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Ineffective Implementation of Language Policy in South African Higher Education: Mapping the Contribution of Family Language Policy

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Abstract—**South Africa's language policy landscape has been lauded as a progressive model for many African countries, particularly due to its intentional drive to promote multilingualism and elevate historically marginalised indigenous African languages at various levels of education. However, language policy implementation has largely remained ineffective and symbolic. Within the South African higher education sector, inadequate government support for policy operationalisation and enduring colonial language ideologies that valorise and legitimise English as the language of social, educational, and economic advantage have been cited as militating against the realisation of a truly multilingual and transformed university. In this article, we draw on a framework that agitates for an approach that acknowledges interactions between top-down language policy directives and bottom-up community language ideologies. Through an analysis of language policy documents and secondary literature, we build on the adage that 'charity begins at home' to argue that resistance to top-down university language policies is very much a function of ideologies and dispositions towards indigenous languages that are shaped within the home, a dimension known as family language policy. We therefore propose an approach that reconciles national language policy objectives with bottom-up ideologies by placing families at the centre of the macro language policy wheel.**

Index Terms—**language policy in higher education, indigenous African languages, bottom-up language ideologies, family language policy, South African universities**

I. Introduction

The language policy of South Africa is aligned with other national imperatives as spelt out in the Constitution of the Republic. Central to these constitutional pronouncements is the endeavour to transform the country into an inclusive and equitable society. This is a deliberate departure from the country's colonial and apartheid past, which was punctuated by segregation and an emphasis on separate and unequal treatment based on race (Drummond, 2016; Makalela & McCabe, 2013; Maseko & Siziba, 2023a). Since the triumph of democracy and the abolition of apartheid in 1994, the South African government has taken visible steps to redress colonial and apartheid-era injustices at various levels of South African society (Maseko & Siziba, 2023a). During the colonial and apartheid periods, access to university education was a privilege largely conferred on racial considerations. However, the 1996 National Constitution reduced the racial barrier, resulting in significant access to the university space by the previously excluded black African students (Drummond, 2016; Makalela & McCabe, 2013). However, studies have shown how 'access' to the university has remained physical than epistemological (Antia & Dyers, 2016). Physical access means that there are an increasing number of blacks in universities as compared to the colonial and apartheid eras. Although there has been an increase in the enrolment of black, African language-speaking learners into universities, the curriculum has remained largely untransformed (Antia & Dyers, 2016). It has continued to be packaged and delivered in English and Afrikaans as languages of instruction (Govender & Naidoo, 2023). Realising this, the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) directed public universities to craft language policies that intentionally address the challenges of language as a barrier to access and success for the majority of students who speak African languages (DHET, 2020). To that end, all 26 public universities in South Africa were mandated to promote the use of African languages and indigenous multilingualism in teaching, learning, and other areas related to the university's business. This includes the promotion of multilingualism even in engagements between universities and their stakeholders. To date, all universities have some form of language policy in place, although there are still concerns regarding their effective implementation. Predictably, discourses on the preponderance of English and Afrikaans as legitimate languages of instruction dominate much literature on language policy in South African higher education institutions (Drummond, 2016; Dyers & Abongdia, 2015; Madadzhe, 2019; Maseko & Siziba, 2023b). Much literature has mostly highlighted the lack of institutional and government sincerity, support, and commitment to real transformation as being the main reason behind the lack of implementation (Antia & van der Merwe, 2019; Mutasa, 2014). In that regard, some literature shows how

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the wording of the language policy provisions provides escape routes for authorities from being held accountable for non-implementation of these policies (Maseko & Siziba, 2023a). Notably, such research has not gone further than identifying these dynamics as culpable in the ineffectiveness of university language policies.

In this article, we attempt to explain the lack of effective university language policy implementation within the context of an inadequate understanding and appreciation of language ideologies circulating in lower levels of society. As constitutive of what is termed 'bottom-up' language planning, we seek to argue that understanding of language ideologies emanating from the grassroots can bear on how institutional language policies are received and accepted. In particular, we suggest that because the success of any language policy requires community and grassroots buy-in and consensus (Alimi, 2016; Hodges & Prys, 2019; Liddicoat & Taylor-Leech, 2014), it is important for universities to understand and indeed consider bottom-up language ideologies as possible sources of resistance and ambivalence towards university language policies. In our argument, we seek to show how family language policies, that is, decisions about what languages are used and valued within families, may have a bearing on the dispositions of staff and students towards their institutional language policies, thus indirectly impacting implementation.

By drawing evidence from language policy documents and secondary literature on the potential impact of bottom-up language ideologies on top-down language policies, this paper interrogates the dialectics of policy and implementation, arguing that ineffective implementation of university language policies stems from a rudimentary understanding and neglect of family language policy as a site of ideological reproduction. The paper posits that to be effective, university language policies must resonate with the language attitudes, preferences and practices cultivated within the family domain. The study was guided by the following research questions:

- What is the contribution of bottom-up ideologies to the ineffective implementation of language policy in South African universities?
- How can family language ideologies be incorporated into a worthwhile language policy in higher education?

II. The Nexus of Top-Down and Bottom-Up Language Ideologies

To understand what we conceptualise as the 'missing link' towards the effective implementation of language policy in South African higher education, we draw on an apparatus that establishes the nexus between top-down and bottom-up language planning. We proffer this missing link as an explanation for the evident disconnect between language policy and practice in South African universities (Maseko & Siziba, 2023b). In language policy studies, the concepts of top-down and bottom-up generally denote the direction of 'planned change.' Accordingly, 'top-down' language planning is associated with language policy directives and mandates that originate from, or are formulated by, governments or related institutions. These are then handed down to the populace for implementation, often with little or no consultation or input from the general population (Alimi, 2016; Chríost, 2006). Because top-down language planning often involves governmental directives and decisions that are likely to impact a country as a whole, it is also referred to as macro language planning in other literature (Hodges & Prys, 2019; Maseko & Siziba, 2024). On the other hand, language planning decisions that originate from lower grassroots levels of society constitute what is referred to as bottom-up language planning, also used as a synonym for micro language planning (Alimi, 2016; Baldauf, 2006; Hodges & Prys, 2019). Bottom-up actors in language planning may include individual language speakers, families, communities and voluntary community-based non-governmental organisations. Although much of language planning has historically been conceptualised as a macro governmental activity in which decisions about language status and use are orchestrated by the elite and implemented through institutional channels, often without due consideration of language ideologies circulating at lower levels of society (Chríost, 2006; Maseko & Siziba, 2024), there is increasing acknowledgement of the influence of non-state and non-governmental actors towards the success or failure of such state-centric language policies (Liddicoat & Taylor-Leech, 2014; Maseko & Siziba, 2024).

The advent of the micro dimension of language planning thus represents a significant shift in language planning theory and practice (Ngulani & Maseko, 2026). Because it encapsulates initiatives and decisions embedded in community consensus and participation, often involving non-elites and ordinary members of society (Baldauf, 2006; Chríost, 2006; Liddicoat & Taylor-Leech, 2014; Ngulani & Maseko, 2026), it is also known as 'democratic language planning' (Alexander, 2004). By considering ideologies that are shaped by community members' lived experiences and socio-economic realities, micro language planning can potentially challenge the legitimacy of dominant societal languages by foregrounding marginalised languages (Alimi, 2016; Ngulani & Maseko, 2026). In this sense, it is considered truly organic, transformative and in synch with community aspirations (Liddicoat & Taylor-Leech, 2014; Ngulani & Maseko, 2026). However, micro language planning can also be contested, consequently reproducing and perpetuating hegemonic linguistic relations (Maseko & Siziba, 2024; Ngulani & Maseko, 2026).

Drawing a contrast between these two dimensions of language planning usually paints the macro as undemocratic, while the latter is often framed as inclusive, as it is based on consensual community ideologies (Ngulani & Maseko, 2026; van der Merwe, 2022). Consequently, top-down language planning is viewed as an activity associated with "a team of disinterested planners who investigate the linguistic, social, political and educational requirements and made decisions that were in the best interests of the state" (Baldauf, 2006, p. 154). In this study, we deploy the concepts of micro and macro language planning to reveal that the interaction between these two dimensions of language planning is an important consideration in the success of language policy implementation in universities. In particular, we argue that

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an appreciation of the dynamics of both bottom-up and top-down language planning is critical towards understanding the contradictions between university language policies and practice. The enduring ideologies which valorise English on the part of learners, thereby informing negative ideologies towards the use of indigenous African languages, do not necessarily begin and end within the education domain, but form part of a larger language socialisation process that also permeates the family level (Maseko, 2022; Maseko & Mlilo, 2022). Accordingly, the concept of family language policy as one dimension of bottom-up language planning is central to our argument.

Family language policy can be understood as the 'explicit and overt' (King & Fogle, 2013) as well as the 'implicit and covert' (Curdt-Christiansen, 2013b, 2016) planning among family members in various family configurations (Curdt-Christiansen & Palviainen, 2023; Palviainen & Räisä, 2023; Purkarthofer et al., 2022) regarding their language choices, use and literacy practices (Karpava et al., 2021). Family language policy is often influenced by prevailing extra-familial language ideologies that may reproduce the coloniality of language. The valorisation of English within family linguistic and literacy traditions as part of family language policy invariably shapes members' attitudes towards African indigenous languages, consequently influencing their disposition towards the use of these languages in various education levels (Maseko, 2022; Maseko & Mlilo, 2022). Conversely, languages that are valued within education systems tend to permeate aspirational family language policy as languages of social, educational and economic advantage (Hua & Wei, 2016; Seals & Beliaeva, 2023). This interaction suggests that there is an important nexus between top-down and bottom-up language planning that has to be incorporated into our understanding of the disconnection between university language policies and their effective implementation. Towards that endeavour, recognising the family as a key site where language ideologies are formed is essential to bridging the gap between language policy intentions and the communities' lived experiences and realities (Curdt-Christiansen, 2013a). This conceptual grounding thus facilitates our understanding of the centrality of micro language planning in catalysing social transformation (Makalela & McCabe, 2013). Ignoring the interaction between family language policy as a micro dimension and grassroots agency in any language planning endeavour renders it futile and disconnected from the very communities it seeks to serve (Ngulani & Maseko, 2026; Maseko & Siziba, 2024).

