examines the content, nature, and distribution of learner-generated questions on informal online learning platforms. These platforms, which provide accessible spaces for language learners to seek guidance, exchange knowledge, and practice their skills beyond the boundaries of formal instruction, represent a growing yet under-investigated area of study. While recent research efforts have shed light on patterns of peer interaction and collaborative learning in social media-based language learning environments (Gao et al., 2024) and have offered valuable insights into autonomous, self-directed learning practices occurring in out-of-class contexts (Wang & Chen, 2019), such studies often focus on broader participation dynamics and learner autonomy. Consequently, the specific linguistic focus of learner help requests on Q&A-oriented platforms remains insufficiently explored, leaving a gap in understanding learner-driven language needs.

A recent systematic review of online informal language learning further highlights this research gap, noting that while peer interaction and social engagement in digital spaces have been widely studied, the linguistic dimensions of learner-generated questions have received little systematic attention (Inayati et al., 2024). Understanding these patterns can offer valuable insights for the design of self-access resources, adaptive learning technologies, and targeted instructional interventions.

This study addresses this gap by analyzing the types of English-language questions posted by learners on *HiNative*.

The questions are categorized into key linguistic domains, such as grammar, vocabulary, usage, pronunciation, idioms, and translation, to identify common areas of learner difficulty and interest. By examining the content, frequency and nature of these learner-generated help requests, this research contributes to a clearer understanding of how learners engage with digital platforms for self-access language learning and how these interactions reflect their evolving needs in contemporary contexts. The investigation is framed by theoretical perspectives on learner autonomy and sociocultural learning, which guide interpretation of the findings in relation to learner agency and peer-supported development.

The structure of the paper is as follows. Section 2 provides a review of the relevant literature. Section 3 details the methodological framework of the study. Section 4 presents and discusses the findings, and Section 5 concludes by outlining the study's implications and suggesting directions for future research.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Digital platforms have significantly reshaped language learning by enabling learners to engage in self-access, informal contexts beyond the classroom (Reinders & Benson, 2017). Among these, peer-to-peer Q&A environments such as *HiNative* provide opportunities for learners to articulate questions, test hypotheses, and receive feedback from native speakers or more proficient peers. Such platforms encourage learner autonomy and self-regulated learning. This trend aligns with the broader evolution of autonomy and technology-mediated language education (Cohen & Macaro, 2007; Gao et al., 2024; Holec, 1981; Little, 1991; Nushi et al., 2023) and is supported by evidence that learners use digital tools for substantial out-of-class practice (Lai & Gu, 2011).

Studies on Informal Digital Learning of English (IDLE) have consistently shown its positive impact on learners' language development and autonomy beyond formal settings. A scoping review of IDLE research highlighted that engaging with digital media, mobile apps, and online communities supports vocabulary development, digital literacies, and communicative confidence through linguistic, affective, and agency-related dimensions (Soyoo et al., 2021). Similarly, Zhang and Liu (2022) developed and validated a structural model of IDLE in a university context, emphasizing how cognitive, motivational, and resource-based factors predict IDLE-enhanced benefits and practices.

Additional empirical research highlights IDLE's role in advancing intercultural awareness and positive attitudes toward language learning. For example, Liu et al. (2023) conducted a large-scale structural equation modeling study among Chinese university students, showing that participation in IDLE activities cultivates intercultural competence, including awareness of self and others, openness, and intercultural communicative skills. Together, these studies establish IDLE as a powerful complement to structured learning, nurturing autonomy, learner motivation, agency, and meaningful engagement in authentic contexts.

Findings from studies on social media and online peer interaction illustrate that learners benefit not only linguistically but also socially from engagement in such communities. Alsenafi et al. (2024) show that social media platforms encourage authentic interaction and collaboration, while Noorwali and Sabir (2025) report that technology use strongly correlates with the development of learner autonomy among EFL Saudi students. These studies point to the dual role of digital platforms in supporting both language development and the cultivation of independent, self-regulated learning practices.

Building on this, related research conceptualizes informal digital learning environments as spaces where learners develop linguistic competence and intercultural awareness through self-directed participation. For instance, Lee and Sylvén (2021) examined Korean and Swedish EFL learners' engagement in informal digital learning of English and found that online communities, gaming, and social media use not only enhanced learners' communicative abilities but also promoted intercultural understanding and collaborative learning practices. From this perspective, platforms such as *HiNative* and similar environments are not merely places to obtain answers but dynamic arenas where learners expand their linguistic resources, negotiate meaning, and build intercultural competence in authentic, socially mediated contexts.

Learner-generated content provides valuable insight into learners' linguistic priorities, metalinguistic awareness, and persistent areas of difficulty (Behzad et al., 2023; Lee, 2021; Sánchez, 2013). Corpus-based study upholds this, showing that grammatical issues, particularly with determiners and prepositions, make up the largest portion of learner errors followed closely by vocabulary-related errors (Sánchez, 2013). More recent work highlights the central role of vocabulary in EFL proficiency (Alshumrani, 2024), while earlier research has documented the enduring challenges learners face with collocations and idiomaticity (Henriksen, 2013). Collectively, these studies demonstrate that both grammatical accuracy and lexical competence, including vocabulary breadth, collocational knowledge, and idiomatic usage, are central to understanding the persistent difficulties and developmental priorities of L2 learners.

While mobile-assisted and social media-based platforms have been widely studied in terms of learner interaction and technological affordances, there has been little systematic analysis of the specific linguistic categories of learner-generated questions in open Q&A platforms. *HiNative*, in particular, remains underexplored despite its global reach and explicit focus on linguistic inquiry. This study addresses this gap by categorizing English learner questions on *HiNative* into domains such as grammar, vocabulary, usage, pronunciation, idioms, translation, and comparison, as detailed in the methodology section. In doing so, it provides empirical evidence of learner priorities in informal digital contexts and contributes to applied linguistics research on learner autonomy, learning strategies, and technology-enhanced language learning.

### III. METHODOLOGY

#### A. Research Aim and Design

The present study aimed to investigate the nature of language-related questions posed by English learners in an online self-access learning environment (i.e., *HiNative*) and to identify the linguistic areas and learning priorities reflected in these inquiries. Specifically, the study sought to examine how learners articulate their language-related difficulties and what these articulated concerns reveal about their needs and challenges in autonomous English language learning within a socially mediated digital context.

To address this aim, the study employed a qualitative content analysis of learner-generated questions. This approach was selected because it allows for the systematic and inductive examination of authentic textual data, enabling the identification of recurring patterns and themes in learners' inquiries.

#### B. Research Questions

To guide the research, a set of questions was developed to focus the analysis on learners' language-related inquiries. These questions capture both the types of linguistic issues raised by English learners on *HiNative* and the broader patterns underlying their queries. Framing the inquiry around these questions ensures a clear link between the data, methods of analysis, and the theoretical lens of learner autonomy and sociocultural learning:

- What types of language-related questions do English learners most frequently ask on *HiNative*?
- Which linguistic areas are most commonly addressed in learner help requests?
- What do learners' question types reveal about their priorities and difficulties in self-access language learning?

#### C. Data Collection Procedures

The data for this study were collected from *HiNative* (<https://hinative.com>), a global online question-and-answer platform designed to facilitate peer-supported language learning. *HiNative* allows users to post questions about language use and receive responses from native speakers and proficient users, making it a rich source of learner-generated data for investigating autonomous help-seeking behavior.

Data collection was conducted over nine consecutive days, during which all publicly available questions meeting the inclusion criteria were systematically gathered. A purposive sampling strategy was employed to ensure that the dataset was directly relevant to the research aim. To be included, posts had to (a) be written in English, (b) explicitly concern English as a second or foreign language, and (c) be framed as clear linguistic inquiries. Posts were excluded if they were duplicate entries, one-word or fragmentary posts, incomplete questions, or unrelated to language learning.

Following the application of these criteria, a total of 783 learner questions were retained for analysis. Each question was treated as a single unit of analysis. The resulting dataset represents a diverse range of learner concerns and reflects the spontaneous and self-directed nature of learner engagement in online self-access language learning environments.

#### D. Research Instrument: Classification Coding Scheme

The research instrument employed in this study was a classification coding scheme designed to systematically categorize English learners' language-related questions. The collected questions were coded and organized according to a predefined classification framework consisting of nine linguistic domains, as presented in Table 1. Each question was assigned a single primary code corresponding to the dominant linguistic focus of the inquiry.

The Grammar (GRA) category encompassed questions related to core grammatical structures, including sentence formation, verb tense, articles, modals, and other syntactic features. The Vocabulary (VOC) category included questions concerning the meaning, usage, or selection of individual words or phrases. The Usage/Naturalness (USG) category captured inquiries about whether a given expression or sentence sounded natural, idiomatic, or contextually appropriate in English.

Questions related to phonological concerns were classified under Pronunciation (PRN), which included requests for guidance on articulation, phonetic clarification, or transcription using the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA). The Idioms/Phrasal Verbs (IDI) category was used for questions addressing idiomatic expressions, phrasal verbs, and other fixed or semi-fixed multi-word units. The Translation (TRN) category comprised questions requesting English equivalents of words or expressions from learners' first languages (L1s).

The Comparison (CMP) category included inquiries that explicitly contrasted two or more linguistic items, such as differences between words, expressions, or grammatical constructions. Questions related to register, politeness, or language use in specific communicative contexts were coded under Formality/Contextual Use (FML). Finally, an Other (OTH) category was included to accommodate questions that did not fit the predefined categories, such as those related to cultural references, slang, humor, or general language learning strategies.

TABLE 1  
QUESTION CLASSIFICATION CODING SCHEME

| Code | Category                 | Definition                                                                         |
|------|--------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| GRA  | Grammar                  | Questions about sentence structure, verb tense, articles, modals, etc.             |
| VOC  | Vocabulary               | Meaning, usage, or choice of a specific word or phrase                             |
| USG  | Usage/Naturalness        | Asking whether a sentence or word sounds natural or idiomatic                      |
| PRN  | Pronunciation            | Requests for pronunciation tips, phonetic clarification, or IPA                    |
| IDI  | Idioms/Phrasal Verbs     | Inquiries about idioms, phrasal verbs, or fixed expressions                        |
| TRN  | Translation              | Requests for English equivalents of words/phrases from the learner's L1            |
| CMP  | Comparison               | Asking for differences between two or more expressions, words, or structures       |
| FML  | Formality/Contextual Use | Questions about register, politeness, or usage in specific settings                |
| OTH  | Other                    | Questions that don't fit the above (culture, slang, humor, language learning tips) |

To strengthen the reliability and validity of the classification process, the coding scheme was first piloted on a representative subset of the collected questions prior to conducting the full analysis. This preliminary stage allowed for the refinement of category definitions, the clarification of coding criteria, and the identification of any ambiguities or areas of overlap between categories. Ambiguous or challenging cases encountered during the pilot stage and subsequent full coding process were systematically reviewed and resolved through collaborative discussion with a second coder, ensuring inter-coder agreement and consistency in the application of the coding framework.

In addition to these methodological safeguards, strict ethical considerations were observed throughout the analysis. All identifying or potentially sensitive information related to users or content creators was carefully removed to protect privacy. Furthermore, only content that was publicly available and accessible without restriction was included in the dataset, thereby aligning with ethical research practices for the use of online data. These measures collectively ensured both methodological rigor and adherence to ethical standards in data collection and analysis.

#### IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

##### A. Categorization of Questions

As illustrated by Figure 1 and detailed in Table 2, the distribution of the 783 learner-generated questions on *HiNative* reveals a clear predominance of meaning-focused categories. Translation questions accounted for the largest share (34.2%), followed by vocabulary (21.5%), comparison (13.7%), and usage/naturalness (12.8%). Grammar (6.8%), idioms/phrasal verbs (1.4%), pronunciation (1.4%), and formality/context (0.4%) were only marginally represented. A chi-square goodness-of-fit test confirmed that the frequency of questions differed significantly across these categories,  $\chi^2(8, N = 783) = 692.90, p < .001$ , indicating that English learners' help requests were far from evenly distributed among topic areas.

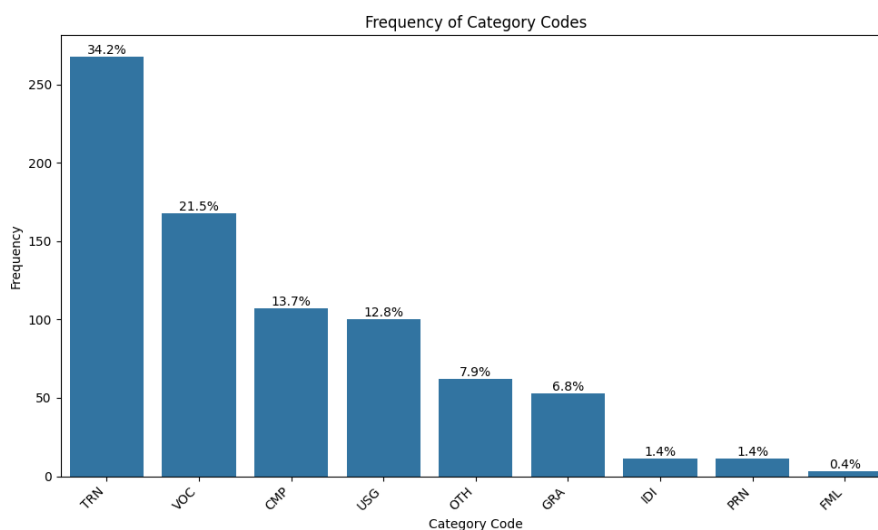


Figure 1. Distribution of Question Types on *HiNative*

TABLE 2  
DISTRIBUTION OF QUESTION TYPES (N = 783)

| Category                   | Number of Questions | Percent of Total (%) |
|----------------------------|---------------------|----------------------|
| Translation (TRN)          | 268                 | 34.2                 |
| Vocabulary (VOC)           | 168                 | 21.5                 |
| Comparison (CMP)           | 107                 | 13.7                 |
| Usage/Naturalness (USG)    | 100                 | 12.8                 |
| Other (OTH)                | 62                  | 7.9                  |
| Grammar (GRA)              | 53                  | 6.8                  |
| Idioms/Phrasal Verbs (IDI) | 11                  | 1.4                  |
| Pronunciation (PRN)        | 11                  | 1.4                  |
| Formality/Context (FML)    | 3                   | 0.4                  |
| <i>Total</i>               | <i>783</i>          | <i>100.0</i>         |

This imbalance in question types suggests that learners prioritize lexis and meaning over abstract rules, reflecting the long-established view that vocabulary forms the foundation of communicative ability (Alqahtani, 2015; Wilkins, 1972). Recent work confirms that lexical knowledge, both in size and depth, is a strong predictor of proficiency, while collocational and idiomatic competence remains a persistent challenge. The high incidence of translation requests suggests that learners draw on their L1 as a strategic resource, consistent with contemporary perspectives on *translanguaging* that treat cross-linguistic mediation as an asset rather than a hindrance (Nushi et al., 2023; Wang, 2022).

Vocabulary-related questions further highlight the ongoing struggle to master lexis beyond single-word meanings. Learners frequently asked for contextualized usage, synonyms, or example sentences, demonstrating an awareness that word knowledge entails not just basic meaning but also collocation, connotation, and pragmatic appropriateness (Henriksen, 2013). This behavior emphasizes the enduring importance of vocabulary-focused support in both digital and classroom settings.

The substantial number of usage (12.8%) and comparison (13.7%) questions indicates that learners are attentive to subtle distinctions between forms and pragmatic naturalness. By asking “Does this sound natural?” or “What’s the difference between X and Y?”, learners positioned themselves as active investigators of context-sensitive meaning, echoing Behzad et al.’s (2023) observation that digital platforms encourage refined language exploration and language-focused discourse. Such questions reflect the effort to align their output with native-speaker norms of idiomaticity and appropriateness, goals that remain difficult to achieve even at advanced levels of L2 development. The platform’s affordances, particularly the possibility of receiving immediate judgments from native speakers, appear to make it especially effective for addressing these pragmatic concerns.

In contrast, grammar-related questions constituted a relatively small portion of the dataset (6.8%). While grammar traditionally dominates formal instruction, learners on *HiNative* appear to reserve their questions for issues that cannot be easily resolved through textbooks or rules. Some grammatical concerns may also be “disguised” as usage queries, where learners seek judgments on sentence naturalness rather than explicit explanations of rules. This pattern reflects Reinders and White’s (2016) observation that technology has expanded opportunities for autonomous learning, often extending and complementing formal instruction rather than replacing it.

Pronunciation (1.4%), idioms and phrasal verbs (1.4%), and formality/contextual use (0.4%) questions were particularly rare. The low number of pronunciation queries is likely due to the absence of spoken-output or audio feedback features and the inherently text-only nature of the platform, which limits opportunities for learners to practice or receive pronunciation feedback, a phenomenon frequently noted in reviews of CALL tools that lack robust pronunciation support (Bajorek, 2017). Similarly, although idioms are a well-documented source of difficulty for learners, many may treat them as part of vocabulary or translation inquiries rather than explicitly labeling them as idiom questions. The scarcity of formality questions suggests that sociolinguistic variation is not highly salient to learners, reinforcing the need for pedagogical interventions that raise awareness of register and appropriateness (Larsson & Kaatari, 2020).



TABLE 3  
BREAKDOWN OF "OTHER" CATEGORY QUESTIONS (N = 62)

| Subcategory                          | Questions (n) | Percent (%)  |
|--------------------------------------|---------------|--------------|
| Edit request                         | 15            | 24.2         |
| Edit request + rewriting suggestions | 3             | 4.8          |
| English practice request             | 2             | 3.2          |
| Example request                      | 8             | 12.9         |
| Guessing origin by last name         | 1             | 1.6          |
| Language learning tips               | 1             | 1.6          |
| Slang Language question              | 1             | 1.6          |
| Listening comprehension              | 14            | 22.6         |
| Politeness                           | 1             | 1.6          |
| Proofreading request                 | 1             | 1.6          |
| Slang                                | 1             | 1.6          |
| Slang/Culture/Word history           | 2             | 3.2          |
| Sociolinguistic question             | 1             | 1.6          |
| Song lyrics request                  | 1             | 1.6          |
| Speaking and writing accuracy        | 1             | 1.6          |
| Transcription (speech-to-text)       | 9             | 14.5         |
| <b>Total</b>                         | <b>62</b>     | <b>100.0</b> |

The “Other” category represented 7.9% of questions (62 out of 783), as shown in Table 3, included diverse queries such as requests for editing, help with listening comprehension, transcription, and culturally embedded topics (e.g., slang or word history). Although fewer in number, these questions reveal that learners occasionally use *HiNative* to seek support for broader skills: productive skills (writing and speaking accuracy), receptive skills (listening comprehension), and cultural knowledge. Their presence illustrates that learner needs extend beyond the mastery of discrete linguistic forms to encompass broader dimensions of communicative competence, including cultural literacy and the development of multimodal skills.

#### B. Factors Shaping Question Patterns

The observed distribution of question types is partly explained by the design and affordances of *HiNative* itself. The platform provides built-in question templates, such as “How do you say this in English?” and “What’s the difference between X and Y?”, which naturally funnel learners toward translation and comparison questions (Nushi et al., 2023). These scaffolds make certain forms of inquiry more salient and accessible, thereby influencing learner behavior.

At the same time, the patterns reflect broader processes of socially mediated learning. From a sociocultural perspective, *HiNative* affords learners opportunities to engage within their zone of proximal development by interacting with more proficient peers, who can provide guidance and feedback (Vygotsky, 1978). Native speakers’ corrections and contextualized explanations act as forms of scaffolding that help learners refine their interlanguage (Gao et al., 2024). The prominence of usage and naturalness questions in particular shows that learners value this scaffolding most when it helps them resolve subtle distinctions not easily captured by formal instruction.

The results also highlight the role of learner autonomy in informal digital environments. By posing questions, learners actively diagnose their own gaps, articulate needs, and seek immediate clarification. Such behavior exemplifies self-directed learning (Benson, 2013; Holec, 1981) and reflects the shift toward more learner-driven practices in technology-mediated education (Kerimbayev et al., 2023; Zhang & Zou, 2022). The variety of queries in the “Other” category further suggests that learners occasionally use the platform to pursue more holistic goals, such as editing help or cultural understanding, expanding the function of *HiNative* beyond lexis and grammar.

When considered together, these factors suggest that the patterns observed in Figure 1 and Tables 2–3 are not merely incidental but are systematically shaped by the interplay of learner needs, the affordances and constraints of platform design, and the underlying processes of autonomy and sociocultural learning. In other words, the trends reflect a meaningful convergence between what learners seek, how the technological environment channels their activity, and the theoretical principles that govern language development in interactive contexts.

#### V. CONCLUSION

The analysis of learner-generated questions on *HiNative* demonstrates that English learners predominantly seek support in translation, vocabulary, and usage, indicating their orientation toward meaning-making and pragmatic precision. In contrast, grammar, pronunciation, and formality concerns remain marginal. These findings suggest that learners rely on digital platforms to address immediate communicative needs rather than to engage in abstract rule learning. By highlighting this trend, the study emphasizes the importance of designing learner-support tools that prioritize lexical development, pragmatic appropriateness, and context-driven explanations, while also encouraging greater awareness of underrepresented areas such as formal grammar and sociolinguistic competence.

The distribution of learner questions on *HiNative* reveals more than a simple snapshot of curiosity, it encapsulates broader trends in contemporary second language learning, where learner autonomy, meaning-focused inquiry, and digitally mediated peer interaction converge. By analyzing what learners ask when left to their own devices, this study

illuminates their priorities, challenges, and strategies. It offers both theoretical contributions and practical guidance for the design of learner-centered pedagogy and language-learning technologies in the digital age.

#### A. Implications

The findings of this study carry several implications for language education, digital pedagogy, and applied linguistics research. The predominance of translation and vocabulary questions (as shown in Figure 1 and Table 2) confirms that learners perceive lexis and cross-linguistic mediation as their most immediate challenges. Given that vocabulary size and depth strongly predict overall proficiency (Alshumrani, 2024) and that collocational and idiomatic mastery remain persistent obstacles (Henriksen, 2013), curricula should place greater emphasis on vocabulary development beyond single-word meanings. Instructional activities focusing on contextualized usage, synonym differentiation, and collocation-building may directly address the gaps that learners themselves highlight in informal digital contexts.

The high incidence of usage and comparison queries illustrates learners' desire to achieve pragmatic appropriateness and fine-grained semantic distinctions, abilities not easily acquired through textbooks alone. Teachers and materials designers should therefore integrate more explicit practice in naturalness, register, and subtle meaning into instruction. The very low number of formality-related questions suggests that learners may not yet be attuned to sociolinguistic variation, reinforcing the need for proactive awareness-raising in classroom settings (Zhang & Zou, 2022).

The relatively small number of grammar and pronunciation questions indicates that learners do not view informal platforms such as *HiNative* as primary sites for rule-based grammar learning or phonological practice, perhaps preferring more traditional resources for those areas (Reinders & White, 2016). However, some grammar difficulties may be embedded within usage questions, suggesting that pragmatic-focused activities can also serve as implicit grammar instruction when carefully designed.

The diverse queries grouped in the "Other" category (Table 3) reveal additional learner needs, including editing help, listening comprehension, and cultural understanding. While numerically smaller, these requests demonstrate that learners occasionally use Q&A platforms to pursue holistic goals that extend beyond discrete language items, such as improving writing accuracy, developing receptive skills, or gaining cultural literacy. Educators and platform designers should not overlook opportunities to support this broader communicative competence, which combines linguistic, pragmatic, and cultural dimensions.

From a theoretical standpoint, these findings reinforce the value of viewing peer-to-peer learning platforms through the dual lenses of autonomy and sociocultural theory. By lowering the threshold for participation, *HiNative* enables learners to take ownership of their learning and seek real-time feedback in the areas they deem most critical. At the same time, the interactions observed here exemplify scaffolded learning in which more knowledgeable peers provide linguistic support that learners gradually internalize (Gao et al., 2024; Nushi et al., 2023).

For researchers, the categorization of learner-generated questions provides a scalable form of needs analysis grounded in authentic learner behavior. Rather than relying exclusively on self-reports or classroom performance, mining the questions from platforms like *HiNative* reveals learners' actual priorities when they engage in self-directed learning. Future studies could expand this approach to include multimodal data (e.g., audio/video queries), other target languages, and larger longitudinal samples to capture how learner priorities evolve across contexts.

#### B. Limitations and Future Research

Several limitations of this research should be acknowledged. First, the dataset was limited to 783 questions collected over a nine-day period, which constrains the generalizability of the findings. Learners' questioning behaviors may vary over longer timeframes or in response to external factors such as academic calendars, examination periods, or global events. Second, the study relied solely on textual data from the platform, excluding any audio-based interactions or other multimodal features that might provide further insights (for example, into pronunciation or spoken discourse). Third, the categorization was based on researcher's interpretation. Although coding reliability was enhanced through piloting and discussion, subjective judgment cannot be entirely eliminated. Finally, the analysis focused exclusively on English learners on *HiNative*, which limits cross-linguistic comparisons, learners of other target languages on the platform might exhibit different patterns. Future research should address these limitations by expanding the temporal scope of data collection, incorporating multimodal content, employing larger-scale or automated corpus analyses, and examining multiple language learning communities to capture broader learner behaviors.