III. Language Policy and Practice Dialectics in South African Universities

The government of South Africa, through the DHET, has continued to agitate for the transformation of the linguistic landscape of higher education through various language policy proclamations. The Language Policy Framework for Public Higher Education Institutions (LPFPHEI) (DHET, 2020) emphasises the promotion of indigenous African languages in academic and administrative spaces of the university. To that end, the policy framework directs universities to adopt multilingual approaches that not only recognise and foreground African languages in their language policies but also treat multilingualism as a resource that can "facilitate cognitive development, epistemic access, inclusiveness, transformation, social cohesion and respect for all languages" (DHET, 2020, p. 13). Notably, this proclamation is attuned to national values espoused in the national Constitution of the Republic of South Africa. It is aligned with the recognition of the rights of all citizens to use their languages in a manner that fosters "parity of esteem" and equitable treatment as provided for in Section 6 (RSA, 1996). The framework thus seeks to:

> Promote multilingualism as a strategy to facilitate meaningful access and participation by university communities (students and staff) in various university activities, including cognitive and intellectual development. (DHET, 2020, p. 5)

In light of the historically disadvantaged position of indigenous African languages owing to the legacy of colonialism and apartheid in South Africa, the policy framework pledges to redress that predicament by elevating them to be languages of teaching and learning, research, and use in all aspects of the university.

While these directives have positively impacted language policy formulation in public universities in South Africa, implementation is a bane of most institutional language policies (Docrat & Kaschula, 2015; Dyers & Abongdia, 2015; Maseko & Siziba, 2024, 2023a). In their review of the original 2002 language policy directive culminating in the 2020 revision, the DHET concedes that "there has been little progress made in exploring and exploiting the potential of African languages in facilitating access and success in higher education institutions" (DHET, 2020, p. 5). The DHET also concedes that despite all previous efforts by the department and universities:

> Language continues to be a barrier to access and success for many students at South African higher education institutions. Despite their status as official languages, indigenous languages have, in the past and at present, structurally not been afforded the official space to function as academic and scientific languages. (DHET, 2020, p. 9)

The above concession by the DHET speaks to the problematique of language policies and their ineffective implementation in South African universities. Notably, while different institutions purport to promote multilingualism and indigenous African languages in their language policies, in practice, the dominance of English continues largely unchallenged (Antia & van der Merwe, 2019; Makalela & McCabe, 2013; Maseko & Siziba, 2023b). Institutional commitments to use African languages in official communication, curriculum delivery, or scholarly publishing have remained rhetorical and more of a band-wagoning and window-dressing strategy than a lived reality in most institutions (Maseko & Siziba, 2023a). This policy-practice mismatch thus underscores the symbolic nature of multilingualism in many higher education institutions. It reflects enduring colonial vestiges that have been reproduced in the post-colonial

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and post-apartheid epoch (Alexander, 2004; Makalela & McCabe, 2013; van der Merwe, 2022). Several scholars have shown that most university language policies are characterised by 'rosy ideals' that lack practical implementation. Chief among these is the observation that most language policies are awash with caveats and provisions that not only encourage discretionary implementation of language policies but also insulate university authorities from accountability (Maseko & Siziba, 2023a). In particular, most language policies contain escape clauses that can be used to justify non-implementation (Docrat & Kaschula, 2015; Maseko & Siziba, 2023a). There is a visible correlation between escape clauses in the wording of policy provisions and the DHET policy directive. The acknowledgement of the limitations of the language policy framework by the DHET animates this previous point:

> […] some of the limitations cited include lack of enforceable mechanisms built into the policy; lack of funding or incentives by government to support the implementation of the policy; as well as lack of clear directives within the policy on how multilingualism is to be realised within higher education institutions. (DHET, 2020, p. 10)

Most studies on language policy in South African higher education institutions have thus delved more into the mismatch between language policy and implementation in various university spaces. Besides the lack of incentives and limited government support for the implementation of university language policies, one frequently cited factor relates to language attitudes of students and staff towards English and indigenous African languages (Dyers & Abongdia, 2015; Madadzhe, 2019; Pillay & Yu, 2015; Prah, 2017; Siziba, 2024; Siziba & Nhongo, 2024) These studies suggest that in spite of government and institutional efforts to promote the use of African indigenous languages, globalisation processes, economic considerations and "negative attitudes towards African languages and a lack of will or confidence by both students and university officials to take the plunge in using African languages in teaching and learning" (Madadzhe, 2019, p. 205) militate against full and effective implementation of multilingualism. On the contrary, some studies demonstrate a continuous rise in the status of English and Afrikaans (Pillay & Yu, 2015). In some situations, Historically Black Universities (HBUs) are seen to be gravitating towards English monolingualism (Makalela & McCabe, 2013). For example, Pillay and Yu (2015) paint a somewhat grim picture regarding the number of students taking up courses in indigenous languages in South African universities. The negative perceptions about the value of indigenous African languages in contrast to English tend to result in most students opting to pursue non-African language degrees (Pillay & Yu, 2015), while the majority of students also prefer being taught in English rather than in indigenous African languages (Mutasa, 2014). This is despite the documented benefits of using one's mother tongue in the learning process. Similarly, scholars such as Thamaga-Chitja and Mbatha (2012) have also shown that students' perceptions of indigenous languages as terminologically and conceptually deficient often lead to a preference for English instruction. In addition to these inherited colonial era attitudes and ideologies, competence in English is desirable for its perceived economic opportunities and upward social mobility, a trait that indigenous African languages are thought to lack (Mutasa, 2014; Prah, 2017; Siziba & Maseko, 2024).

However, some studies have shown that despite the widely cited lack of policy implementation, all hope is not lost. Recent studies often cite the 'success story' of the implementation of isiZulu as an academic language at the University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN) as the cases that demonstrate the potential of language policy in enabling the effective use of indigenous African languages as languages of learning, teaching and research scholarship (Kamwendo et al., 2014; Khumalo & Nkomo, 2022; Zungu, 2021). For instance, Kamwendo et al. (2014) observe that the successful implementation of isiZulu as an additional language of instruction at UKZN helped "deflate[s] the myth that indigenous African languages can only serve in lower levels of education (such as primary schools) and not higher education" (Kamwendo et al., 2014, p. 75). Additionally, the introduction of a university-wide compulsory isiZulu module for undergraduate students at UKZN is seen as an intentional commitment towards its use as an academic language and its intellectualisation (Kamwendo et al., 2014; Zungu, 2021). However, this has not been without some problems. For example, Rudwick (2018) suggests that while this move can be applauded as showing the UKZN's commitment to turning policy into practice, some concerns regarding the choice of isiZulu as the only language to be promoted remain. In that regard, Rudwick (2018, p. 261) observes that disregarding the linguistic diversity of the staff and students risks restricting the university's purported Africanisation agenda into one of 'Zulufication' of the institution. 'Zulufication' denotes the projection of isiZulu as the legitimate African language of the university. This potentially stifles the growth and promotion of other indigenous languages spoken by staff and students at the institution, as more resources and attention are given to isiZulu. However, this does not diminish the UKZN's bold move towards the promotion of indigenous African languages. The North-West University has also been commended for its intentional drive to mainstream Sesotho and Setswana into teaching and learning, and the conduct of university business (Coetzee-Van Rooy, 2012; Maseko & Siziba, 2023a; Siziba & Nhongo, 2024).

Despite these efforts, the effective implementation of language policy in universities remains largely symbolic and ineffective. Thus far, the paper has shown that there is a prevalent preference for English as a medium of instruction, thus revealing the enduring coloniality of language (Veronelli, 2015) in higher education. We argue that, in part, ideologies that privilege English ahead of the indigenous African languages among students are imported from the home into the education system and vice versa. In the following section, we unpack the nexus between family language policy and the ineffective implementation of university language policies as one dimension of micro-macro interaction

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in language policy. We reveal how considerations of family-level language ideologies may be the important missing cog in university language policy implementation.

IV. Ineffective Language Policy Implementation: What Has Family Language Policy to Do With It?

Research on family language policy has shown that families and parents in particular play a crucial role in deciding what languages are used and valued within the families (Ahooja et al., 2022; Maseko & Mutasa, 2018; Schwartz & Verschik, 2013). Although parents' language ideologies often favour the use of family home languages for linguistic, cultural and identity preservation and continuity (Maseko & Mutasa, 2018), prevailing economic, sociopolitical and educational realities tend to influence parents' revision of their preferred family language policies and subsequent capitulation to wider societal language ideologies informed by aspirations for a better life (Hua & Wei, 2016; Seals & Beliaeva, 2023). Within the context of post-colonial South Africa, where English remains entrenched as a language of social and economic advantage, parents' aspirations for their children's success in schooling precipitate its intrusion into family language practices as a reproduction of the coloniality of language in the family (McKinney & Molate, 2022; Molate & McKinney, 2024). The valorisation of English within the family domain is thus part of children's language socialisation. Although some families have tried to resist the reproduction of coloniality within their family language practices (Molate & McKinney, 2024), the global dominance of English and its seemingly unassailable status in education systems across Southern Africa add to its valuation as the legitimate language of education, and the subsequent subservience and backgrounding of indigenous African languages in such high domain functions.

In light of the foregoing, we argue that the negative attitudes towards indigenous African languages, which likely result in the ineffective implementation of university language policies, are possibly nurtured within the family domain. As the adage goes, 'charity begins at home.' In the context of our paper, this implies that the embracing or shunning of indigenous African languages in higher education is to some degree a function of how the same languages are perceived and used in the homes of university staff and learners. As a dimension of family language policy, positive attitudes and embrace of indigenous languages at home will likely translate to their valuation in the education system. Additionally, if the education system embraces indigenous languages through fostering their use as academic languages, that will likely translate to their valorisation in the family space and beyond. This suggests that, rather than operating as distinct and contradictory notions, the bottom-up and top-down dimensions of language planning policy are in a state of constant interaction. On the other hand, if university language polices remain statements of intent that do not translate into recognisable practice (Docrat & Kaschula, 2015; Kaschula, 2016; Maseko & Siziba, 2023b; Siziba & Maseko, 2024), learners will likely not appreciate nor experience the actual value of indigenous languages, resulting in the 're-importation' of the dominant education language practices into the family sphere. Studies have thus shown that aspirational family language policies tend to overpower pro-home language family language policies (Maseko, 2022, 2024; Maseko & Mlilo, 2022; Seals & Beliaeva, 2023), as families often favour the language of social, educational and economic success and advancement.