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# Associative Meanings of Animals in the Linguistic Consciousness of Kazakh, English, and Chinese Speakers: A Comparative Study of Idioms and Proverbs

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**Abstract**—This article examines and compares the associative meanings of animal-related lexical items that possess culturally marked connotations and are actively used in everyday communication in Kazakh, English, and Chinese. The analyzed lexical units are classified into three groups: (1) words with similar cultural connotations; (2) words with different or even opposite cultural connotations; and (3) words that share the same conceptual meaning but carry cultural connotations in one language while lacking them in another. The study identifies pig, snake, and rooster as animals with identical or similar cultural connotations across the three languages; dog, owl, cat, and bat as animals with divergent cultural connotations; and ostrich, silkworm, crane, fish, Bactrian camel, and locust as animals whose cultural connotations are present in some languages but absent in others. The associative meanings of these lexical items are analyzed comparatively, revealing both similarities and differences. Furthermore, the cultural connotations of animal-related words in Kazakh, English, and Chinese are substantiated through idiomatic expressions, set phrases, and proverbs. The primary aim of the study is to enhance mutual understanding between different peoples and cultures and to help overcome communicative difficulties. In addition, the research contributes to the development of ethnolinguistics, cognitive linguistics, linguocultural studies, paralinguistics, and pragmalinguistics by offering a comprehensive and modern approach to language analysis.

**Index Terms**—associative meanings, linguistic consciousness, Kazakh, English, Chinese

## I. INTRODUCTION

The anthropocentric paradigm, which examines language in close connection with cognition, culture, and national identity, has significantly influenced the development of modern linguistics. This shift has led to the emergence and advancement of new linguistic disciplines and has broadened the scope of linguistic research. Alongside structural linguistics, which established fundamental theoretical principles, contemporary linguistics increasingly focuses on language as an integral part of individual and ethnic cognition, mental activity, and spiritual experience.

Fields such as ethnolinguistics, cognitive linguistics, linguocultural studies, paralinguistics, and pragmalinguistics have opened new opportunities for a holistic and innovative exploration of language. Within these approaches, one of the key areas of cognitive linguistics involves the study of metaphorization and symbolization processes in language, as well as the classification and comparative analysis of metaphorical and symbolic lexical units across different languages. This line of research is of particular interest not only to linguists but also to scholars in anthropology and social sciences.

The associative meanings of animal-related lexical items are closely linked to each nation's cultural perception and understanding of animals. In this study, we compare idiomatic expressions and associative meanings related to animals

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in Kazakh, English, and Chinese. The Kazakh language reflects the worldview of a people historically rooted in nomadic pastoralism across the Eurasian steppe, tracing back to ancient Saka, Hun, and Turkic civilizations. In contrast, Chinese culture is shaped by centuries of sedentary agricultural traditions, while English represents Western European cultural heritage.

The article analyzes animal-related words and word combinations with associative meanings in Kazakh, English, and Chinese through a comparative lens. Although associative meanings have been extensively studied within individual languages, there remains a need for comparative research involving languages that differ significantly in cultural background, environment, and linguistic structure. Investigating cultural connotations across diverse ethnic groups and comparing linguistic features shaped by history, culture, customs, and religious beliefs helps identify both similarities and differences, thereby fostering intercultural understanding.

Accordingly, this study aims to analyze linguistic units within the interconnected framework of “human–language–culture–society–communication” and to explore shared lexical items from semantic and linguocultural perspectives.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Although a considerable body of scholarly research has been devoted to concepts denoting culturally connoted lexical units, terminological uniformity has not yet been achieved. Newmark (2010) refers to such units as cultural words, Baker (1992) uses the term culture-specific concepts, Nord (1997) introduces the notion of cultureme, Gambier (2007) employs the term culture-specific references, Davies (2003) refers to them as culture-specific items, while Bulgarian scholars Vlahov and Florin (1980) define them as *realia*. In both domestic and international research traditions, when cultural vocabulary is discussed, a wide range of related terms is also employed, including non-equivalent vocabulary, exotic lexis (exotisms), localisms, alienisms, ethnographisms, background words, connotative words, words with a connotative component, barbarisms, and lacunae.

Kazakh scholars have examined Kazakh idioms from the perspectives of lexicology, etymology, grammar, lexicography, and translation studies. Contemporary research on Kazakh idioms addresses issues such as their distinction from other linguistic phenomena, the formation of idiomatic meaning, internal structure, the relationship between phraseology and synonymy, stylistic features of idioms, individual authorial usage, part-of-speech affiliation, and idiomatic variation. In selecting Kazakh lexical material, sources such as the National Corpus of the Kazakh Language (2024), the encyclopedia *The Traditional System of Ethnographic Categories, Concepts, and Names of the Kazakh People* (2011), and Qaidar's (2013) ethnolinguistic dictionary *The World of the Kazakh Native Language* were consulted. In Kazakh linguistic scholarship, the cognitive function of language within the structure of ethnocultural nominations is also reflected in works such as *The Cultural and Cognitive Dictionary of the Kazakh Language* (2023) and similar studies.

Chinese linguists and researchers have conducted extensive and in-depth studies of Chinese idioms across various theoretical frameworks and analytical levels. Chinese idioms are generally characterized as fixed expressions consisting predominantly of four characters, possessing a stable structure and holistic meaning, in which the constituent characters cannot be freely replaced or altered. For the selection of Chinese lexical material, authoritative sources were used, including *The Dictionary of Chinese Idioms* (2024) published by the Commercial Press, containing over 10,000 idiomatic expressions, *The Xinhua Dictionary* (2024), *A Chinese–English Dictionary of Idioms* (2024), and works on Linguoculturology (2023). It is well known that English and Chinese are among the most widely used languages in the world, both in terms of the number of speakers and their global functional domains (Jiao et al., 2010; Li et al., 2016; Lin & Leonard, 2012; Yule, 2017; Wang, 2022). Due to rapid integration processes in the global economy, trade, education, and infrastructure, the number of people learning English and Chinese continues to increase. In recent years, Kazakh linguists and researchers have increasingly turned their attention to comparative studies of the Kazakh language in relation to typologically and culturally different languages, thereby expanding the scope of contrastive and linguocultural research.

## III. METHODS

This study employs a qualitative comparative research design grounded in linguocultural and cognitive linguistic approaches. The primary objective is to identify, classify, and interpret the cultural connotations of animal-related lexical units in Kazakh, English, and Chinese, with particular attention to their associative meanings as manifested in idioms, proverbs, fixed expressions, and figurative usages.

The research material consists of animal names and animal-based idiomatic expressions selected from authoritative lexicographic and corpus sources in the three languages. For Kazakh, the data were drawn from the National Corpus of the Kazakh Language, ethnolinguistic dictionaries, cultural and cognitive dictionaries, and collections of proverbs and sayings. English data were collected from idiom dictionaries, phraseological reference works, and linguistic textbooks. Chinese data were extracted from large-scale idiom dictionaries, explanatory dictionaries, linguocultural studies, and online idiom databases. Only stable and widely attested lexical units with clear associative or figurative meanings were included in the analysis (Chinese idioms database).

The methodological framework integrates several complementary methods. First, the descriptive method was used to identify and systematize animal-related lexical units and to provide semantic descriptions of their meanings in each language. Second, the comparative and contrastive method served as the core analytical tool, enabling the comparison of

identical or similar animal names across the three languages in order to reveal convergences and divergences in their cultural connotations (Anderson & Pelteret, 2012; Ayto, 2020; Ji, 2013). Third, semantic analysis was applied to distinguish between conceptual (denotative) meaning and associative (connotative) meaning, allowing for the identification of culturally motivated semantic extensions. Fourth, elements of linguocultural analysis were employed to interpret the identified connotations in relation to historical experience, traditional worldview, belief systems, customs, and symbolic practices of each linguistic community.

In addition, the study draws on cognitive linguistic principles, particularly the notions of conceptual metaphor and association, to explain how human perception of animal characteristics is mapped onto abstract human qualities and social behavior. The classification of animal names into three groups— (1) words with identical or similar cultural connotations, (2) words with different or opposite cultural connotations, and (3) words with identical conceptual meaning but culture-specific connotations present in one language and absent in another—was carried out inductively on the basis of the analyzed data.

To ensure analytical reliability, examples were cross-checked across multiple sources, and only recurrent and culturally conventionalized usages were considered. Contextual interpretation was applied to avoid isolated or idiosyncratic readings. The analysis is synchronic in focus, although diachronic observations are incorporated where necessary to clarify the origin and development of specific connotations.

Overall, the chosen methodological approach makes it possible to reveal both universal and culture-specific patterns in the associative meanings of animal names and to demonstrate how linguistic semantics reflects broader ethnocultural cognition and value systems.

#### IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Associative meaning constitutes one of the most distinctive types of lexical meaning actively functioning in communicative contexts. It reflects not only the denotative content of a word but also culturally embedded emotional, evaluative, stylistic, and contextual nuances that arise through collective experience.

The system of anthroponyms in a language provides valuable evidence of the material and cultural life of a people and is inherently saturated with cultural connotations. In Kazakh culture, a significant proportion of personal names are closely connected with traditional pastoral life and livestock breeding. Examples include Bota, Botaköz, Nartai, Aknar, Ögizbai, Sıyrbai, Tekebai, Qoshqarbai, Burabai, Buqabai, Aqqozy, Qulynshaq, Zhylqybai, Zhylqyaildar, Zhylqybek, Qozy, Qozybaq, Qoibagar, Taishyq, Zhamantai, Taizhan, Qunanbai, Qunantai, Dönentai, and others. In addition, some personal names derive from dairy products associated with livestock, such as Airanbai and Süttibai. Beyond anthroponymy, Kazakhs affectionately address small children using diminutive forms derived from animal offspring, such as Qulynym (“my foal”), Botam (“my camel calf”), and Qozym (“my lamb”). This linguistic practice of equating one’s child with the offspring of domesticated animals is culturally meaningful and deeply rooted in the Kazakh worldview. Such usage, however, is not observed in English or Chinese linguistic traditions.

In Chinese culture, affectionate address toward children may involve expressions such as 猪猪, 小猪, or 猪娃 (“piglet,” “little pig,” “my piglet”), which carry positive and endearing connotations. Moreover, individuals born in the Year of the Pig are often given personal names that are phonologically or graphically associated with the character 猪 (pig), such as 诸桦, 诸华, 诸哲, 诸丽, 诸嫣, 诸然, 诸福, 诸莉, 诸娟, and 诸磊. In contrast, in Kazakh culture, the pig is strongly negatively marked: children are never named after pigs, pork is not consumed, and the animal itself is culturally rejected. This negative perception is influenced both by the notion of impurity traditionally associated with pigs and by the prohibitions of Islam.



Figure 1. The Image of a Dragon in the Chinese Ghost



Figure 2. The Image of a Dragon in the Ghost of Westerners



Figure 3. The Image of the Dragon in the Ghost of the Kazakhs

Another illustrative example of culturally divergent associative meaning is the image of the dragon (Fig. 1). The dragon is a widely attested figure in the folklore of many nations, yet its symbolic interpretation varies significantly. In Chinese cultural imagination, the dragon is depicted as a composite creature combining features such as a horse-like face, ox horns and ears, a snake-like body, fish scales, and eagle claws. In Chinese culture, the dragon symbolizes wealth, power, strength, benevolence, and prosperity and serves as a national symbol as well as an emblem of imperial authority. This positive symbolism is reflected in idiomatic expressions such as 望子成龙 (“to hope one’s son becomes successful,” literally “to hope one’s son becomes a dragon”) and 真龙天子 (“the true son of heaven,” literally “the true dragon”). The Chinese people traditionally regard themselves as descendants of the dragon, which explains why more than 300 idiomatic expressions in Chinese are centered around the concept of the dragon [15].

In Western cultural traditions (Fig. 2), by contrast, the dragon is predominantly associated with evil, violence, cruelty, and destruction. It is imagined as a fire-breathing, terrifying, and aggressive monster, often resembling a giant winged lizard. The motif of a hero or prince slaying a dragon is recurrent in Western folklore and mythology. In the biblical tradition, the dragon is interpreted as a symbol of sin and rebellion against God, with Satan being referred to as “the great dragon.” In English, the word dragon carries connotations of ferocity and anger, while expressions such as the old dragon may metaphorically denote the devil.

The Kazakh perception of the dragon largely coincides with the Western interpretation. In Kazakh folklore, the aidahar is portrayed as a gigantic, often multi-headed predator representing a destructive force that imposes heavy tributes on the people (Fig. 3). It is depicted as arriving with storms and devastation, devouring livestock and humans alive, particularly young women, and even threatening to consume a king’s daughter. In heroic narratives, a brave warrior enters the dragon’s body armed with a sword, slays it from within, and liberates the people, cutting a strip from its back as proof of victory. These narratives indicate that the image of the dragon in Kazakh culture has undergone its own stage-based development while retaining a predominantly negative evaluation. This perception is also reflected in idiomatic expressions such as to survive the dragon’s jaws (to escape death) and to bewitch like a dragon (to intimidate or deceive). In Kazakh dream interpretation, riding a dragon signifies the subjugation of enemies. Additionally, in metaphorical geopolitical discourse, Kazakhs sometimes refer to China as a dragon, describing Kazakhstan as a country situated between the Bear (Russia) and the Dragon (China).