The importance of the family institution in encouraging heritage language use, bonding and stabilisation has long been established in family language policy literature (Schwartz, 2010; Schwartz & Verschik, 2013). These studies are inspired by Fishman's observations that, for any language to survive intergenerational disruption, it has to be used by all three generations within the family as a language of everyday conversation (Fishman, 2001, 1991). On the contrary, if families abandon using their home languages in daily interactions, that often signals a negative forecast for the concerned languages in terms of their intergenerational transmission. Additionally, the intimacy and privacy of the family make it resistant to external influences "as it acts like a natural boundary, a bulwark against outside pressures" (Schwartz & Verschik, 2013, p. 2). In that regard, Romaine (2002) concurs that before languages can be introduced in education, they must first be embraced and valued by their speakers, and any effort for a top-down approach in revitalising indigenous languages may be futile if not supported by the speakers of the languages themselves, starting in the home:

> Looking to schools and declarations of official status to assist endangered languages is much like looking for one's lost keys under the lamp post because that is where the most light appears to shine, rather than because that is where they have been lost. Just as it is easier to see under the lamp post, it is far easier to establish schools and declare a language official than to get families to speak a threatened language to their children. (Romaine, 2002, pp. 3-4)

This observation suggests that the family is the first and foremost battleground for the valorisation of heritage languages. In other words, bottom-up language policies play a fundamental role in how indigenous languages are perceived in macro national-level institutions. However, while the family has been thought to be immune to outside influences (Fishman, 1991), recent scholarship has shown that family language policy is not entirely insulated from dominant language ideologies circulating in extrafamilial domains such as the education system (Maseko, 2022, 2024; Maseko & Mlilo, 2022; Purkarthofer et al., 2022). In fact, emerging studies show that the private/public dichotomy is increasingly becoming blurred when it comes to language socialisation, and that what happens in the family is very much a function of public sociopolitical discourses (Maseko, 2024; Purkarthofer et al., 2022). The coloniality of language experienced in public institutions certainly infiltrates the family as children tend to import these language ideologies, resulting in children socialising their parents into new ways of using and thinking about language (Fogle &

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King, 2013; Luykx, 2005; Maseko, 2022). In particular, parents' impact beliefs, that is, their perceptions of their ability to shape their children's language practices, can either galvanise their family language policies or result in parents' or caregivers' capitulation to children's use of the dominant societal language (Pérez Báez, 2013).

The foregoing demonstrates that family language policy may shape family members' attitudes and dispositions towards indigenous African languages in their later educational lives. As previous literature suggests, university students demonstrate a strong preference for English in academic circles in the place of indigenous African languages, thereby contradicting university language policies that seek to centre African languages (Madadzhe, 2019; Mutasa, 2014; Pillay & Yu, 2015; Prah, 2017). These attitudes are deeply entrenched and reflect broader societal ideologies shaped and sometimes nurtured within the family. In the absence of an engagement with language ideologies shaped within the family, top-down institutional decrees to promote African languages will likely continue being characterised by apathy or resistance, consequently reinforcing the perceived unimportance of African languages, resultantly undermining national language policy goals.

V. Reconciling University Language Policy Goals With Bottom-Up Ideologies

Thus far, we have argued that the evident mismatch between university language policy goals as articulated in the DHET language policy directives and individual university language policies potentially lies in misalignment between top-down policy objectives and bottom-up language practices couched in family language policy. Attitudes that are exhibited by university learners towards indigenous African languages are potentially 'home-grown' and exported into the education system. Conversely, the persistent use of English as the legitimate language in all levels of education potentially influences language practices at home, as aspirations for educational success compel families to accommodate English within their family language policies. Inadvertently, this reproduces and perpetuates the coloniality of language within the family sphere (McKinney & Molate, 2022; Molate & McKinney, 2024). While top-down language policymakers envisage a multilingual university that celebrates linguistic diversity, some families may prioritise dominant languages for pragmatic reasons (Hua & Wei, 2016; Maseko, 2024; Seals & Beliaeva, 2023). Although the DHET's language policy framework is thin on the role of communities and bottom-up agency towards the successful implementation of multilingual language policies that centre indigenous African languages, it is worth noting that it provides for the interaction of top-down policy directives and community agency. Notably, it reiterates that as part of its underpinning principles, it commits to "enhancing people-centeredness in addressing the interests, needs and aspirations of a wide range of language communities through ongoing dialogue and debate" (DHET, 2020, p. 14). Sadly, this is as far as it goes in its acknowledgement of the centrality of communities to foster successful implementation. There is no further elaboration on how universities can mobilise community and grassroots agency to reshape and influence attitudes towards indigenous languages from the bottom up. Such an elaboration would particularly be useful to provide support for universities in their community engagement efforts and conscientising communities on how to challenge and resist coloniality within the micro-domains of the community, starting at the family level.

Placing family language policy at the centre of national language policy imperatives and interventions could partly alleviate the ineffective implementation that results from bottom-up imported language ideologies. This could involve government and universities making provisions not just for community participation in the crafting of institutional policies but also extending language planning and policy efforts beyond campuses by engaging families and communities. This can be done through outreach programs, language awareness campaigns, and other participatory policy development strategies. The LPFPHEI should also be revised to explicitly spell out the role of communities in the crafting and implementation of multilingual language policies in universities. This is important in light of the observation that language planning endeavours that ignore or trivialise the dynamics of bottom-up agency risk futility and disconnection from the very communities it is intended to serve (Ngulani & Maseko, 2026). There is evidence to suggest that language policy initiatives rooted in community consensus and buy-in tend to face little resistance during implementation (Alimi, 2016; Baldauf, 2006; Hodges & Prys, 2019; Liddicoat & Taylor-Leech, 2014). Our argument, therefore, is that language policy should not only be conceived in a narrow sense that only puts the macro dimension at the fore. Rather, there is a need to consider how the macro dimension of language policy interfaces with ideologies that originate from the community and are concretely enacted and realised in family language policy and practices. It is such ideologies and practices which tend to be reproduced within macro-level institutions through the lack of conformity to language policy directives. If there are no tangible economic and educational benefits in using indigenous African languages, families are likely to continue shunning them for the preference of English. At best, African languages will be confined to informal domains. This does a great disservice to the cause of the intellectualisation of African languages. This is because parental aspirations for their children's upward social mobility are very much a factor that influences language ideologies within families, and such ideologies may be reproduced in language attitudes in higher education.

VI. Conclusion

Ineffective language policy implementation in South African higher education institutions is not just a function of inadequate resource allocation and support from macro government institutions, but also a result of a lack of consideration of bottom-up language policy dynamics and ideologies at the community and family levels. In this article,

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we have argued that worthwhile university language policies must reflect a deeper ideological interaction with family language practices, as these potentially inform attitudes and dispositions of learners towards indigenous African languages when they eventually reach university. In other words, valorisation of indigenous African languages must begin at home, where language ideologies are significantly shaped. By placing bottom-up language planning at the centre of language policy in higher education through fostering family and community involvement, there is a higher possibility for institutions to move towards language policies that are embraced as products of consensual community involvement. We submit that currently, the missing cog in the higher education language policy wheel is grassroots consultation and the critical role of families in shaping language attitudes. This conceptual study sought to understand how bottom-up language ideologies are potentially connected to the ineffective implementation of top-down language policy in South African higher education. An obvious limitation of this study is its lack of empirical data that speaks to how students and university staff experience the nexus of bottom-up language ideologies and the top-down university language policies. Future studies can thus include the voices of students and/or staff, and other stakeholders such as parents, to understand their experiences in navigating the use of indigenous African languages as mandated by macro-level policy proclamations and directives. An interesting angle could be to examine the perspectives of those who are themselves parents to understand how they reconcile their university language experiences with language use preferences for their children. This could further shed light on how lived experiences influence the language practices of university staff and students, and their positionings towards African languages in teaching and learning.

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Old Tales, New Skills: Exploring the Influence of Fables on EFL Writing Performance

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Abstract—**This quasi-experimental mixed-methods study investigated the efficacy of integrating fables into English as a Foreign Language (EFL) instruction to enhance high school students' writing proficiency and critical thinking. Conducted with 65 A1-level learners aged 15–16, this research employed pre- and post-tests to evaluate improvements in paragraph structure, grammatical accuracy, vocabulary range, and critical problem-solving skills. At the outset, participants demonstrated difficulties with verb tense consistency, sentence construction, and the logical organization of ideas. Thus, an eight-week intervention was implemented, using a series of fable-based activities that included moral interpretation, character analysis, and narrative reconstruction, providing repetitive and contextualized input and opportunities for meaningful writing practice. Results showed that this scaffolded approach significantly softened initial problems, leading to marked gains in writing coherence, cohesion, lexical diversity, syntactical precision, and expansion of vocabulary. Furthermore, the tasks were effective in enhancing critical thinking, students learned to formulate and justify arguments, interpret implicit messages, analyze narrative structures, and consider alternative perspectives. Students also strengthened their ability to evaluate information and recognize biases, producing more well-supported written responses. These findings affirmed fables as a powerful tool that effectively harmonizes linguistic development with critical reasoning. The study suggests further research into integrating AI with story-based writing activities to promote creativity and differentiated instruction.**

Index Terms—**critical thinking, EFL instruction, fables, problem solving, vocabulary**

I. Introduction

Writing in English as a foreign language (EFL) is a fundamental skill that enables learners to communicate effectively in academic, professional, and everyday contexts. As Arochman et al. (2024) point out, writing competence is essential for producing academic and professional texts such as reports, emails, and resumes within the professional and academic fields. Nonetheless, mastering writing skills is a process that requires not only instruction but also practice (Arianti, 2020). However, in the Ecuadorian EFL context, writing remains a challenging skill for many learners due to the limited opportunities to practice it in classroom settings. This situation is particularly evident in public educational institutions, where English instruction is often limited to approximately three hours per week. To address this limitation, narrative texts such as fables may serve as an effective pedagogical resource to support writing development in EFL classrooms (Guerrero Rodriguez & Moreira Baquerizo, 2025).

Humpherys and Babb (2020) define fables as narrative texts that convey moral lessons through characters, often represented by animals with human-like qualities, thus they become an effective resource to foster language development and critical thinking skills (Nippold & Marr, 2022). Besides, fables allow students to analyze, interpret, and create texts. Some researchers demonstrate the positive impact of using fables in the EFL classes. Additionally, Saputra et al. (2023) assert that fables help students to stimulate their ideas and increase their creativity in writing. Similarly, Smogorzewska (2014) indicates that creativity and critical analysis are fostered thanks to the incorporation of stories in the EFL classes. Because of fables' clear narrative structure and moral focus, they can provide meaningful contexts for language use, allowing learners to practice vocabulary, grammar, and textual organization while reflecting on the message of the story.

Although previous studies have explored the role of storytelling and narrative texts in language learning, limited research has examined the use of fables as a structured pedagogical resource to simultaneously enhance written production and critical thinking among beginner EFL learners in secondary education contexts. Therefore, this study aims to examine the effects of using fables as a pedagogical strategy to enhance EFL students' writing performance and foster their critical thinking and problem-solving skills. From this perspective, the following research questions were addressed:

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What are the effects of using fables on EFL students' writing performance in terms of paragraph structure, grammar, and vocabulary?

How do writing activities based on fables influence the development of EFL students' critical thinking and problem-solving skills?

II. Literature Review

A. The Role of Writing Skills in EFL Students

For English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students developing strong writing skills is fundamental to achieving communicative competence. These skills allow learners to move beyond simply understanding the language and actively express themselves in real-world situations in a written way. Writing is known as a productive skill because learners use it to actively create language, not just understand it (Harmer, 2007; Spratt et al., 2005).