Associative meaning can thus be understood as a complex aggregate of emotional, stylistic, reflective, and collocational meanings. This aggregate arises from associations grounded in the conceptual meaning of words. Such meanings often cause misunderstanding and communicative failure, sometimes leading to serious consequences. For this reason, one of the most challenging aspects of translation is the accurate rendering of associative meaning. Associative meaning is closely tied to a nation’s customs, beliefs, and cultural traditions. Since people live in different natural environments and



sociocultural contexts, the same object or phenomenon may evoke divergent associations in different linguistic communities. Understanding these culturally conditioned associations is therefore a crucial prerequisite for successful intercultural communication and translation.

#### *A. Words With Identical or Similar Cultural Connotations*

In the life experience of different ethnic groups, both shared and divergent patterns can be observed in the perception and interpretation of objects and phenomena. A considerable number of idiomatic expressions in languages emerge from observations of animals' natural characteristics. Through long-term interaction with and observation of animals, humans have attributed various associative meanings to them. Associative meaning is closely connected with concrete life experience and objective reality. Linguocultural meanings embedded in nationally marked lexical units tend to be preserved over centuries. On the basis of shared human experience and collective emotional perception, linguistic units may develop in two or more languages whose associative meanings are highly similar or even identical.

One illustrative example is pig (Chinese 猪, Kazakh шошқа). In Kazakh, Chinese, and Western cultures alike, the pig is commonly associated with laziness and filth. Consequently, lexical units and idiomatic expressions involving this animal often carry strong negative and derogatory emotional overtones. In Chinese, expressions such as 肥得像头猪 (“fat like a pig”), 猪猡 (“a real pig”), 猪头阿三 (“pig-headed fool”), and 懒得像头猪 (“lazy like a pig”) are all grounded in this negative cultural perception.

Comparable usages are found in English. Idioms and expressions such as pigs might fly, this place is a pigsty, cast pearls before swine, to make a pig's ear of something (to spoil something), as drunk as a sow, as a hog on ice (clumsy), make a pig of oneself, and to be a pig about something all portray the pig as greedy, dirty, ill-mannered, or morally flawed. Similarly, in Kazakh, proverbs and fixed expressions such as шошқадай қорсылдай (“to grunt like a pig”), ит жоқта шошқа үреді қорада (“when there is no dog, the pig barks in the yard”), шошқаға ерген балшыққа аунап (“who follows a pig will wallow in mud”), and ит аулақта доңыз төбеге шығады convey negative evaluations, reinforcing the pig's unfavorable cultural image.

Another example is snake (Chinese 蛇, Kazakh жылан). In the Biblical tradition, the snake is portrayed as a symbol of evil for tempting Adam and Eve to eat the forbidden fruit, after which it was expelled from Eden. This negative symbolism is reflected in English expressions such as to snake one's way through (to move in a dangerous or deceitful manner) and a snake in one's bosom, denoting a treacherous person who betrays trust. In Kazakh, the expression сұры жылан refers to a cruel and malicious individual, while the curse жағына жылан жұмыртқаласын represents one of the strongest forms of malediction, implying death. Traditional Kazakh beliefs also held that snakes might lay eggs in the mouths of the deceased, further reinforcing their ominous image. Numerous Kazakh proverbs reflect this perception, including warnings such as қарап жатқан жыланның құйрығын баспа (“do not step on the tail of a resting snake”) and ордалы жыланмен ойнама (“do not play with a nest of snakes”). In Chinese as well, the snake often symbolizes treachery and cruelty (阴险、狠毒), indicating a shared negative associative meaning across the three cultures.

The cock (Chinese 鸡, Kazakh әтеш) provides an example of positive or neutral shared symbolism. The rooster's most salient feature is its crowing at dawn, awakening people and announcing the morning. Accordingly, in all three languages, the rooster is associated with the arrival of day. Chinese idioms such as 闻鸡起舞 and 雄鸡一唱天下白 emphasize diligence and the coming of dawn, while English uses expressions like cockcrow to denote early morning. In Kazakh, the proverb “Әтешке шақыр десең, таң атсын дейді” similarly reflects the rooster's role as a herald of dawn.

Beyond these examples, many idiomatic comparisons based on animals display striking semantic convergence across Kazakh, English, and Chinese. Expressions such as as timid as a mouse / 胆小如鼠 / “тышқан сияқты қорқақ,” kill two birds with one stone / 一石二鸟 / “бір таспен екі құсты ұрып алу,” a wolf in sheep's clothing / 披着羊皮的狼 / “қой терісін жамылған қасқыр,” as gentle as a lamb / 温柔如羔羊 / “қозыдай момақан,” as fast as a hare / 动若脱兔 / “қоян сияқты жылдам,” as busy as a bee / 蜜蜂般忙碌 / “ара сияқты еңбекқор,” as sly as a fox / 狐狸般狡猾 / “түлкі сияқты айлакер,” as graceful as a swan / 优雅如天鹅 / “аққу сияқты сұлу,” and as light as a butterfly / 如蝴蝶般轻盈 / “көбелек сияқты жеңіл” demonstrate a high degree of cross-linguistic similarity.

The shared associative meanings of these idioms stem from common human perceptions of animal characteristics: the speed of the hare, the industriousness of the bee, the gentleness of the lamb, the cruelty and greed of the wolf, the cunning of the fox, the purity and grace of the swan, the lightness of the butterfly, the strength of the bull, the filth associated with the pig, the venom and danger of the snake, the rooster's role as a herald of dawn, and the timidity of the mouse. These perceptions appear to be largely universal, resulting in similar associative meanings across languages.

Linguocultural differences in language generally arise from the customs, values, modes of thinking, and cognitive frameworks of different ethnic groups. Consequently, idioms in which animals function as key components may develop divergent associative meanings. In some cases, the conceptual (or rational) meaning of a lexical unit may be identical across languages, while its associative meaning differs significantly or even becomes completely opposite.

#### *B. Words With Different or Even Opposite Cultural Connotations*



In some cases, the same animal may evoke multiple connotations even within a single language, while in other languages its associative meaning may differ significantly or become completely opposite. These discrepancies are rooted in cultural traditions, belief systems, and historically shaped value orientations.

The lexeme dog (Chinese 狗, Kazakh ит) demonstrates striking cross-cultural divergence. In Western cultures, the dog is widely regarded as a loyal companion and a faithful friend of humans. Consequently, many English expressions involving dog carry positive or affectionate connotations, such as puppy love (first love), love me, love my dog, a lucky dog (a fortunate person), a jolly dog (a cheerful person), a top dog (a dominant or successful individual), a clever dog (a smart child), and old dog (an experienced person). In these contexts, the dog symbolizes loyalty, friendliness, and social success.

In Chinese, however, lexical units containing 狗 predominantly express contempt, treachery, cowardice, baseness, or cruelty. Expressions such as 狗汉奸 (“traitorous dog”), 走狗 (“running dog; lackey”), 狐朋狗友 (“friends like foxes and dogs,” i.e., immoral companions), 狼心狗肺 (“wolf’s heart, dog’s lungs,” meaning ruthless and ungrateful), 狗胆包天 (“dog-like audacity”), 狗仗人势 (“to bully others by relying on power”), 狗头军师 (“dog-headed strategist,” an incompetent adviser), 狗急跳墙 (“even a dog will jump over a wall when cornered”), and 狗嘴里吐不出象牙 (“no ivory comes out of a dog’s mouth,” i.e., no good words from a bad person) all reflect a strongly negative associative meaning.

In Kazakh culture, the dog occupies an ambivalent yet culturally significant position. On the one hand, the dog is considered one of the “seven treasures” (jeti qazyna), symbolizing wealth and protection. Numerous Kazakh proverbs emphasize the dog’s loyalty and usefulness, such as “A good dog is its owner’s eyes and ears” and “The dog runs for its owner, the bird flies for its food.” On the other hand, negative or ironic shades are also present in certain contexts, for example in proverbs highlighting neglect or disorder. This dual evaluation indicates that, unlike in Chinese, the dog in Kazakh culture is not exclusively negatively marked, but rather occupies a culturally complex and multifaceted position. It is noteworthy that the Kazakh language contains nearly 800 proverbs and sayings involving the word dog [16], underscoring its cultural salience.

Another example of divergent connotations is owl (Chinese 猫头鹰, Kazakh үкі). In English, the owl is commonly associated with wisdom and intelligence, as reflected in expressions such as as wise as an owl. In Western fairy tales and folklore, the owl often appears as a fair and wise judge who resolves disputes among animals, and characters frequently seek its advice. This symbolism can be traced back to Greek mythology, where the goddess Athena, the embodiment of wisdom, is associated with the owl as her sacred symbol.

In Chinese culture, by contrast, the owl is perceived as an ominous and frightening creature. It is believed to bring misfortune and disaster, and its nocturnal calls are associated with death. Proverbs such as 夜猫子进宅, 无事不来 (“when an owl enters a house at night, it is never without cause”) and 夜猫子抖翅, 大小有点事 (“when an owl flaps its wings at night, trouble is coming”) reflect this belief. In Chinese folklore, it is commonly thought that whoever hears an owl’s call first, or the tree on which the owl lands, foretells death. As a result, the owl symbolizes illness, calamity, and misfortune, and people traditionally avoid it.

In Kazakh culture, however, the owl (үкі) is regarded as a sacred and protective bird. The use of owl feathers as ornaments in traditional clothing is deeply symbolic. The soft texture, distinctive coloration, and aesthetic appeal of owl feathers are believed to enhance beauty and bring good fortune. The owl’s ability to see in the dark and fly silently—qualities absent in many other birds—have contributed to its sacred status. Kazakhs traditionally believe that “the owl has a protective spirit, and evil forces fear it.” To ward off the evil eye, owl beaks or claws are sometimes used as amulets for children, while feathers are attached to cradles, headgear, musical instruments, decorative textiles, and the clothing of young men and women. The custom of үкі тағу (attaching an owl feather) also marks the first stage of betrothal, symbolizing protection and future prosperity. Personal names such as Üki, Ükilai, and Ükibai further attest to the owl’s positive cultural value. Numerous idiomatic expressions and fixed comparisons in Kazakh, such as үкідей ұшы (“to arrive very quickly”) and екі иығына екі үкі тағып (“to praise excessively”), reflect this favorable perception. The widespread metaphorical use of үкі indicates its close association with humans and its status as a benevolent, sacred bird in Kazakh worldview.

The lexeme cat (Chinese 猫, Kazakh мысық) also illustrates partial divergence. In English, idioms such as rain cats and dogs, an old cat (an irritable woman), and alley cat (a promiscuous person) carry figurative or negative connotations. In Chinese, the cat functions largely as a neutral linguistic symbol and lacks strong cultural connotations beyond its literal meaning. In Kazakh, however, the cat tends to be negatively evaluated in figurative usage, as seen in expressions such as мысық тілеулі адам (“a malicious or treacherous person”) and мысық жоқта тышқан төбеге шығады (“when the cat is away, the mice will climb the roof”).

A particularly striking example of opposite connotations is bat (Chinese 蝠, Kazakh жарқанат). In English, the bat is typically associated with blindness, ugliness, madness, and evil. Expressions such as as blind as a bat, crazy as a bat, He’s a bit batty, and have bats in the belfry portray mental instability or irrationality. Influenced by legends of blood-sucking bats, Western culture often associates bats with witches, darkness, and death, and a bat entering a house is traditionally viewed as an ominous sign.

In Chinese culture, however, the bat carries a strongly positive connotation. The character 蝠 (bat) is homophonous with 福 (happiness, good fortune), which has led to its symbolic association with luck, health, and prosperity. Bat images

are frequently used in New Year decorations and placed on doors and windows, as it is believed that doing so will attract happiness and wealth into the household.

These examples demonstrate that even when the conceptual meaning of an animal is shared across languages, its associative meaning may vary significantly depending on cultural context, and in some cases may be entirely reversed. Such contrasts highlight the importance of considering linguocultural factors in semantic analysis, translation, and intercultural communication.

### *C. Words With Identical Conceptual Meaning but Culture-Specific Connotations Present in One Language and Absent in Another*

In some cases, animal names share the same conceptual (denotative) meaning across languages, yet possess rich cultural connotations in one language while remaining culturally neutral in another. Such asymmetry is largely conditioned by differences in natural environment, social organization, economic activities, belief systems, and religious traditions, which inevitably shape distinct modes of perception and interpretation of the same animal among different ethnic groups.