Language classrooms develop this skill through activities such as paragraphs and essays. This skill permits students to experiment with the target language by expressing themselves through written words. Writing, according to Harmer (2007), results in a physical product that others can read and mentally process. Furthermore, it involves the act of generating language for communication. Through this skill, students can demonstrate both their understanding of grammar and vocabulary and showcase their critical thinking and problem-solving.

Investing in the development of productive skills promotes confidence and motivation in EFL learners. The ability to express oneself clearly and confidently fosters a sense of accomplishment and a deeper connection with the language. Additionally, research conducted by McDonough and Mackey (2016) highlights the importance of productive skills in language learning, leading to improved accuracy, enhanced EFL students' writing skills, and overall language proficiency.

B. The Benefits of Using Fables for EFL Learning

Fables are short, fictional narratives that typically feature animal characters exhibiting human traits. Also known as folktales, these stories convey moral lessons that have been transmitted across generations through oral and written traditions (Fahmy, 2021). In the context of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learning, fables offer significant pedagogical value due to their structured format, engaging content, and meaningful messages. Their concise and vivid nature, combined with clear narrative structures and moral outcomes, makes them particularly accessible and appealing to learners (Simon, 2022).

Unlike traditional instructional materials, fables capture learners' attention through relatable scenarios and symbolic characters, fostering a more enjoyable and motivating learning environment. Moreover, the universal themes commonly found in fables such as honesty, kindness, and perseverance resonate with learners from diverse cultural backgrounds, facilitating emotional engagement and personal connection to the content. The use of animal characters further supports classroom interaction, as it enables students to discuss abstract ideas and personal reflections in a less intimidating and more approachable manner. These interactions contribute to the development of productive skills, particularly speaking and writing, while also enhancing learners' ability to interpret moral meanings (Romdoni, 2020).

In addition, exposure to a variety of fables allows learners to gain cultural insights, promoting intercultural awareness and broadening their understanding of different worldviews (Simon, 2022). Retelling fables in their own words provides learners with opportunities to actively practice language production, reinforcing newly acquired vocabulary and grammatical structures encountered in the narratives (Fahmy, 2021). This process not only consolidates linguistic knowledge but also supports the development of fluency, as learners strive to communicate ideas effectively. Furthermore, the presence of explicit moral lessons offers learners a sense of purpose and achievement, which can enhance motivation and engagement.

Fables also contribute to vocabulary acquisition by presenting new lexical items in meaningful and contextualized situations, thereby facilitating comprehension and retention. Their narrative structure enables learners to observe grammatical patterns in authentic language use, supporting a deeper understanding of syntactic forms. Additionally, analyzing both the narrative and its underlying message encourages critical thinking and strengthens both oral and written communication skills. Through active engagement with the text, learners develop a more profound and integrated understanding of the language (Saputra, 2023). Overall, fables represent a versatile and effective pedagogical resource for EFL instruction, as they simultaneously promote language development, cultural awareness, and learner motivation.

C. The Implementation of Fables as a Strategy to Foster Writing Skills

Several studies have investigated the use of fables in the ELF learning process, and they have shown positive results. Meletiadou (2022) carried out a study to analyze the impact of storytelling on writing competence of undergraduates, concluding that storytelling fostered genuine educational experiences by encouraging students to incorporate their personal narratives into their academic work. Additionally, it engages students in authentic learning experiences while deepening their comprehension of theoretical frameworks and course material. In the same vein, fables are seen as a strategy to support EFL students to produce written language as well as to promote critical thinking by analyzing the moral of the stories. Under this line, Fahmy (2021) pointed out that fluency and vocabulary were boosted by rewriting

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the selected fable using students' words, it led to an increase in their vocabulary and enabled them to be aware of the correct paragraph structure without overlooking the cognitive skills such as critical thinking and comprehension (Aisyah et al., 2024). Besides that, fables promote independent thinking in students, guiding them to justify their opinions with evidence and to communicate their ideas clearly, precisely, and effectively (Nippold & Marr, 2022).

D. Writing Skills Through Critical Thinking in Fables

Education constitutes the means through which students can develop their creativity in terms of cognition, behavior, and attitude. Fables always include moral lessons that students can analyze and interpret. In this sense, students are provoked to show their critical thinking skills in a written form (Tolipova, 2024). Critical thinking in EFL writing refers to the ability of learners to interpret, analyze, evaluate, and synthesize information in English, leaving simple memorization apart to develop reasoning and problem-solving skills. It involves enhancing students' ability to form judgments, question assumptions, and supporting their ideas with evidence while using the target language in written form. Deepening critical thinking helps EFL learners become more autonomous and effective communicators in real-world contexts (Facione, 2015; Stapleton, 2011). Research also points out that the ability to think critically is connected to narrative discourse, as well as to the use of more complex sentence structures and specific vocabulary, such as metacognitive verbs (Nippold & Marr, 2022).

In this sense, to cultivate the critical thinking learning approach, teachers play a fundamental role helping students develop deep understanding through questioning, comparing perspectives, identifying moral ambiguities, analyzing language and symbolism, connecting to real life, comparing across fables, among others (Pardede, 2019). This will provide them with the necessary competencies to overcome challenges (Al-Zou'bi, 2021).

III. Methodology

A. Participants of the Study

The study adopted a one-group pre-and post-tests quasi-experimental design, which allowed the researchers to examine changes in students' writing performance before and after the intervention. According to Campbell and Stanley (1963), this design is frequently applied in educational research when it is not feasible to create control groups in classrooms settings. The implementation of a control group was not feasible due to the limited number of students enrolled in the course. Therefore, the study relied on within-group comparisons to examine changes in students' written output. Although the absence of a control group limits causal inference, the pre-and post-tests comparison provides valuable evidence regarding the potential effectiveness of the instructional intervention.

This study employed both qualitative and quantitative approaches. In this regard, Creswell (2014) states that integrating these approaches facilitates a comprehensive and holistic understanding of the research purpose. The study utilized purposive sampling, involving 65 A1-level EFL students enrolled in a public high school in Loja, Ecuador, where English is taught as a foreign language. The participants were between 15 and 16 years old and were in their second year of senior secondary education.

It is important to note that students in public high schools receive only three hours of English instruction per week, which is insufficient for the effective development of all language skills. In contrast, students in private high schools typically receive approximately eight hours of English instruction weekly. This disparity in instructional time may negatively impact the overall English language performance of students in public institutions.

Moreover, with regard to the sample, participants' privacy and confidentiality were fully ensured, as all data collected during this study were voluntary and anonymized in accordance with institutional ethical standards and the Declaration of Helsinki for research involving human subjects. All participants were informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any time without any academic consequences.

B. Procedure

This research started with a writing pre-test that consisted of three questions; the first task involved writing a paragraph on the moral of the fable "The Ant and the Grasshopper," allowing students to demonstrate their critical thinking. In the second question, students had to write the antonyms of some words from the fable with the purpose of showing their background vocabulary knowledge, and the third and last question included an exercise in which students had to complete some sentences using simple past. The writing test was scored on a 10-point scale. To evaluate students' writing performance, an analytic rubric was employed. This rubric assessed three key components of writing: paragraph structure, grammatical accuracy, and vocabulary use. Each component was rated on a scale from 0 to 3 points, resulting in a maximum raw score of 9 points. To ensure consistency with the institutional grading system, the total rubric score was subsequently converted to a 10-point scale.

The instrument was designed to capture students' ability to organize ideas coherently, apply accurate grammatical structures, and use appropriate vocabulary in their written responses. Specifically, paragraph structure assessed the organization and coherence of ideas, including the presence of a clear topic sentence and relevant supporting details. Grammar evaluated the accuracy of sentence construction and the appropriate use of verb tenses. Vocabulary measured lexical variety and the effective use of words related to the narrative context. Finally, the rubric was reviewed by experienced EFL instructors to ensure its clarity, validity, and alignment with the learning objectives of the intervention.

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The intervention involving fable-based activities lasted eight weeks, with the purpose of improving students' writing proficiency and fostering critical thinking and problem-solving through the use of six classic fables: *The Lion and the Mouse*, *The City Mouse and the Country Mouse*, *The Boy Who Cried Wolf*, *The Goose with the Golden Eggs*, *The Wolf in Sheep's Clothing*, and *The Fox and the Crow.* The selection of the six fables used in this study was guided by specific pedagogical and linguistic criteria to ensure their suitability for A1-level EFL learners. First, the chosen fables present simple and accessible language structures, including high-frequency vocabulary and basic grammatical patterns such as the simple past tense, which are aligned with learners' proficiency level. Second, each fable follows a clear and consistent narrative structure (introduction, conflict, resolution, and moral), which supports the development of paragraph organization and coherence in writing tasks. Additionally, the selected fables contain explicit moral lessons and well-defined conflicts, providing meaningful opportunities for students to engage in interpretation, critical reflection, and problem-solving activities. Finally, these fables address universal themes such as honesty, responsibility, and perseverance, facilitating learners' engagement and connection with the content. Therefore, their selection was not arbitrary but grounded in their potential to simultaneously support linguistic development and foster critical thinking skills in beginner EFL learners.

Throughout the intervention, students completed some writing activities to enhance their paragraph structure, grammar and cohesive devices, vocabulary, critical thinking skills, and problem-solving. These activities included writing a paragraph based on the moral of each fable, grammar exercises with open questions, sentence unscrambling, matching tasks, and vocabulary tasks centered on synonyms, antonyms, and definitions. Moreover, activities such as identifying a central problem in a fable and proposing alternative solutions were employed to foster problem-solving. Additional activities were rewriting the story from a different character's viewpoint or designing a new moral lesson based on alternative resolution. Finally, to assess the effectiveness of the intervention, a writing post-test identical in format to the pre-test was administered.

IV. Results

The data collected were analyzed statistically by using Jamovi software. Hence, to know the effectiveness of the use of fables for writing, it was applied first to pair sample t-tests with the corresponding scores from the pre- and post-tests.

TABLE 1
PAIRED-SAMPLES T-TEST RESULTS FOR PRE- AND POST-TEST WRITING SCORES

Test	Mean	Standard Deviation	T-value	p-value	Cohen's d
Pre-test [1]	5.23	0.59			
Post-test [1]	7.76	0.13	-32.70	< .001	5.88

A paired sample t-test was conducted to examine the effect of the fable-based intervention on students' written output. The results revealed a statistically significant improvement between the pre-test (M = 5.23, SD = 0.59) and the post-test (M = 7.76, SD = 0.13), t = -32.70, p < .001. Cohen's d indicated a very large effect size (d = 5.88), suggesting a substantial improvement in students' writing performance following the intervention. Such a large effect may be explained by the intensive practice provided through the fable-based writing activities and the relatively low variability observed in the post-test scores.