In Kazakh, English, and Chinese, a number of animal names demonstrate this phenomenon clearly. Certain animals carry strong cultural symbolism in one linguistic tradition, while in others they lack any connotative extension beyond their literal meaning. For instance, in Kazakh culture, affection toward children is commonly expressed through metaphorical address using the names of animal offspring, such as Qulynym (“my foal”), Botam (“my camel calf”), and Qozym (“my lamb”). This type of linguistic behavior is absent in English and Chinese and is closely linked to the nomadic pastoral lifestyle of the Kazakh people. Even greeting formulas such as “Mal-jan aman ba?” (“Are your livestock and family well?”) demonstrate the central role of livestock as a guarantee of survival and prosperity in Kazakh life.

Another striking example is the crow. In contemporary perception, the black crow is often considered unpleasant or ominous; however, traditional Kazakh worldview associated it with positive expectations. The idiom “Meniñ qolyma da qarğa tyshar” (“even a crow may defecate on my hand”) expresses hope for future wealth and good fortune. Moreover, the expressions qarğa tamyrlı qazaq (“Kazakh bound by crow-like kinship”) and the affectionate address qarğam (“my dear”) suggest that the crow may once have functioned as a totemic bird in Kazakh culture. Such symbolic meanings of the crow are absent in English and Chinese.

A similar contrast is observed in the perception of the wolf. In English and Chinese, the wolf is predominantly associated with cruelty, aggression, and hostility, whereas in Kazakh culture the Kökböri (Blue Wolf) occupies a sacred and emblematic position. Kazakhs traditionally regard themselves as descendants of the Blue Wolf, which symbolizes wisdom, bravery, perseverance, and strength. Traces of this sacralization are preserved in language, folklore, and ritual practices. Until recently, the wolf’s name was often avoided, replaced by euphemisms such as it-qus, tik qulaq, kara qulaq, ulyma, serik qulaq, and kökjal. The wolf was referred to as “Täñir serisi” (“the companion of Tengri”), and livestock killed by wolves was often consumed without fear, as it was believed to be touched by sacred power. Encounters with wolves were interpreted as good omens, and various protective rituals involving wolf teeth, bones, or talismans were practiced to safeguard children and ensure fertility. In Kazakh discourse, a brave hero is still metaphorically described as “nağyz kökjal” (“a true blue wolf”).

The English word wolf, derived from Old English wulf and attested across early Germanic languages, conveys the animal’s wild and powerful nature. While its associative meaning in English partially overlaps with the Kazakh perception in terms of strength and untamed force, it lacks the deep sacral and totemic dimension characteristic of Kazakh culture. In Chinese, by contrast, the wolf consistently symbolizes cruelty, greed, and evil, as reflected in idioms such as 声名狼藉 (“notorious like a wolf”), 如狼似虎 (“as cruel as wolves and tigers”), 狼狈为奸 (“colluding like wolves and jackals”), 狼吞虎咽 (“to devour like a wolf and a tiger”), and 羊贪狼狠 (“wolfishly cruel”).

The ostrich (Chinese 鸵鸟, Kazakh түйеқыс) provides another illustrative case. While the ostrich is conceptually understood in all three languages as a large, fast-running bird incapable of flight, its cultural connotations differ. In English, ostrich is associated with cowardice, avoidance, and excessive appetite. Expressions such as ostrich belief, to bury one’s head in the sand like an ostrich, an ostrich policy, and have the digestion of an ostrich metaphorically refer to self-deception, denial of reality, or excessive tolerance. In Chinese, the ostrich is perceived merely as a bird that can run but not fly, and the expression 鸵鸟政策 (“ostrich policy”) is a direct calque from English. In Kazakh, the ostrich lacks any notable cultural connotation.

The crane (Chinese 鹤) occupies a highly symbolic position in Chinese culture, where it represents longevity and immortality. Parents may name their children using expressions such as 鹤年 (“crane year”) or 鹤龄 (“crane age”) to wish them long life, and gifts decorated with crane motifs are commonly presented on the birthdays of elderly people. In English and Kazakh cultures, however, the crane does not possess comparable symbolic or connotative meaning.

Similarly, the silkworm (Chinese 蚕) carries strong positive cultural symbolism in China, reflecting the country’s long history of silk production. The proverb 春蚕到死丝方尽, 蜡炬成灰泪始干 (“The silkworm spins silk until death; the candle burns to ashes before its tears dry”) metaphorically praises selfless dedication and tireless labor. Such connotations are entirely absent in Kazakh and English.

The camel (Chinese 骆驼, Kazakh нар түйе) is another culturally marked animal. In Kazakh worldview, the camel symbolizes strength, endurance, dignity, and resilience. Proverbs such as “Nar jolynda zhük qalmaidy” (“no load remains on the path of a camel”), “Zhygylsañ nardan zhygył” (“if you fall, fall from a camel”), and “Zhükti nar köterer, qaiğyny er köterer” (“the camel bears the load, the man bears sorrow”) reflect this symbolism. Such cultural connotations are not found in English or Chinese.

The fish (Chinese 鱼) illustrates another asymmetry. In Chinese, the word 鱼 (yu) is homophonous with 余 (“surplus, abundance”), which has led to its association with wealth, prosperity, and fertility. Fish imagery is widespread in New Year decorations, often combined with lotus flowers, symbolizing abundance and harmony. Eating fish during festivals is believed to ensure prosperity, and idioms such as 鱼水之欢 (“the joy of fish and water”) metaphorically describe marital harmony and intimate affection. In English, however, fish often carries negative connotations, as in a shy fish (a timid person), a cold fish (an emotionally distant person), a loose fish (a morally lax individual), and a poor fish (a foolish person). In Kazakh, fish-related connotations are largely absent.

Finally, the cicada (Chinese 蝉, Kazakh көк шери́тке) is a powerful cultural symbol in Chinese tradition. Due to its long life cycle (up to 17 years) and its ability to shed its skin, the cicada represents renewal, rebirth, and immortality. In ancient China, a cicada was placed in the mouth of the deceased, symbolizing rebirth in the afterlife. Such cultural symbolism is entirely absent in both English and Kazakh.

These examples demonstrate that while the conceptual meaning of animal names may be universal, their associative and cultural meanings are deeply culture-specific. The presence or absence of such connotations plays a crucial role in semantic interpretation, translation, and intercultural communication.

## V. CONCLUSION

The comparative analysis of the cultural connotations of animal names in English, Kazakh, and Chinese demonstrates that the formation and development of such connotations are grounded in three principal factors. First, they arise from the animals’ observable characteristics, including physical appearance, physiology, behavioral patterns, habits, functions, and other natural features. Second, they are shaped by the national values of particular peoples, encompassing religious beliefs, historical experience, literature and art, geographical environment, customs and traditions, ethical norms, modes of thinking, aesthetic preferences, and overall lifestyle. Third, associative processes play a decisive role, as semantic extension is impossible without association; consequently, comparative studies are essential for identifying and explaining these processes. On this basis, the present study has carried out a systematic comparative analysis of similarities and differences in the connotations of animal names across the three languages.

In general, rational (conceptual) meaning does not possess a national character, whereas associative meaning, which emerges from national culture, displays highly distinct ethnocultural features. Each social group has its own language practices, cognitive patterns, religious beliefs, customs, social systems, and lifestyle, all of which contribute to cultural differentiation. Linguistic differences, therefore, are not limited to variations within semantic systems but also reflect divergences in conceptual and value systems. Language serves not only to represent empirical facts but also to express emotions and culturally specific attitudes. As a result, equivalent lexical items denoting the same concept in different languages may evoke divergent associations due to sociocultural differences. Some semantic meanings are present in one language but absent in another, a phenomenon closely related to the psychological associative habits of social groups, as well as their natural and social environments, traditions, religious beliefs, and everyday practices.

Although the cultural connotations of wild animals, domesticated animals, and insects in the three languages often overlap, they also exhibit notable distinctions. The number of idiomatic expressions associated with animals varies considerably across languages. For example, in Chinese, idioms related to insects constitute the largest group among animal-based idioms and are particularly rich in cultural connotations. Out of approximately 30,000 Chinese idiomatic expressions, about 1 percent—315 items—are associated with insects. In contrast, English and Kazakh contain very few idioms related to insects, and such expressions generally lack strong cultural connotations, with only limited examples involving ants, frogs, or locusts.

The Kazakh language contains an estimated 40,000 proverbs and sayings, of which approximately 30 percent are related to livestock. This proportion is significantly higher than that found in English or Chinese and directly reflects the fact that Kazakh traditional life has been predominantly centered on pastoralism for thousands of years.

Ultimately, meaningful linguistic interaction between civilizations and deep mutual understanding among peoples can only be achieved through respect for and comprehension of each other’s cultural traditions and customs. Only under such conditions can genuine and profound intercultural communication be realized.

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# A Critical Discourse Analysis of Agency Concealment in the Speeches of Kamala Harris and Spoljaric at the 60th Munich Security Conference

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**Abstract**—In the context of security negotiations, speeches that promote peace and stability are never ideologically neutral; rather, they contribute to the legitimization of existing power relations. This study aims to examine the linguistic strategies through which agency is concealed in speeches delivered at the 60<sup>th</sup> Munich Security Conference in 2024, with particular attention to how both the Russia-Ukraine and Israel-Hamas wars are legitimized or contested through selective representations of agency. Adopting a mixed-method approach, the study applies van Leeuwen's (2008) framework of social actor exclusion combined with van Dijk's (2024) model of nominalization to uncover the role of linguistic strategies in revealing ideologies. Two speeches delivered by American Vice President Kamala Harris and the president of the International Committee of the Red Cross, Mirjana Spoljaric, were analyzed. It was found that genericization and nominalization strategies were remarkably employed in Harris's speech to conceal the agent in comparison with Spoljaric's speech, which preferred suppression to completely anonymize the agent. Moreover, both speakers resorted to indetermination to render responsibility vague, particularly when addressing sensitive content. Ideologically speaking, Harris concealed agency to naturalize negative actions in the Middle East and to redirect blame and responsibility in the Eastern European war, while Spoljaric highlighted the victims, generating sympathy to delegitimize war in international security conferences. It is concluded that agency concealment is employed not only by humanitarian actors but also by political actors as a strategic tool to legitimize or delegitimize war.

**Index Terms**—critical discourse analysis, social actor exclusion, humanitarian discourse, political discourse

## I. INTRODUCTION

Actor descriptions in war-related discourse are inherently ideological. They serve “semantic, rhetorical, and argumentative functions in the expression of opinion” (Van Dijk, 2025, p. 21). Through selective emphasis, omission, misrepresentation, or backgrounding, linguistic choices can reshape the representation of events in a particular way that enhances in-group positivity or out-group negativity. A key discursive mechanism in this process is the concealment of agency, particularly when narrating the negative actions of “our group” or the sensitive actions of “their group”.

This phenomenon occupies a crucial role in contemporary political and humanitarian discourse. The ongoing wars in Gaza and Ukraine have triggered intense controversy in global platforms, where world leaders strategically obscure responsibility. The Munich Security Conference (MSC), one of the most influential meetings for international policy-shaping, provides a rich site for analyzing how political and humanitarian actors linguistically mask agency. For instance, the statement “Aleksey Navalny has died in Russia” offers a clear example of narrating Navalny's death as natural and not caused by anyone. Critical discourse analysis (CDA) is therefore essential for unpacking how such linguistic practice contributes to undermining or maintaining power structures (Meyer, 2021).

Even though past studies have explored certain aspects of the linguistic concealment in journalistic discourse (e.g., Lingle, 2017; Sogut, 2018; El-Astal & Al-Mutawa, 2024) and in a single-sided political speech (e.g., Mutlug & Ali, 2025), research remains limited in two major ways: first, existing research rarely compares how agency concealment operates across different institutional contexts, particularly between political and humanitarian discourses, despite their contrasting mandates and communicative norms. Second, few comparative studies analyze how conflicting geopolitical narratives (e.g., Ukraine and Gaza) shape the linguistic strategies used to obscure agency in highly influential security discourse.

A further gap arises from the fact that most previous studies have focused exclusively on direct conflict actors (e.g., Putin or Zelenskyy), overlooking how indirect global figures obscure agency. Unlike these works, the current study examines two such actors: Kamala Harris, representing U.S. political power, and Mirjana Spoljaric, representing the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC). As a result, it offers a novel perspective on how responsibility is

framed by obscuring the social actor. This gap is significant, given the growing scholarly emphasis on how institutional discourses contribute to legitimizing or contesting power asymmetries.

To fill in this gap in the research, the current study investigated agency concealment strategies in selected political and humanitarian speeches delivered by Kamala Harris and Mirjana Spoljaric at the 60th Munich Security Conference (MSC). Through the application of an expanded CDA framework, this study compared how both speakers framed the wars in Palestine and Ukraine by focusing on how social actor exclusion role shifts or obscures responsibility. This approach provides insight into probable ideological biases embedded in institutional war discourse. As a result, this study aims to address the following research questions:

1. What are the frequencies and distribution of agency-concealment strategies in the selected political and humanitarian speeches?
2. How do these speeches differ in their linguistic and discursive strategies for shifting or obscuring responsibility?
3. In what ways do these social-actor strategies reveal underlying power relations and ideological positions in the representation of the conflict?