Additionally, a repeated-measures ANOVA was conducted to examine differences in students' performance across the three writing components assessed in the rubric: paragraph structure, grammar, and vocabulary. This analysis aimed to identify which dimension of writing showed the greatest improvement because of the fable-based activities. The results of the analysis are presented in Table 3, while Table 2 summarizes the descriptive statistics obtained during the intervention.

TABLE 2
DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS OF STUDENTS' PERFORMANCE IN THE FABLE WRITING TASKS

Aspects	Mean	SD	Min	Max	95% CI
Paragraph Structure	2.52	0.20	2.13	2.7	0.21
Grammar	2.77	0.18	2.5	3.03	0.19
Vocabulary	2.92	0.16	2.73	3.2	0.17
Total	8.20	0.52	7.36	8.93	0.55

Table 2 illustrates the average scores in each analyzed aspects, whereas the 95% confidence interval indicates the probable range where the population means lie, based on a 95% confidence level. All the averages demonstrated a significant increase in each evaluated aspect of writing. Hence, in paragraph structure, the mean was 2.52 and the standard deviation was 0.20, which demonstrates a consistent progression during the intervention. With reference to grammar, the mean was 2.77 and the standard deviation was 0.18. In comparison to paragraph structure, the outcomes evidence a more noticeable and reliable advancement. Regarding vocabulary, the mean obtained was 2.92, and the

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standard deviation was 0.16. These results reflect the enhancement of the participants of this study by learning new terms.

TABLE 3
RESULTS OF THE REPEATED MEASURES ANOVA COMPARING PARAGRAPH STRUCTURE, GRAMMAR, AND VOCABULARY

	F	df	p
Writing Component	46.99	(2,10)	< .001

A repeated-measures ANOVA was conducted to compare students' performance across the three writing components: paragraph structure, grammar, and vocabulary. The analysis revealed a statistically significant difference among the components, $F(2,10) = 46.99$, $p < .001$. Among the evaluated components, vocabulary obtained the highest mean score, suggesting that narrative-based activities may particularly support lexical development in beginner EFL learners.

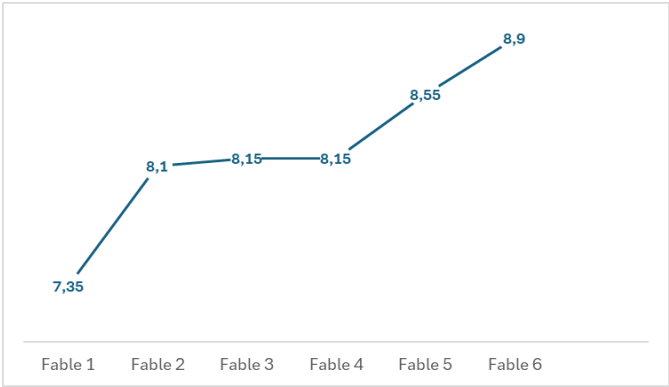


Figure 1. Progression of Students' Writing Performance Across the Fable-Based Writing Activities

The figure above clearly shows the overall writing improvement by using fables. The total mean was 8.20, which validates the overall improvement in writing by using fables considering the three aspects: paragraph structure, grammar, and vocabulary. The low standard deviation indicates the effectiveness of using fables, as the results were consistent among participants.

V. DISCUSSION

Regarding initial participants' knowledge based on their writing skills, the outcomes demonstrated the critical obstacles that they presented with vocabulary usage, paragraph organization, and basic grammar structures knowledge. According to Setiani et al. (2024), EFL students struggle with writing because they usually meet various problems related to grammar use, vocabulary, and content, which cause a kind of frustration when they are asked to produce; therefore, writing is not as easy as it seems. The most prevalent mistakes found in the pre-test were in the use of the past simple tenses (e.g., "The boy who cry wolf" instead of "cried") and present simple tenses in third person singular (e.g., "The lion live in the forest" instead of "lives"). Students also had trouble with simple conjunctions ("and" or "but" The city mouse liked rich, delicious food and he did not like the dangers of the city. Instead of writing correctly: The city mouse liked rich and delicious food, but he did not like the dangers of the city.); using singular and plural forms of nouns ("a golden eggs" instead of "golden eggs") and wrong ordering of adjectives and nouns (A tiny small mouse helped the lion instead of A small tiny mouse helped the lion). Their ability to construct coherent sentences was hindered by these grammatical errors. This issue may be attributed to the influence of the students' mother tongue, as learners often tend to transfer sentence structures and linguistic patterns from their first language, as noted by Alrashed (2024).

Additionally, students' paragraphs frequently lack cohesive structure, topic sentences, conclusion sentences, and adequate supporting facts. Because concepts were often fragmented or unconnected, there was a lack of coherence and unity. Students' low results were also influenced by their narrow vocabulary range, as they used repetitive or too basic terms. These difficulties can be linked to a lack of exposure to systematic writing practice, a poor understanding of core grammatical rules, and a lack of confidence when using the target language (Alrashed, 2024).

However, after the intervention, students showed significant improvement, particularly in grammar accuracy, paragraph organization, and vocabulary usage, as a result of the incorporation of fables. Narrative texts such as fables often present clear and structured language patterns that provide learners with models of coherent discourse and grammatical usage. When students retell or rewrite these stories, they practice verb tenses, sentence structure, and lexical choices in meaningful contexts, which can facilitate writing development in EFL classrooms (Ajabshir, 2024). Thus, in this research, errors in the present simple and past simple tenses were greatly reduced. Likewise, when learning a language, students may doubt how to use tenses in writing a sentence. This result can be explained based on the input received.

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These improvements can be justified by Krashen's Input Hypothesis, which emphasizes the role of comprehensible input in second language acquisition (Krashen, 1985). The use of fables provided learners with meaningful narrative input in which grammatical structures and vocabulary were presented in contextualized forms. Such exposure likely facilitated learners' understanding of how language operates within coherent narratives, supporting the development of their writing abilities.

In this sense, Fitria (2020) asserts that the simple past tense is used to refer to activities or situations that began and ended in the past. In the same line, in simple past tense, students usually write recount texts that have happened in a certain order. Consequently, students' constant errors will help them to master the correct form to use later. The intervention process also helped students to have deeper knowledge of grammar, which allowed them to create sentences that were clearer and more meaningful. Additionally, the correct use of conjunctions significantly improved as students recognized their role in establishing logical relationships between ideas and enhancing textual cohesion. Conjunctions function as cohesive devices that organize discourse and contribute to the overall quality and readability of written texts (Zhang & Zhang, 2023). Furthermore, students' paragraphs had a more cohesive structure, with clear topic sentences, pertinent supporting details, and effective concluding statements. All mentioned previously improved their writing's cohesiveness and cohesion by connecting concepts logically and developing them fully. Fables typically follow a clear storyline from introduction through conflict to resolution, which helps learners understand how coherent texts are built. By analyzing how the elements in the story are logically connected, students can improve their use of linking words and transitions that ensure smooth flow in their writing (Briesmaster & Etchegarar, 2017).

Additionally, students broadened their vocabulary by using more descriptive and varied terms (e.g., "clever fox," "greedy farmer") to describe complex thoughts. Fables offer learners a valuable chance to encounter new vocabulary, including terms linked to values and key messages. Working with such texts helps students reinforce word meanings by seeing them applied in relevant and engaging situations (Dewi et al., 2022; Gao et al., 2023; Razaq et al., 2022). These advancements can be attributed to the intervention's emphasis on writing practice, specific grammar instruction, and vocabulary-building activities centered on engaging the six fables. Furthermore, reading the fables provided students with the appropriate input and consequently served as a model for their writing practice. As confirmed by Qatrinada and Apoko (2024), narrative texts play a crucial role in improving English writing proficiency; as students grasp the language features such as tense usage, text structure, and grammar. These results are aligned with the findings of De Wilde (2023), who highlights that EFL learners working with narrative-based texts such as stories can activate diverse linguistic resources and organize ideas within meaningful narrative structures, which supports the development of written expression.

The improvement of students' critical thinking skills was also reflected in the qualitative analysis of their written responses. In the pre-test, students tended to provide very simple and literal answers, often limited to basic statements such as "the moral is work hard" or "the fox is bad." In contrast, post-intervention responses, although still linguistically simple due to their A1 level, showed clearer reasoning and interpretation. For example, one student wrote: "The grasshopper did not work, so he was hungry. This shows we must prepare for the future." This response reflects an emerging ability to establish cause–effect relationships and interpret the message of the story. Similarly, other students began to explain their ideas using simple connectors such as "because" and "so," which indicates a progression from isolated statements to more connected reasoning. These findings provide concrete evidence that fable-based writing activities can support the development of early-stage critical thinking skills in beginner EFL learners. Furthermore, the findings can be interpreted through the lens of sociocultural theory, which highlights the role of interaction and scaffolding in learning (Vygotsky, 1978). Throughout the intervention, students received guidance from the teacher while engaging in narrative interpretation and writing activities. This instructional support may have helped learners gradually develop their writing abilities by providing structured opportunities to practice language in meaningful contexts.

In the first fable activity, most of the participants could recognize the intention and the role of each character in the fables and what could be the consequences of changing the characters' roles. In the same token, Nippold and Marr (2022) confirm that engaging students in working with fables supports their ability to reflect on moral messages, examine character roles, and consider various possible outcomes, which contributes to the development of critical thinking. In almost every fable, there is a problem that the characters must solve. The way they solve (or fail to solve) the problem is what teaches morals.

As for the second activity, participants generated a dissimilar ending to the fable, provoking them to use their critical thinking and problem-solving skills. Through critical thinking, students were equipped to develop their responsibility and competencies, which consequently led to better learning. It is necessary to consider critical thinking as one of the key goals of education; hence, it should receive more devotion to guarantee that students present good arguments when expressing their ideas. In this sense, fables or short stories can help learners to boost their critical thinking (Sahibzada et al., 2020). These results can also be interpreted through Swain's Output Hypothesis, which emphasizes the importance of language production in second language development (Swain, 1995). Writing activities based on fables required students to actively produce language, organize ideas, and express interpretations of the stories' moral messages. This process likely encouraged learners to notice gaps in their linguistic knowledge and refine their use of grammatical structures and vocabulary.

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The subsequent activities were focused on boosting their creativity and imagination since they provided different morals. Students were required to use the moral of the fables to write a paragraph interpreting the message in each of them since the moral lessons at the end of each fable prompted students to reflect and form their own perspectives. Furthermore, while doing these activities students used their ability to reason, build arguments, and support their opinions with justification that are essential skills for critical thinking (Praimahaniyom et al., 2023; Sahibzada et al., 2020).

VI. Conclusions

The outcomes of this research demonstrated that the use of fables as instructional material had a beneficial impact on EFL students' writing performance. In the beginning of the intervention, participants struggled with the use of verb tenses, sentence construction, and logical organization of ideas, which were caused by limited linguistic exposure, L1 interference, and lack of writing practice. However, the previous issues were mitigated by the implementation of fables since they were used repetitively and contextualized, which offered participants understandable input and meaningful opportunities to implement them in their writing practice. Fables proved to be effective instructional resources that not only enriched vocabulary and supported grammar but also were an effective scaffolding tool to foster coherence and cohesion in EFL writing. Overall, writing activities based on fables made a significant contribution to boosting students' critical thinking and problem-solving skills. These activities promoted participants to develop arguments and justify their perspective performing critical thinking skills.

The improvement of these skills was achieved gradually by developing the capability to interpret morals, analyze character roles, and consider alternative outcomes. The activities based on fables demonstrated to be an effective resource for improving cognitive development. Furthermore, by engaging students with fables, they developed skills in analyzing narrative structures, distinguishing between explicit and implicit messages, and reflecting the ethical aspects of storytelling. This type of analysis also strengthened students' ability to critically evaluate information sources, recognize biases, and produce well-supported written responses.

Despite the positive outcomes reported in this study, several limitations should be acknowledged. First, the research was conducted in a single educational institution, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to other educational contexts. Second, the sample size was relatively small and consisted of students from only one class, which may restrict the broader applicability of the results. Third, the study employed a one-group pre- and post-tests design without a control group, which may introduce potential threats to internal validity such as practice effects or maturation over time. Finally, the instructional intervention was implemented over a relatively short period of time, which may not fully capture the long-term impact of narrative-based instruction on writing development. Nevertheless, the findings provide valuable insights into the potential benefits of integrating narrative texts such as fables into EFL writing instruction, particularly in contexts where instructional time is limited.

Additional studies are suggested to investigate the ways that AI could be integrated into story-based and writing activities, considering the age of learners, their language proficiency level, and other learning concerns. Such an inquiry would contribute to understanding how AI-led storytelling platforms can promote creativity, improve language output, and enable differentiated instruction across education.

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Proficiency-Level Differences in the Use of Temporal Adverbials by Albanian Learners of English

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Abstract—**This study investigates how Albanian university students at different proficiency levels (first, second, and third year) express temporal reference in English writing, examining whether lower-proficiency learners rely more heavily on explicit temporal adjuncts (e.g., yesterday, last week) while more proficient learners shift toward accurate tense-aspect verb morphology. A cross-sectional design was employed with 36 Albanian ESL university students divided into three proficiency groups (n=12 per year). Participants completed three written narrative tasks targeting past, present, and future temporal reference. A total of 684 sentences were analyzed for temporal adjunct type and frequency, as well as verb tense and aspect distribution across proficiency levels. Temporal adjunct usage followed an unexpected non-linear, inverted-U pattern, peaking at the intermediate level (70.7% in Year 2) before declining in Year 3 (65.4%). Despite advancing proficiency, all groups maintained 75%–80% reliance on simple tenses, with progressive aspect usage remaining low (5.7%–7.6%) and perfect aspect emerging only in Year 3 (7.2%), driven primarily by past perfect acquisition. These findings challenge linear acquisition models, suggesting that temporal expression development in Albanian ESL learners involves dynamic interaction between lexical and morphological systems rather than simple substitution. The persistent reliance on simple tenses across all levels points to enduring L1 transfer effects from Albanian's implicit aspectual system, with Year 2 representing a critical reorganization phase in temporal expression development.**

Index Terms—**tenses, temporality development, temporal adjuncts, Albanian (L1), English (L2)**

I. Introduction

The acquisition of temporal reference systems represents one of the most complicated areas of second language development, which involves the complexity of the interplay of morphological tense-aspect markings and lexical temporal expressions. Temporal expression acquisition involves all linguistic means of reference to time, with research showing that adult learners express temporality through various developmental stages (Dietrich et al., 1995). For Albanian learners of English as a Second Language (ESL), this complexity is amplified by fundamental structural differences between the two languages' temporal systems.

Based on Bardovi-Harlig (1992), temporal adjuncts play a crucial role in the development of temporal expression, often representing mechanisms that morphological systems are still developing. While extensive research has focused on morphological tense-aspect acquisition, the functional roles of temporal adjuncts in second language learners' encoding of temporality remain underexplored, particularly across different proficiency levels (Götz et al., 2019).

Albanian presents a particular case for temporal acquisition research due to its complex aspectual system. Albanian distinguishes aspect implicitly (without any morphological marker), creating a more implicitly nuanced temporal framework than English. This richness may influence how Albanian learners approach English temporal expression, potentially leading to strategies involving the usage of explicit temporal adjuncts. Recent studies of Albanian ESL learners reveal systematic difficulties with English verb tenses, with errors being particularly prominent in Past and Present Simple tenses (Këpuska & Toçi, 2024). However, the developmental relationship between temporal adjunct use and morphological tense marking across proficiency levels remains unexplored.

This study explores how Albanian university students across different academic years express temporal spheres, past, present, and future, in written narratives, with particular focus on their reliance on explicit temporal adjuncts versus morphological tense-aspect markings. The research examines whether lower proficiency learners demonstrate greater dependency on temporal adjuncts to establish time reference due to developing control over English tense-aspect morphology, while advanced learners show more sophisticated temporal morphological encoding with reduced reliance

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on explicit temporal adjuncts. Consequently, the hypotheses guiding this research are as follows:

H1. First-year students will display greater reliance on temporal adjuncts to establish time references due to developing control over tense-aspect morphology.

H2. Third-year students will more accurately and naturally use tense and aspect marking on verbs, with a reduced dependency on adjuncts.

II. Literature Review

The acquisition of temporal reference systems represents a complex development process involving the interplay between morphological tense-aspect marking and lexical temporal expressions. Klein (1994) established a foundational framework distinguishing between external temporal features (tense, grammatical aspect, temporal adjuncts) and internal temporal characteristics (lexical aspect). Adult L2 learners progress through three developmental modes: the pragmatic mode (early stage, relying on discourse sequencing), the lexical mode (explicit use of temporal adjuncts), and the morphological mode (consistent tense-aspect inflection) (Klein & Perdue, 1997; Dietrich et al., 1995). Importantly, learners do not abandon their earlier strategies; rather, the ratio of lexical to morphological marking shifts as proficiency increases (Bardovi-Harlig, 1992).

A. Morphological Expression and Lexical Temporal Adjuncts

English employs an explicit tense-aspect system combining tense inflections with aspectual distinctions makers through constructions like be + -ing (progressive) and have + past participle (perfect). The Aspect Hypothesis (Andersen & Shirai, 1994, 1996) posits that learners initially associate perfective past marking with telic predicates (achievements, accomplishments), while progressive aspect emerges predominantly with atelic activity verbs. This hypothesis receives substantial empirical support, suggesting universal principles underlying temporal acquisition (Bardovi-Harlig & Comajoan-Colomé, 2020). However, advanced learners eventually extend morphological marking across all lexical aspectual classes, achieving target-like distribution (Robison, 1995). A recent scientometric synthesis of four decades of research confirms that the Aspect Hypothesis remains the most frequently tested framework in L2 tense-aspect morphology studies, while also noting a gradual shift from form-focused approaches toward meaning-oriented and usage-based perspectives (Almakrob & Alduais, 2025).

At the same time, temporal adjuncts serve crucial scaffolding functions during early and intermediate development. Bardovi-Harlig (1992) demonstrates that lower proficiency learners exhibit high reliance on explicit temporal adjuncts (e.g., yesterday, last week) to compensate for underdeveloped morphological control. Critically, at lower proficiency, temporal adjuncts correlate with lower rates of past tense markings on verbs, suggesting lexical markers substitute for morphological marking; however, at higher proficiency, this pattern reverses (Yang & Huang, 2004). While absolute adverbial frequency remains stable across proficiency levels, the adverb-to-adverb ratio decreases as learners develop morphological competence, reflecting reduced dependency on explicit temporal adjuncts (Bardovi-Harlig, 1992, 2000). Additionally, types of adjuncts evolve: beginners favor deictic expressions (yesterday, tomorrow), while advanced learners employ complex temporal constructions (subordinate clauses expressing simultaneity, anteriority).

B. Albanian Learners and L1 Transfer

Albanian presents a particular case for temporal acquisition research due to its implicit aspectual system. Unlike English's explicit aspect marking, Albanian distinguishes aspect implicitly through form alternations without any dedicated morphological markers, creating a more nuanced temporal framework (Pinari, 2014). The Albanian system includes multiple past tense forms, e shkuar (past simple), e kryer (present perfect), and më se e kryer (past perfect), expressing aspectual distinctions through form variations and lexical connotations rather than aspect morphemes, contrasting sharply with English's explicit marking.

Recent studies reveal systematic patterns in Albanian ESL learners' temporal expression. Këpuska and Toçi (2024) documented high error rates in English tense usage, particularly in Past Simple and Present Simple. Similarly, Këpuska's (2024) investigation through the Aspect Hypothesis lens revealed that while learners' past tense usage largely aligns with predictions (marking achievements and accomplishments), their development exhibits greater variability than native patterns. Notably, Albanian learners overextend the -ing marker to stative verbs while demonstrating limited application to achievement and accomplishments, deviating from typical predictions. Errors stem from structural differences: Albanian's implicit system leads learners to rely on simple aspect forms for meanings English encodes through continuous aspect, resulting in underuse of progressive constructions and confusion with perfect aspects (Këpuska, 2024).

C. Research Gap and Study Rationale

While extensive research examines morphological tense-aspect acquisition and the Aspect Hypothesis across diverse L1-L2 combinations, a significant gap remains regarding the developmental relationship between the use of temporal adjuncts and morphological acquisition across proficiency levels for Albanian ESL learners. Although Bardovi-Harig (1992, 2000) established that temporal adjuncts serve crucial scaffolding roles, Ellis and Sagarra (2010) demonstrated that lexical cues can block morphological acquisition; few studies systematically examine how explicit temporal adjuncts' reliance evolves as morphological competence develops across all three temporal spheres (past, present, and future).

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Furthermore, recent work examining learners with typologically diverse L1 backgrounds, including languages with morphologically rich aspectual systems, demonstrates that L1 aspectual categories significantly shape the route of tense-aspect acquisition in ways not fully accounted for by universal models (Alekseyeva & Mikhaylova, 2023; Ayoun, 2025).