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

### A. Critical Discourse Analysis

Critical discourse analysis is an interdisciplinary approach that incorporates broader social and cultural context, moving beyond textual structure to uncover the interaction between discourse, ideology, institutions, and representations (Wodak & Meyer, 2016; Flowerdew & Richardson, 2019). Its critical dimension lies in its ability to denaturalize language by exposing the ideas, omissions, and taken-for-granted assumptions embedded in texts. This process reveals that texts are not neutral; rather, they are “ideological and seek to reshape the representation of persons and events for particular ends, which reflects the power interests buried in texts” (Mayr & Machin, 2023, p. 326).

This assumption gave rise to the idea of the present study, which analyzes the ideological concealment of agency in discourse and its influence on legitimizing or contesting military actions, particularly in contemporary conflict zones such as Palestine and Ukraine. Such discourse requires a discourse-historical approach (DHA), described by Wodak and Mayer (2016) as problem-oriented in that it demands not only linguistic dimensions but also contextualization. It primarily has to do with the historical or sociopolitical context in which this kind of speech was spoken. Contextualizing discourse in this way (DHA) is to “analyze, understand, and explain the complexity of the objects under investigation” (p. 3).

### B. Representation in War Discourse

Representation is a core concept in critical discourse analysis. There is no neutral way in the representation of a person, groups, or events (Gavriely-Nuri, 2018; Mayr & Machin, 2023). One aspect of political representation is exclusion, which is viewed by Chilton (2004, p. 201) as “defining ‘us’ versus ‘them,’ shaping identities, and legitimizing policies” such as framing others as enemies or friends. Those strategies of exclusion were later developed by van Leeuwen (2008) in representing social actors, and they are used as the main analytical framework of this study. Sometimes such social actor representation is made explicit, such as “the Russians made a terrorist attack,” and sometimes it is made implicit, as in the following examples provided by Tonori (2011, p. 203) depicting how the Guardian described certain events in Iraq: “the death of Uday and Qusay, or the killing in July of Saddam’s two sons,” where the agent is anonymous. He adds that such concealment of agency helps to mask the responsibilities of agents.

### C. Strategies of Social Actors’ Concealment

Actor description is a major topic in critical discourse analysis, which is ideologically motivated. Such a description serves “semantic, rhetorical, and argumentative functions” (van Dijk, 2025, p. 21). Concealing, de-emphasizing, or misrepresenting social actors is a widespread phenomenon. Language can thus be used to hide or shift emphasis away from social actors to obscure or background responsibility, depersonalize negative-related agency, undermine, or maintain power (Meyer, 2021). This supports the argument that there is no neutral representation of groups or events (Mayr & Machin, 2023; Gavriely-Nuri, 2018). In this regard, agency can be concealed totally or partially: *complete concealment* is realized by suppression and nominalization, whereas partial concealment is realized by indetermination, genericization, circumstantialization, and impersonalization, as shown below:

1. Suppression: e.g., “the city was bombed” (van Leeuwen, 2008, p. 42).
2. Nominalization: e.g., “killing civilians is illegal.” This hides the agency by intentionally ignoring “who did what to whom and when” (van Dijk, 2024, pp. 131-138).
3. Indetermination: e.g., “some people” (van Leeuwen, 2008, p. 52).
4. Genericization: e.g., “fighters,” “troops (army),” “immigrants,” etc. (van Leeuwen, 2008, p. 36).
5. Circumstantialization: e.g., “due to the ongoing tensions, violence is reputed” (van Leeuwen, 2008). Halliday and Matheson (2014) refer to such cases as eventive sentence structures, where, to avoid blame, the focus is on the event rather than the agent.
6. Impersonalization, which involves:
  - (a). Utterance autonomization (e.g., surveys, reports, etc.), which lends impersonal authority to statements.

- (b). Spatialization, which is realized through “metonymical reference,” denotes institutionalized places associated with social actors (e.g., “the White House decided...”) used to decrease responsibility and blame (van Leeuwen, 2008, p. 46).

#### *D. Background to the Munich Security Conference*

The Munich Security Conference (MSC) is hosted every year in Munich, Germany, with its motto being “Peace Through Dialogue.” More than 450 senior decision-makers from around the world participate in an intensive debate on topics such as wars (Franke, 2024). Although MSC was originally established as a neutral platform for discussing global conflicts with the same eye, it has been criticized—particularly by the Russian politicians—for reinforcing Western dominance. Thus, MSC speeches provide suitable data for this study. Consequently, applying critical discourse analysis to MSC speeches reveals how various political power structures influence the representation of conflicts and wars on a global scale.

### III. METHODOLOGY

This study employed critical discourse analysis (CDA) to analyze political and humanitarian discourses of war in the Munich Security Conference (MSC). In this regard, the CDA approach is appropriate in analyzing political discourse since it addresses the way language is shaped and challenged by ideologies and power dynamics (Fairclough, 1995; Van Dijk, 1998).

#### *A. Data Collection and Description*

Two speeches delivered at the 60<sup>th</sup> Munich Security Conference (MSC) in 2024 were selected for this study. They were delivered by two globally influential speakers: American Vice President Kamala Harris and International Committee of the Red Cross President Mirjana Spoljaric. The official videos of both speeches were retrieved from MSC’s official webpage, <https://securityconference.org/en/medialibrary/>. Then, they were transcribed by the researchers.

These speeches were chosen due to the representative roles of both Kamala Harris and Mirjana Spoljaric in international security policy. Moreover, each speaker tackled different aspects of war—Harris focused on the military side, while Spoljaric addressed the humanitarian perspective of war. This duality made their speeches particularly valuable for critically examining how war is framed, allowing the study to cover multiple dimensions of war-related discourse.

Additionally, these speeches were delivered during a critical time after two conflicts: the first was the escalation of the Russian attack on Ukraine, which started on February 24, 2022, and the second was Hamas’ attack on Israel on October 7, 2023—the main topic of discussion at the 60<sup>th</sup> Munich Security Conference.

#### *B. Research Design*

This study implemented a mixed-method approach, which, as noted by Khanday and Khanam (2019), provides “maximal information about the problem under consideration” (p. 374). In the same regard, Ary et al. (2010) maintain that qualitative and quantitative research methods can be mixed in various ways. The use of mixed methods also offers various benefits concerning the scope of explanations of the research problem, which leads to having the strengths of quantitative and qualitative methods (Tzagkarakis & Kirtas, 2022).

Accordingly, this study started with a quantitative analysis, and the results were then used as a basis to enhance the reliability of the subsequent qualitative analysis, applying what Flick (2002) refers to as “triangulation,” which is used to validate the methodological processes.

#### *C. Analytical Framework*

Van Leeuwen’s (2008) Social Actor Constructions and van Dijk’s (2024) Nominalization were employed in this study. Besides analyzing the linguistic strategies of agent concealment of the two speeches, their interpretation went in line with Reisigl and Wodak’s (2001, 2009) Discourse-Historical Approach, with their historical and social context, to reveal comparatively the implicit ideology used in the language of each speech.

Accordingly, van Leeuwen (2008) emphasizes that social actors are either left out completely (suppression) or mentioned elsewhere in a way not linked to the main event or action (backgrounding). Both strategies are employed to obscure responsibility, shift blame, and avoid direct accusation (see also van Leeuwen, 1996). The critical discourse analytical framework used in the current study is visualized in Figure 1.

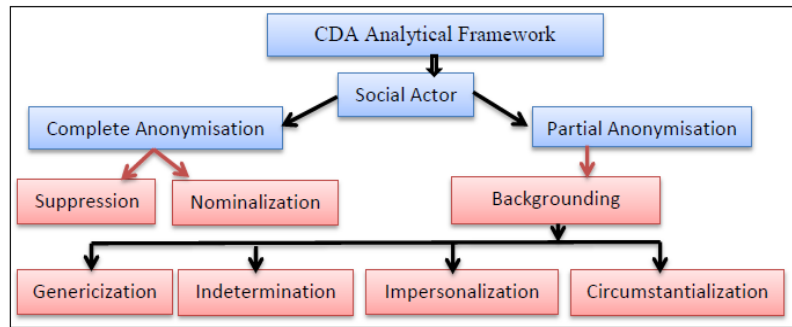


Figure 1. The Eclectic Model of the Current Study After van Leeuwen (2008) and van Dijk (2024)

#### D. Procedures of Analysis

The two speeches in this study were analyzed in two main phases: the analysis started quantitatively and then proceeded qualitatively (cf. Sogut, 2018; Abbadi et al., 2024). First, a quantitative descriptive analysis was conducted to pinpoint the overall patterns, frequencies, and distribution of the six strategies of agent concealment. These strategies were categorized into two main types depending on whether the agent responsible for the action could be traced in the context or not: complete concealment and partial concealment. They were further classified into three categories:

1. Structural Concealment: (Suppression and Nominalization)
2. Referential Concealment: (Generificization and Indetermination)
3. Contextual and Impersonal Concealment (Circumstantialization and Impersonalization)

The frequencies were manually counted to allow for a comparative view of their usage across the two speeches.

In the second phase, the qualitative analysis proceeded through four ordered steps:

1. Pinpointing the strategy under examination.
2. Describing the linguistic realization of the strategy.
3. Selecting a textual example (typically a sentence).
4. Uncovering the ideological function and the political intent conveyed via the strategy.

### IV. DATA ANALYSIS

#### A. The Quantitative Stage of the Analysis

The general results and patterns of the strategies used in political and humanitarian discourses are shown in Table 1 and Figure 2 below.

TABLE 1  
FREQUENCIES OF AGENT CONCEALMENT IN HARRIS'S AND SPOLJARIC'S SPEECHES

| No. | Strategies            | Harris's Speech |            | Spoljaric's Speech |            |
|-----|-----------------------|-----------------|------------|--------------------|------------|
|     |                       | Frequency       | Percentage | Frequency          | Percentage |
| 1.  | Suppression           | 10              | 15.15 %    | 13                 | 33.33 %    |
| 2.  | Nominalization        | 13              | 19.70 %    | 4                  | 10.26 %    |
| 3.  | Generificization      | 18              | 27.27 %    | 7                  | 17.95 %    |
| 4.  | Indetermination       | 17              | 25.76 %    | 9                  | 23.08 %    |
| 5.  | Circumstantialization | 3               | 4.55 %     | 3                  | 7.69 %     |
| 6.  | Impersonalization     | 5               | 7.58 %     | 3                  | 7.69 %     |
|     | Total                 | 66 (63 %)       | 100 %      | 39 (37 %)          | 100 %      |

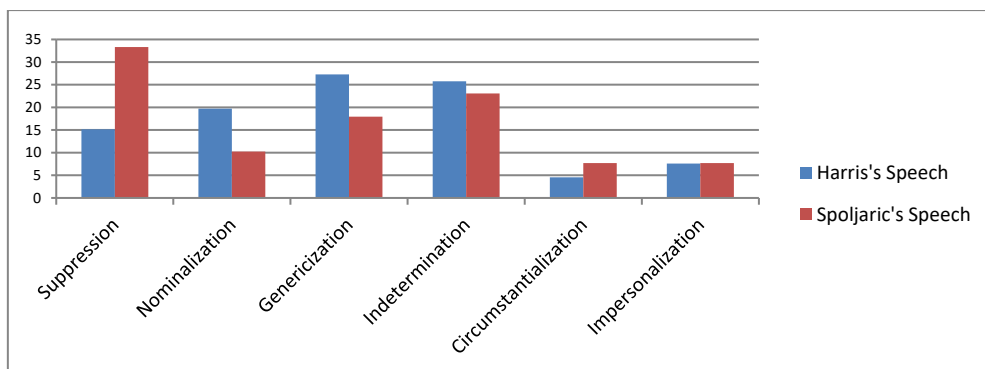


Figure 2. Agent Concealment in Harris's and Spoljaric's Speeches

After conducting the quantitative analysis, it can be seen that Harris extensively used agent concealment strategies. The results show that her politically oriented speech employed these strategies 66 times (63%), compared to 39



occurrences (37%) in Spoljaric's humanitarian-oriented speech. The most frequently used strategies in Harris's speech were genericization, used 18 times (27.27%), and indetermination, used 17 times (25.76%), while the least frequently used strategy was circumstantialization, which Harris used three times (4.55%). In Spoljaric's speech, the most frequently used strategies were suppression, used 13 times (33.33%), and indetermination, which was used nine times (23.08%). Spoljaric used circumstantialization three times (7.69%) and impersonalization also three times (7.69%), making them the least frequently used strategies.

Comparatively speaking, as shown in Figure 2, some strategies were used more frequently in Harris's speech than in Spoljaric's. Harris extensively used nominalization 13 times (19.70%), genericization 18 times (27.27%), and indetermination 17 times (25.76%). On the contrary, Spoljaric extensively used Suppression 13 times (33.33%) in her speech.