For Albanian learners specifically, no research has investigated whether their implicit L1 Aspectual system influences the strategic use of temporal adjuncts versus morphological marking across proficiency levels. Given that Albanian encodes aspect implicitly while English marks it explicitly, Albanian learners may demonstrate unique developmental patterns. This present study addresses this gap by examining how Albanian university students at different proficiency levels express temporal spheres in written narratives, testing whether lower proficiency learners demonstrated greater dependency on temporal adjuncts (H1), while advanced learners show more accurate morphological marking with reduced adverbial reliance (H2). This investigation contributes to understanding universal L2 temporal acquisition principles and Albanian-specific developmental patterns.

III. Methodology

This study employed a cross-sectional design to investigate the development of temporal sphere expressions among Albanian ESL learners at different proficiency levels. Written narrative tasks were used to elicit natural language production across three temporal domains (past, present, and future), allowing for systematic analysis of tense-aspect morphology and temporal adjunct usage.

A. Participants

In total, thirty-six Albanian ESL students from a university English program participated in this study. Participants were grouped by year of study in order to represent various proficiency levels. First-year students (n=12, lower-intermediate), second-year students (n=12, intermediate), and third-year students (n=12, upper-intermediate/advanced). Gender was not considered a relevant variable for this study. All participants have studied English for approximately 8-12 years in formal classroom settings. None had lived in an English-speaking country or used English as their primary means of communication outside the educational context.

B. Data Collection

Data collection took place in faculty settings during regular class hours over approximately 40-minute sessions. Participants completed three written narrative tasks designed to elicit temporal sphere expression. The first task required participants to describe a past event from their personal experience. For the second task, students wrote about their current self-perception and present circumstances. The final task asked participants to describe future academic career plans. This sequence systematically targeted past, present, and future temporal references to capture natural usage patterns across all three temporal spheres.

Participants were informed that their narratives would be used for research purposes and that results would remain anonymous. No identifying information was collected except the year of study, and the participation was voluntary. Students were encouraged to ask questions during the session for any clarification.

C. Data Analysis

The collected narratives underwent systematic linguistic analysis to examine temporal expression patterns across proficiency levels. Each narrative was first segmented into individual sentences, which served as the primary unit of analysis. Within each sentence, all verb phrases were identified and categorized according to their tense usage and accompanying temporal adjuncts.

The analysis focused specifically on the presence and type of temporal adjuncts when explicitly stated. Four distinct temporal expression categories were examined: frequency markers (such as always, often, sometimes), duration indicators (such as for two hours, all day), point-in-time references (like yesterday, at 3 PM, last week), and sequence markers (such as then, after that, before). Through this categorization system, a comprehensive mapping of how students express different relationships across different proficiency levels has been elicited.

Each identified verb phrase, tense form, and temporal adjunct was systematically coded and quantified by category. The coding process captured both the morphological complexity of verb forms and the reliance on explicit temporal adjuncts. Raw frequencies were calculated for each temporal category and converted to percentages to enable meaningful comparison across the three proficiency groups. This quantitative approach provides the foundation for examining developmental patterns in temporal sphere expression, with results presented in both numerical and percentage formats to highlight trends across beginner, intermediate, and advanced learners.

IV. Results

This section presents a comprehensive analysis of temporal adjunct usage patterns among Albanian learners of ESL across three proficiency levels. The analysis examines 684 sentences produced by 36 participants (12 per year group) completing three temporally-distinct writing tasks: recounting a past event, describing a present situation, and outlining future plans. The data reveal both quantitative changes in temporal adjunct frequency and qualitative shifts in the types and complexity of temporal expressions as learners progress through university studies. Each year, the group's

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performance is analyzed separately before presenting a cross-sectional comparison that shows the development trajectory of temporal reference acquisition.

A. Year 1 Analysis

The first-year group represents learners at the initial stages of university-level English study, providing a baseline for understanding temporal expression development in this population. Their writing demonstrates fundamental temporal marking abilities while revealing areas of ongoing development.

(a). Overall Temporal Adjunct Use

The analysis of Year 1 data comprised 192 sentences produced by 12 first-year undergraduate students across three writing tasks. The distribution of temporal marking in these texts reveals that the majority of sentences contained some form of temporal reference with varying degrees of explicitness. Table 1 presents the detailed distribution of temporal adjunct usage.

TABLE 1
TEMPORAL ADJUNCT USAGE IN YEAR 1 TEXTS

Measure	**n**	**%**
Sentences with explicit temporal adjuncts	127	66.15%
Sentences with implied temporal reference	21	10.94%
Sentences without temporal adjuncts	44	22.92%
Total sentences	**192**	**100.00%**

The findings that two-thirds of sentences (66.1%) contain explicit temporal adjuncts indicate that even at the earliest university level, learners demonstrate a consistent need for temporal grounding in their writing. The additional 10.9% of sentences with implied temporal references suggests that learners sometimes rely on contextual or sequential interpretation rather than explicit marking. Notably, less than one-quarter of sentences (22.9%) lacked any temporal marking, indicating relatively strong temporal awareness. Overall, Year 1 was characterized by substantial heterogeneity, with individual differences spanning in all the measured dimensions. Productions ranged from just 3 sentences to 24 sentences, with a mean of 16 sentences per student. A total of 200 temporal adjuncts were identified across all texts, indicating that some sentences contained multiple temporal adjuncts.

(b). Temporal Adjunct Types

From the elicited learners' interlanguage, various temporal adjuncts have been identified. There is a noticeable preference in type distribution, with point-in-time markers dominating.

TABLE 2
DISTRIBUTION OF TEMPORAL ADJUNCT TYPES

Adjunct Type	**Count**	**%**	**Examples from learners' interlanguage**
Point in time	84	42%	*"last summer", "in 2022", "yesterday", "at noon", "right now"*
Sequence	46	23%	*"then", "after that", "first", "finally", "before"*
Frequency	40	20%	*"always", "every day", "usually", "never", "sometimes"*
Duration	30	15%	*"for 2 years", "all day", "for hours", "a week"*
Total	**200**	**100%**	

The dominance of point-in-time adjuncts (42%) reflects learners' preference for concrete temporal anchoring. These markers appeared across all three tasks but were particularly concentrated in Task 1 (past events), where students needed to establish specific temporal settings for their narratives. Sequence markers (23%) played a crucial role in narrative organization, while frequency adjuncts (20%) were primarily used in Task 2 to describe habitual present activities. Duration adjuncts were the least common (15%), suggesting that expressing temporal extent remains challenging for Year 1 learners.

(c). Verb Tense Distribution

Overall, Year 1 students produced 467 finite verb phrases across their texts, demonstrating clear patterns in tense selection. However, there is an overwhelming reliance on the use of simple tenses.

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TABLE 3
VERB TENSE DISTRIBUTION IN YEAR 1

Tense/Aspect	Count	%	Primary task association
Simple present	196	41.79%	Task 2 (present), Task 3 (future plans)
Simple past	158	33.69%	Task 1 (past events)
Future (will)	55	11.73%	Task 3 (future plans)
Modal verbs	23	4.90%	Task 3 (possibility/ability)
Present progressive	19	4.05%	Task 2 (present/ongoing events)
Past progressive	8	1.71%	Task 1 (past events/background events)
Present perfect	6	1.28%	Cross-task (experience/relevance)
Future progressive	2	0.43%	Task 3 (future plans/future ongoing)
Past perfect	2	0.43%	Task 1 (anteriority)
Total	**469**	**100.00%**	

The huge reliance on simple tenses (74% combined simple present and past) indicates Year 1 learners primarily employ basic temporal expression strategies. Progressive aspect accounts for only 5.75% of verb phrases, while perfect aspects represent 1.72%, implying a limited mastery of aspectual distinctions.

B. Year 2 Analysis

The second-year group represents learners at an intermediate stage of development. Their production reveals both quantitative increases in temporal marking and qualitative shifts in expression strategies that suggest growing metalinguistic awareness of English temporal systems.

(a). Overall Temporal Adjunct Use

The analysis of Year 2 data comprised 205 sentences produced by 12 second-year undergraduate students across three writing tasks. The distribution of temporal marking in these texts reveals an increased temporal marking compared to Year 1. As shown in Table 4, the distribution of temporal adjuncts usage demonstrates increased explicitness in temporal expressions.

TABLE 4
TEMPORAL ADJUNCT USAGE IN YEAR 2 TEXTS

Measure	n	%
Sentences with explicit temporal adjuncts	145	70.7%
Sentences with implied temporal reference	11	5.3%
Sentences without temporal adjuncts	49	24%
Total sentences	**205**	**100.00%**

The increase to 70.7% explicit temporal adjunct usage represents a substantial 4.6% rise from Year 1's 66.1%, suggesting that learners at this intermediate level have developed heightened awareness of the importance of temporal specification in their writing. Another shift is noticed in the dramatic decrease in implied temporal reference, falling from 10.9% in Year 1 to 5.3% in Year 2. This shift toward explicitness indicates that Year 2 learners actively favor overt temporal marking over contextual inference.

(b). Temporal Adjunct Types

In Year 2, learners' interlanguage, 213 temporal adjuncts revealed evolving preferences in how learners conceptualize and express temporal relationships. While point-in-time markers continued to dominate, the distribution of adjunct types shows notable shifts that suggest developing temporal expression strategies.

TABLE 5
DISTRIBUTION OF TEMPORAL ADJUNCT TYPES

Adjunct Type	Count	%	Examples from learners' interlanguage
Point in time	87	40.8%	*"last year", "during the summer season", "at the moment", "right not"*
Frequency	54	25.4%	*"Constantly", "regularly", "sometimes", "each time"*
Sequence	41	19.2%	*"then", "after that", "before creating", "as soon as"*
Duration	31	14.6%	*"for hours", "during the month", "for a while", "several days"*
Total	**213**	**100%**	

The most striking change from Year 1 is an increase in the frequency of adjuncts from 20% to 25.4%, suggesting that Year 2 learners have developed greater facility with expressing habitual actions and iterative events. This increase coincides with more sophisticated frequency markers such as "*constantly"* and "*regularly"* replacing the simpler "*always"*

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and "*sometimes"* predominant in Year 1. The slight decrease in point-in-time adjuncts (from 42% to 40%) and sequence markers (from 23% to 19%) suggests a realignment of temporal expression strategies rather than the simple addition of new forms. Duration adjuncts remained stable at 14.6%, even though the examples show more precise duration specifications ("for several days") compared to Year 1's vague temporal extents ("for a while").

(c). Verb Tense Distribution

Overall, Year 2 students produced 384 finite verb phrases, fewer than Year 1's 469, despite producing more sentences overall, suggesting more complex sentence structures with greater subordination. The distribution of tenses reveals changes in morphological development in comparison with Year 1 and Year 2.