This quantitative analysis highlights the general patterns of agent concealment strategies that will be analyzed in greater depth in the next qualitative phase. Thus, the following in-depth examinations of the selected examples explore the discursive context in which these patterns occurred and connect these strategies to the socio-political circumstances surrounding the MSC discourse to figure out the implicit ideological meanings behind the concealment of actors in war discourse.

## B. *The Qualitative Stage of the Analysis*

### (a). *Structural Concealment of Agency*

Agency can be obscured by means of linguistic structures, thereby manipulating how events in war narratives are represented. This form of obscuring responsibility involves the complete deletion of agency; the agent is made completely anonymous by employing two strategies: suppression and nominalization (cf. van Leeuwen, 2008; van Dijk, 2024), leaving no trace of the agent in the sentence.

#### 1. *Suppression*

This strategy involves the complete deletion of the social actor from the sentence, leaving the action appearing as agentless and seemingly natural and depersonalized. In the current text analysis, the frequency of suppression in Harris's speech is 10 instances (15.15%). The suppression strategy used in the data under consideration is linguistically realized through agentless passive constructions and intransitive verb forms. The verbs most commonly used with this strategy were in the form of passive or intransitive verbs, such as "died," "trampled," "released," "resolved," "frozen," "tortured," "raped," and "killed." The remarkable point in the occurrences of these verbs in this strategy is that the agency was concealed, as shown in examples 1 and 2:

1. "Women were horribly tortured and raped" (Harris, 2024).
2. "Aleksey Navalny has died in Russia" (Harris, 2024).

These examples are extracted from Harris's speech. Example 1 is used to narrate events related to the Palestine-Israel conflict. The agency committing such negative actions as torturing and raping women is left anonymous. The ideological function behind such anonymity is to hide the negative actions of America's ingroup in the Middle East. Example 2 describes the death of Aleksey Navalny in Russia. The linguistic choice of the verb "died" suggests that no one is responsible for this incident. Though it was narrated as a natural event, Western leaders, including American President Joseph Biden, had directly accused Russia of executing Navalny shortly before the Munich Security Conference was held in February 2024. Harris, however, obscured the agency of Putin's government to avoid a direct confrontation with Russia and its allies, who were there at the conference. This reflects the centrist ideology she adopts, as well as the influence of the Democratic Party, which typically promotes moderate positions on conflict, particularly during that period when she was approaching a critical election stage. Thus, Harris refrained from issuing direct accusations against Russia.

As for Spoljaric's speech, the frequency of suppression is 13 instances (33.33%). The suppression strategy in Spoljaric's speech is linguistically realized through agentless passives, intransitive verb forms, and eventive sentence structure (Halliday & Malthusian, 2014). The verbs most commonly used with this strategy are "criticized," "ratified," "bound," "abode," "reduce," and "spread." The remarkable point in the occurrences of these verbs is that agency was consistently concealed, as illustrated in examples 3 and 4 below:

3. "We have been criticized for our neutrality and for not taking a side" (Spoljaric, 2024).
4. "To preserve that principle, you have to reduce harm for civilians and reduce harm for non-combatants" (Spoljaric, 2024).

In example 3, "we" refers to the International Committee of the Red Cross president. Here, Spoljaric hid those who criticized the ICRC by using the agentless passive voice. It seems that the social actors concealed in this example are Western political leaders who asked her to take a position. In example 4, Spoljaric hid the agent by means of using a non-finite construction and the generic pronoun "you," which refers to all parties to the conflict. Thus, the social actors responsible for harming civilians are made anonymous. Those engaged in war are portrayed as failing to follow "that principle," namely, the Geneva Convention's principles, which are expected to guide the warring parties. She concealed such actors since they were associated with negative actions of "harming non-combatants." Ideologically speaking, Spoljaric hid the social actor due to her global responsibilities as president of the ICRC. She wanted to present herself to

all parties to the conflict as neutral, rather than ideologically biased, for authorization to enter any conflict zone. Therefore, she did not name the social actor, since they were connected to negative actions.

## 2. Nominalization

Nominalization is another strategy used to hide the agent by turning the verb into a noun. In Harris's speech, the frequency of this strategy was 13 (19.70%). It was linguistically realized through nouns derived from verbs, such as "effort," "existential threat," "the innovation," "the failure," "an attack," "a sustained presence," "the gains," "re-occupation," "change," "return," and "the work." Turning verbs into nouns helps Harris conceal agency in negative actions, such as saying "the failure to do so" instead of saying "if we fail to do so," which would explicitly imply America or NATO as weak in facing Russian expansion. Notably, all occurrences of these nouns obscure the agents, as shown in examples 5 and 6 below:

5. "The failure to do so would be a gift to Vladimir Putin" (Harris, 2024).

6. "The work that will happen among nations will be critically important" (Harris, 2024).

In example 5, instead of stating "if America failed," Harris turned the verb "fail" into the noun "failure" since such a word as this carries a negative evaluative meaning. The context of example 5 reflects ongoing geopolitical tension between America and Russia, implying that Ukraine would be a gift to Russia if America and NATO failed. Harris stressed that, to avoid such failure, NATO members, led by America, should "secure critical weapons and resources that Ukraine so badly needs" (The White House, 2024) to counter Russia's expansion towards Europe. Ideologically, Harris obscured her government's agency in this unfavorable hypothetical scenario. Similarly, in example 6, who will do the "work" is left obscure. Initially, it seems to refer to Western countries; however, context reveals that "the King of Jordan" is also being deliberately concealed. The West, under the leadership the United States, frames collaboration with Arab states as "critically important" for strategic goals. America's ultimate goal relates to ensuring Israel's security and achieving stability in the Middle East. Thus, Harris ideologically concealed the king of Jordan's agency to maintain diplomatic channels and emphasize the collective rather than the individual responsibility within the Munich Security Conference.

In Spoljaric's speech, the frequency of nominalization is 4 (10.26%). This strategy co-occurs with verbs such as "preserving humanity," "taking hostages," and "compliance." Most instances refer to negative actions, as shown in examples 7 and 8 below:

7. "Taking hostages is a violation of international humanitarian law, and mistreating prisoners of war is a violation of the Geneva Conventions" (Spoljaric, 2024).

8. "This extinction of the other at the end of the road is necessary for victory and at any cost" (Spoljaric, 2024).

The actions of "taking hostages" and the "mistreatment of prisoners of war" in example 7 are banned under the *Geneva Convention (IV) relative to Civilians* (1949), Article 34, and the *Geneva Convention (III) relative to Prisoners of War* (1949), Article 13, which classify them as war crimes (Amnesty International, 2025, para. 3). During her last visit to Gaza, Spoljaric noted Israel's mistreatment of Gazans. By using nominalization, she masks the responsibility of Israeli forces to align with Western ideological expectations. In example 8, nominalizing "this extinction" removes responsibility from both attacking countries (Russia and Israel) and the attacked countries (Ukraine and Palestine), portraying each as attempting to defeat the other at any cost. Ideologically, Spoljaric subtly criticizes all countries in conflict and delegitimizes their political actions.

## (b). Referential and Identification Concealment

Referential and identification concealment involve masking who is referred to or identified in discourse. They encompass genericization and identification, both of which fall under partial concealment of agency.

### 1. Genericization

This strategy replaces the specific agent with general categories to distract attention away from the agent. In Harris' speech, the frequency of this strategy is very remarkable in that it occurs 18 times (27.27%). It is expressed through abstract entities (e.g., "alliance"), indefinite singular nouns (e.g., "aggressor"), collective nouns ("American people," "the army," and "the government"), and generic references (e.g., "nations" and "forces of tyranny"). Most occurrences depersonalize agency, as shown in examples 9 and 10:

9. "History offers a clue: if we stand by while an aggressor invades its neighbor with impunity, they will keep going" (Spoljaric, 2024).

10. "When America has isolated herself, threats and forces of tyranny and fascism have grown" (Harris, 2024).

In example 9, genericization appears in the noun "aggressor" preceded by the indefinite article, which is deliberately general. However, the phrase "invades its neighbor" indicates that the concealed actor is Putin. In 2024, Putin initiated war on his "neighbor" (Ukraine) and acted with "impunity," and continued to during the 60<sup>th</sup> Munich Security Conference. Harris employs genericization to avoid accusing Putin directly. She reframed the conflict as a struggle not against one person (i.e., Putin), but with the whole doctrine of fascism of the Russian government.

In example 10, genericization appears in the plural nouns "threat" and "force," which serve to obscure the agent. The context again suggests that the concealed actor is Russia, whose "forces of tyranny and fascism" threatened to

destabilize Europe. Ideologically, Harris emphasizes America's role as a guardian of freedom and "collective security," portraying Russia as a universalized threat, making the defense appear as a moral duty.

In Spoljaric's speech, the frequency of genericization is seven (17.95%), reflecting strategic ambiguity typical of humanitarian discourse. It appears through plural nouns such as "states, parties, armed groups, and humanitarian actors" or singular nouns with indefinite determiners such as "any civilian," as seen below in examples 11 and 12:

11. "The parties to a conflict ... allow us to occupy a neutral position" (Spoljaric, 2024).

12. "States came together and created the ICRC" (Spoljaric, 2024).

The generalized terms "the parties to a conflict" and "states" do not reveal who is meant. Nonetheless, the context of the 60th Munich Security Conference, which discussed the war in Palestine and the war in Ukraine, made it possible to infer that the anonymous actors in example 11 are Israelis, Gazans, Russians, and Ukrainians. Moreover, example 12 concealed the social actor in which "states" are involved in creating the International Committee of the Red Cross President. Historically speaking, the European states that took part in the creation of the ICRC—such as Switzerland, Britain, etc.—are the social actors that are implied. Ideologically, this concealment helps the ICRC president to maintain neutrality and avoid negative political associations.

## 2. Indetermination

Indetermination makes the agent anonymous through vague expressions or exophoric pronouns. This strategy appears remarkably in both speeches; it occurred 17 times (25.76%) in Harris's speech. It is linguistically realized through indefinite pronouns (e.g., "some") or generic reference (e.g., "one" must act), as shown in the following examples:

13. "There are some in the United States who disagree; they suggest... to embrace dictators...some questioned the usefulness of NATO" (Harris, 2024).

14. "We are going to end the conflict that Hamas initiated on October 7th" (Harris, 2024).

The indefinite pronoun "some," which appears twice in example 13, and the pronoun "they" divert attention from the real actor. By resorting to Reisigl and Wodak's (2001) discourse-historical approach (DHA), it can be inferred that these vague references point to the Republican Party in America, which usually criticizes the Democratic administration. In example 14, the collective pronoun "we" has no clear referent; given the situation in the Middle East, "we" likely refers to the United States and Israel. Ideologically, Harris uses indetermination to shift responsibility away from Israel regarding harm to civilians in the conflict.

In Spoljaric's speech, indetermination appears nine times (23.08%). It is also realized through indefinite pronouns (e.g., "everybody") or personal pronouns with vague reference (e.g., "we"), as shown in examples 15 and 16 below:

15. "Everybody who has an influence on a party to a conflict is bound to make their utmost...to ensure that IHL is implemented" (Spoljaric, 2024).

16. "We engage with everybody who bears weapons and has power" (Spoljaric, 2024).

In example 15, expressions like "everybody" make social actors unspecified or anonymous because it is impossible to determine exactly who "has an influence" on whom. The hidden actors might include China, who influences Russia to stop the war in Ukraine, or Saudi Arabia, who influences Qatar and Hamas to stop the war in Gaza; the list remains open. Additionally, in example 16, "'everybody' who bears weapons" likewise obscures specific actors. Ideologically, Spoljaric uses this vagueness to avoid accusing sensitive parties directly. However, she is not accusing everybody who bears a weapon, but only those who have power, such as Israel or Russia, and use it to harm civilians. This strategic vagueness enables humanitarian leaders to deliver critical messages without overt confrontation.

## (c). Circumstantial and Impersonal Concealment

This third type of agency concealment shifts the focus away from social actors and attributes events to circumstances. This involves concealment by backgrounding the agency, resulting in diffused responsibility and making actions appear as outcomes of contextual factors or non-human entities rather than deliberate human decisions. In this study, this is done through circumstantialization and impersonalization strategies.

### 1. Circumstantialization

Circumstantialization shifts the focus away from the social actor to the circumstances. It is the least frequently used strategy in both speeches. In Harris's speech, its frequency is three (4.55%). It is linguistically realized in adverbial clauses such as "because of" and temporal circumstantial phrases such as "in these unsettled times," as shown in the following example:

17. "This year, we are meeting amid a conflict and instability in the Middle East" (Harris, 2024).

In this example, who causes such instability and conflict remains unnamed. Although such instability is widely associated with the ongoing Israeli military operations in Palestine, South Lebanon, Syria, Yemen, and Iran, Harris presents their "meeting" at the 60th Munich Security Conference in 2024 with no specific accused agents. Ideologically, this obscures Israel's role in the instability in the Middle East. Using her hegemonic language, Harris redirects the attention to America's strategic adversaries, reflected in her reference to "Russia's continuing aggression in Ukraine" and "China's efforts to change the international order" (Harris, 2024). Consequently, the circumstances of the 60th

Munich Security Conference meeting are framed as the result of broader geopolitical tensions, rather than specific tensions and instability in the Middle East.

In Spoljaric's speech, the frequency of circumstantialization is three (7.69%). It is linguistically realized in prepositional phrases such as "due to," as shown in the following example:

18. "Due to globalization, the ripple effect spread faster and had a far greater impact" (Spoljaric, 2024).

In this example, Spoljaric concealed the human agent by presenting the word "globalization" as if it were the main cause behind the ripple effect in Ukraine or in Gaza. No explicit actor is identified in example 18. The only reason behind the ripple effect presented here is the external circumstances caused by globalization. The metaphor of the ripple effect signals the cross-border consequences of war, as seen in the impact of the Russia-Ukraine war in 2022; it had a ripple effect in the shortages of energy in Europe since Russia is the main source of natural gas, and this war created disruptions in gas exportation. Similarly, the Israel-Hamas escalation on October 7, 2024, had a ripple effect of instability in the surrounding regions (Lebanon, Syria, Iran, Yemen, etc.). Strategically, this metaphor serves to encourage European unity to stand against the expansion of the "dictator" Putin and that all European countries will fall if Ukraine falls. Ideologically, Spoljaric avoids direct accusation of Russia and Israel in the escalation of the geopolitical tensions in the Middle East and Eastern Europe.

## 2. Impersonalization

The impersonalization strategy is often interwoven with power, as it abstracts human agents and thereby legitimizes controversial or negative actions. In Harris's speech, it occurred five times (7.58%). It is realized through metonymic expressions, fulfilling the grammatical subject in sentences such as "the White House, America, and our leadership." Additionally, utterance autonomization, a subtype identified by van Leeuwen (2008), appears in expressions containing inanimate nouns such as "the report says" in example 19 and "America," as seen below in example 20:

19. "The report says that Aleksey Navalny has died in Russia" (Harris, 2024).

20. "How America reacts will affect... the people around the world" (Harris, 2024).

In example 19, the person who reported the death of Aleksey Navalny is not identified, and the verb "says" is attributed to a non-human agent, "report," consistent with utterance autonomization. Ideologically, this serves to highlight such crimes while avoiding reference to the individuals or institutions responsible for committing them. It also makes the international community sympathize with Julia Navalny (the wife of Aleksey Navalny), who was invited to deliver a speech at the 60th Munich Security Conference to condemn Russia for what happened to her husband in prison.

In example 20, American hegemony is emphasized by attributing the verb "respond" to the geographical place America rather than to Joe Biden, the U.S. president at that time. This reflects a political ideology in which American global influence is portrayed as institutional and enduring, independent of individual leaders, since presidents are temporal, while America's power and hegemony are permanent, as much as "how America reacts will affect" people everywhere. Concealing the human agency thus serves two purposes: first, to reinforce the notion of America's permanent global role; and second, to shift responsibility away from the current administration of the USA and place it on an institutional entity in order to legitimize the actions.

In Spoljaric's speech, impersonalization appears only three times (7.69%), often realized through metonymic expressions such as "the Geneva Convention," as illustrated below in example 21:

21. "The Geneva Conventions stand against preventing that from happening again in all places of conflict; these conventions preserve humanity and limit as far as possible harm to civilians" (Spoljaric, 2024).

The verbs "stand against," "preserve," and "limit harm" are attributed to the non-human agents, namely, "the Geneva Conventions." The responsible human actors—Israeli forces, particularly given Spoljaric's recent visit to Gaza—are concealed. After her visit, Spoljaric stated that the situation in Gaza would not be solved by transporting more soldiers but by offering protection to the Gazans (ICRC, 2023). At the 60th Munich Security Conference, she also stated, "I'm not speaking about Gaza because we work in a hundred situations of conflict" (Spoljaric, 2024). Here she is implicitly alluding to the severity of the war situation without naming the perpetrating actors. Ideologically, by hiding the social actor and mentioning only the name of the Geneva laws, she attempts to legitimize her actions so she might be perceived as neutral by the parties to the conflict and allowed to enter any war zones.

## V. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The analysis of the two selected speeches—Harris's politically oriented discourse and Spoljaric's humanitarian-oriented discourse—showed different patterns in the use of concealment strategies of social actors.

The descriptive quantitative analysis phase revealed the general pattern of agent concealment; it was revealed that the total of agent concealment strategies was prevalent in Harris's speech. Her political discourse extensively employed concealment strategies at a higher percentage (63%) compared to Spoljaric's humanitarian discourse at 37%, as shown below in Figure 3:

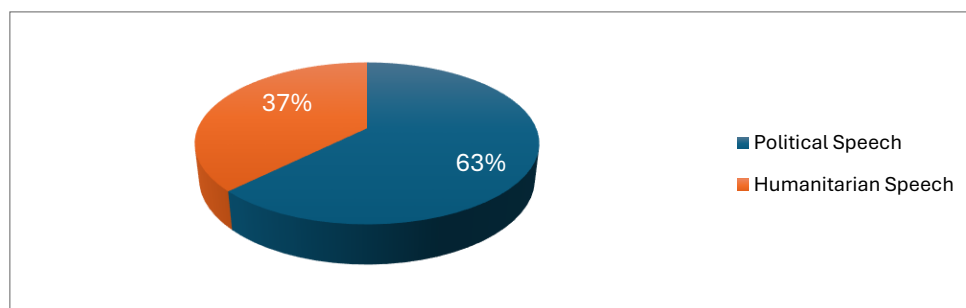


Figure 3. A Comparison of Social Actor Strategies Between Political and Humanitarian Discourse

This contrast between political and humanitarian discourse reflects both the ideological foundations of communication and the specific contextual framework of the Munich Security Conference, where issues of negotiating international responsibility and peace are highly sensitive. The extensive use of agency concealment strategies (63%) in political discourse enables political leaders to operate within a diplomatic and strategic tone to frame controversial actions as collective and inevitable.

In contrast, the humanitarian discourse had a frequency of 37% in using strategies of social actor concealment. This echoed the goal of humanitarian discourse to emphasize agency to enhance moral engagement and obedience to the Geneva Conventions.

This quantitative analysis paved the way to the qualitative analysis, as shown in Table 2:

TABLE 2  
THE MOST COMMON STRATEGIES USED IN WAR DISCOURSE

| Speech Type  | Prevailing Strategies | Linguistic Features                                                                                                                                              | Ideological Function                                                                                     | %      |
|--------------|-----------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------|
| Political    | Genericization        | “aggressor,” “forces of tyranny,” “alliance,” “the American people,” “the army,” “nations,” “the government”                                                     | To dehumanize the other and universalize the conflict to make defense a moral duty.                      | 27.27% |
|              | Nominalization        | “existential threat,” “effort,” “failure,” “attack,” “a presence,” “the gains,” “re-occupation,” “change,” “return the work.”                                    | To emphasize collectivity to stop the expansion of Putin.                                                | 19.70% |
| Humanitarian | Suppression           | Agentless passive constructions and intransitive verb forms are recurrent with verbs such as “criticized,” “ratified,” “bound,” “abode,” “reduce,” and “spread.” | To achieve neutrality and objectivity to be allowed to enter any conflict zone.                          | 33.33% |
|              | Indetermination       | indefinite pronouns (e.g., “everybody”) or personal pronouns with vague reference (e.g., “we”)                                                                   | To enable humanitarian actors to deliver harm messages without directly confronting other social actors. | 23.08% |

Surprisingly, the descriptive percentages of indetermination in both speeches were very close, with Harris’s frequency of use at 25.76% and Spoljaric’s frequency of use at 23.08%, with both using vague expressions associated with negative actions in conflict. Hence, indetermination was ideologically used to cover unpleasant and negative content in war discourse, co-occurring with verbs such as “disagree,” “question,” and “suggest.” This aligns with Vallauri et al.’s (2024) findings that such semantic vagueness can effectively distance the agent from unpleasant contents.

Moreover, in the political speech of Harris, genericization was the most commonly used strategy. Though American politicians are known to be hegemonic in their interactions, Harris employed partial concealment through the genericization of sensitive contexts, especially when the social actor was Russia, to achieve the ideological function of reducing conflict and softening criticism to maintain diplomatic legitimacy at the Munich Security Conference.

Nominalization was also prevalent in Harris’s speech; this strategy was linguistically realized through nouns derived from verbs such as “effort,” “existential threat,” “the innovation, the failure,” “an attack,” “a sustained presence,” “the gains,” “re-occupation,” “change,” “return,” and “the work.” Turning such verbs into nominal forms enabled Harris to not only conceal the agency behind negative actions, such as using “the failure to do so” instead of saying “if we failed to do so,” but also to obscure the agency of America’s regional allies (e.g., the king of Jordan) in a sensitive Middle Eastern context. This strategy is “critically important” for “achieving these ultimate goals” of ensuring Israel’s security and promoting stability in the Middle East.

It was also revealed that only Harris employed utterance autonomization, which is a subtype of “impersonalization.” This is consistent with Al-Zubaidi’s (2024) conclusions that social actors must be hidden in sensitive circumstances by using ambiguous language. She also hid Israel as the social actor when narrating negative actions in Gaza to ideologically dilute responsibility. This aligns with Pira’s (2023) findings that narrating “our” group’s negative action requires concealing the social actors. It also aligns with Mutlug and Ali’s (2025) findings that concealing agency helps reverse the blame, which otherwise would be on “our group.” Moreover, it was revealed that whenever the Ukraine war

was mentioned, Harris explicitly used “President Biden and I” (six times), “America” (eight times), or “the United States” (one time) to declare their siding with Ukraine. However, when it came to the situation in the Middle East, Harris used “we,” which might refer to the United States and Israel, whose names remained unspoken to avoid blame and shift responsibility for what was happening to the Palestinians.

Concerning Spoljaric and her speech, her most frequently used strategy was suppression, which she used 13 times (33.33%), representing complete agent concealment to ideologically avoid direct accusations by the West. The West, which often “criticizes” the International Committee of the Red Cross for not taking sides in conflicts,” has overlooked its own inconsistencies. Suppression also enriched Spoljaric’s humanitarian discourse in that her agent concealment helped her in highlighting the victims wherever there was a conflict. Suppression influenced making events appear as crimes against the Geneva Conventions. In addition, her agent concealment tactic was used to reduce blame and leave room for negotiations as well as generate sympathy with the victims. This aligns with Volker and Gonzatti’s (2024) findings that social concealment helped highlight reshaping public discourse to implicitly legitimize or delegitimize actions without confrontations with dominant groups. Ideologically speaking, by hiding the social actor and reverting to the name of the Geneva laws, Spoljaric legitimized her decisions and comments about social aggressors (e.g., Russia, Israel, or Hamas).

## VI. CONCLUSION

The current study examined the use of agent concealment strategies in the 2024 60<sup>th</sup> Munich Security Conference speeches delivered by an American vice president and the president of the ICRC. It was revealed that agent concealment is more frequent in Harris’s politically oriented speech than in Spoljaric’s humanitarian-oriented speech. In Harris’s speech, partial concealment through the genericization strategy was dominant among all other strategies in her demonizing discourse. On the contrary, in Spoljaric’s speech, complete concealment by suppression was extensively used in her humanitarian discourse. From the context, it was also revealed that the concealed social actors included Russia, Hamas, Israel, the West, the international community, and King Abdullah II of Jordan. The controlling themes in Harris’s discourse served the ideological functions of demonizing others by diluting responsibility, naturalizing actions as inevitable, and emphasizing collectivity to strengthen legitimacy. On the other hand, the controlling theme in Spoljaric’s speech addressed those who bear weapons to serve the ideological function of humanitarianism to implicitly dehumanize opponents and perpetrators. Additionally, it was revealed that most of the examples of social actor concealment were associated with negative content, which explains why these social actors were concealed, with some exceptions.

The current study contributes to critical discourse analysis by presenting empirical evidence of how agent concealment operates across different types of war discourses. It highlights the strategic ways political and humanitarian leaders employ linguistic choices to influence legitimizing or delegitimizing war. Furthermore, critically analyzing such speeches promotes greater attentiveness in producing appropriate political speeches in similar global conferences (cf. Rahimi Tehrani & Chalak, 2022). It also motivates future research to examine agent concealment in the discourse of unequal power politicians, thereby providing a more critical lens for analyzing war discourse and its broader social consequences.

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- Potential authors to the issue if available
- Estimated number of papers to accept to the special issue
- Tentative time-table for the call for papers and reviews, including
  - Submission of extended version
  - Notification of acceptance
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