TABLE 6
VERB TENSE DISTRIBUTION IN YEAR 2

Tense/Aspect	Count	%	Primary task association
Simple present	154	40.00%	Task 2 (present), Task 3 (future plans)
Simple past	152	39.60%	Task 1 (past events)
Present progressive	24	6.30%	Task 2 (present/ongoing events)
Future (will)	21	5.50%	Task 3 (future plans)
Modal verbs	20	5.20%	Task 3 (possibility/ability)
Past perfect	7	1.80%	Task 1 (anteriority)
Past progressive	4	1.00%	Task 1 (past events/background events)
Present perfect	1	0.30%	Cross-task (experience/relevance)
Future progressive	1	0.30%	Task 3 (future plans/future ongoing)
Total	**384**	**100.00%**	

While simple tenses continue to dominate at 79.6% (combined simple present and past), Year 2 shows modest increases in aspectual variety. Progressive aspects increased to 7.6% from Year 1's 5.75%, with present progressive usage nearly doubling (from 4.05% to 6.3%), suggesting growing awareness of the need to explicitly mark ongoing actions. However, perfect aspects remain severely limited at 2.1%, with present perfect nearly disappearing (0.3%), while past perfect shows a slight increase (1.8%). This pattern suggests that Year 2 learners are beginning to grasp the progressive-simple distinction but continue struggling with the semantic complexity of perfect aspects. The stability in modal verb usage (5.2%) indicates that expressions of possibility and obligation have plateaued at this level.

C. Year 3 Analysis

The third-year group represents learners at the final stage, nearing the completion of their undergraduate English studies. Their production reveals unexpected patterns that challenge linear models of development, suggesting a consolidation phase.

(a). Overall Temporal Adjunct Use

The analysis of Year 3 data comprised 234 sentences produced by 12 third-year undergraduate students, the highest production level across all groups. However, the distribution of temporal marking shows an unexpected reversal from Year 2's peak, revealing a complex development dynamic in advanced learners' temporal expressions.

TABLE 7
TEMPORAL ADJUNCT USAGE IN YEAR 3 TEXTS

Measure	n	%
Sentences with explicit temporal adjuncts	153	65%
Sentences with implied temporal reference	16	7%
Sentences without temporal adjuncts	65	28%
Total sentences	**234**	**100.00%**

The decrease in explicit temporal adjunct usage to 65% from Year 2's 70.7% initially appears counterintuitive for advanced learners. However, this 5.3% point decline, bringing usage closer to Year 1 levels (66.1%), may reflect a more sophisticated understanding of when temporal marking is communicatively necessary versus redundant. The slight increase in both implied temporal reference (6.8% from 5.4%) and sentences with temporal markings (27.8% from 23.9%) suggests that Year 3 learners are making more nuanced decisions about temporal expression, moving away from the hypermarking observed in Year 2 toward a more naturalistic, context-dependent usage pattern.

(b). Temporal Adjunct Types

The 236 temporal adjuncts in Year 3 texts reveal a return to certain Year 1 patterns while maintaining some Year 2 innovation, creating a complex picture of advanced temporal expression.

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TABLE 8
DISTRIBUTION OF TEMPORAL ADJUNCT TYPES

Adjunct Type	Count	%	Examples from learners' interlanguage
Point in time	107	46%	*"two years ago", "currently", "in the future", "at this very moment"*
Sequence	50	21%	*"after", "when", "before", "looking back"*
Frequency	45	19%	*"always", "often", "every", "never", "constantly"*
Duration	34	14%	*"for a while", "for many years", "throughout", "for seven years"*
Total	**236**	**100%**	

The reappearance of point-in-time adjuncts to 45.3%, the highest proportion across all years, suggests that advanced learners employ these markers for different functions than beginners. While Year 1 students used basic deictic markers ("yesterday", "last week"), Year 3 students demonstrate more sophisticated temporal positioning ("currently", "at this very moment", "in the longer term"), using point-in-time references for rhetorical emphasis and text structuring rather than simple anchoring. The decrease in frequency of adjuncts from Year 2's peak of 25.4% to 19.1% coincides with increased morphological sophistication, suggesting that some habitual meanings previously expressed lexically are now encoded through verbal morphology. Sequence markers stabilized at 21.2%, similar to Year 1 levels, while duration adjuncts remained the most challenging category at 14.4%, though examples show more precise and varied duration expressions than earlier years.

(c). Verb Tense Distribution

Overall, Year 3 students produced 473 finite verb phrases across their texts, demonstrating the most complex tense-aspect pattern across all three groups, particularly across perfect aspect usages.

TABLE 9
VERB TENSE DISTRIBUTION IN YEAR 3

Tense/Aspect	Count	%	Primary task association
Simple present	200	42.30%	Task 2 (present), Task 3 (future plans)
Simple past	174	36.80%	Task 1 (past events)
Past perfect	31	6.60%	Task 1 (anteriority, background)
Future (will)	18	3.80%	Task 3 (future plans)
Modal verbs	18	3.80%	Cross-task (possibility/necessity)
Present progressive	16	3.40%	Task 2 (ongoing events)
Past progressive	11	2.30%	Task 1 (interrupted actions)
Present perfect	3	0.60%	Task 2 (current relevance)
Future progressive	2	0.40%	Task 3 (future ongoing)
Total	**473**	**100.00%**	

While simple tenses maintain dominance at 79.1% (simple present and simple past), which are nearly identical to Year 2's 79.6%, the distribution within complex aspects shows dramatic shifts. Most notably, past perfect usage increased to 6.6% from Year 2' 1.8%, suggesting that advanced learners have begun to master the expression of temporal anteriority and background information in narratives. This development is mostly noticed with past perfect usage and patterns, as present perfect remains minimal (0.6%). Progressive aspects decreased slightly to 6.1% from Year 2's 7.6%, possibly indicating more selective, appropriate use rather than overgeneralization. The stability in modal verb usage (3.8%) and the decrease in future will (3.8% from Year 2's 5.5%) suggest that advanced learners employ more diverse future expression strategies, including the present tense for scheduled events and modal constructions for tentative plans.

The emergence of past perfect in Year 3 represents the most significant morphological development across the three-year span. This complex pattern challenges linear development models and suggests that advanced proficiency involves not simply more temporal marking but more strategic, context-appropriate deployment of available temporal resources.

D. Cross-Sectional Comparison

This section synthesizes findings across all three proficiency levels to better understand the development trajectory of temporal expression among Albanian ESL learners. This cross-sectional analysis reveals patterns that challenge linear acquisition models and suggest more complex interactions between lexical and morphological temporal marking systems.

(a). Temporal Adjunct Usage Trajectory

The analysis reveals a non-linear progression in temporal adjunct usage across proficiency levels.

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TABLE 10
TEMPORAL ADJUNCT USAGE ACROSS PROFICIENCY LEVELS

Measure	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3
Total sentences	192	205	234
Explicit temporal adjuncts (%)	66.1	70.7	65.4
Implied temporal reference (%)	10.9	5.4	6.8
Sentences without temporal adjuncts (%)	22.9	23.9	27.8
Mean sentence per student	16	17.1	19.5

The data show that explicit temporal adjunct usage peaks in Year 2 (70.07%) rather than decreasing linearly as hypothesised. This inverted-U pattern suggests complex development processes.

(b). Temporal Adjunct Type Evolution

Different types of temporal adjuncts show distinct developmental patterns.

TABLE 11
TEMPORAL ADJUNCT TYPE DISTRIBUTION ACROSS YEARS (%)

Adjunct Type	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Pattern
Point in time	42	40.8	45.3	U-shaped
Frequency	20	25.4	19.1	Inverted-U
Sequence	23	19.2	21.2	Stable
Duration	15	14.6	14.4	Stable

Frequency adjuncts show the most notable variation, peaking in Year 2 at 25.4%, while point-in-time adjuncts demonstrated a U-shaped pattern with the highest usage in Year 3. On the other hand, the sequence and duration adjuncts have shown stable and unchanging usage patterns across the three years.

(c). Verb Tense Development

The usage of verb tenses across proficiency levels reveals both persistent challenges and a gradual sophistication in morphological temporal expression.

TABLE 12
VERB TENSE INDICATORS ACROSS YEARS (%)

Indicator	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Trend
Simple tenses (Present, Past, Future)	75.5	79.7	79.1	Stable
Progressive aspect (Present, Past, Future)	5.7	7.6	6.1	Variable
Perfect aspect (Present, Past, Future)	1.7	2.1	7.2	Increasing
Modal verbs	4.9	5.2	3.8	Stable

The persistent dominance of simple tenses (75%–80% across all years) represents the most striking finding, suggesting fundamental challenges in acquiring English's explicit aspectual system for learners from Albanian's implicit system. This stability may reveal different qualitative changes, while Year 1 students use simple tenses as defaults due to limited alternatives, Year 3 students' continued reliance may reflect strategic choices or deeply entrenched L1 transfer patterns resistant to change. The progressive aspect trajectory, increasing from 5.7% to 7.6% in Year 2 before declining to 6.1% in Year 3, suggests a phase in which intermediate learners overgeneralize progressive marking before achieving more target-like selective usage. This pattern aligns with the frequency adjunct peak in Year 2, indicating a general phase of heightened attention to aspectual distinctions.

On the other hand, the dramatic usage of the perfect aspect shows minimal changes between Year 1 and Year 2 (1.7%–2.1%) before jumping to 7.2% in Year 3, probably driven primarily by past perfect acquisition (6.6% in total of Year 3). This late emergence suggests that perfect aspects, encoding complex temporal relationships like current relevance or anteriority, require advanced proficiency to master. This specific development of past perfect over present perfect may reflect task effects (narrative past events) or indicate that anteriority in past contexts is more conceptually accessible than present relevance for Albanian learners.

(d). Task-Based Performance

The analysis of temporal adjunct usage across different writing tasks reveals consistent task sensitivity at all proficiency levels, though with evolving patterns of task differentiation.

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TABLE 13
TEMPORAL ADJUNCT USAGE BY TASK ACROSS YEARS (%)

Task	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Mean	Task Characteristics
Task 1: Past Event	68.2	71.8	69.5	69.8	Narrative requiring sequencing
Task 2: Present Situation	58.9	65.4	63.2	62.5	Description of current state
Task 3: Future Plan	63.1	70.7	68.6	67.5	Projection and planning
Range (high-low)	9.3	6.4	6.3	-	Decreasing variation

Past events narratives consistently elicit the highest temporal adjunct usage across all years (mean 69.8%), reflecting the genre's inherent need for temporal sequencing and anchoring. The peak in Year 2 (71.8%) aligns with the general Year 2 pattern of temporal hypermarking, while the slight decrease in Year 3 (69.5%) suggests more efficient narrative construction with less redundant temporal specification.

Present situation descriptions exhibit the lowest temporal adjunct usage in Year 1 (58.9%), with a substantial increase in Years 2 and 3 (65.4% and 63.2%). This increase may reflect growing awareness that present states also require temporal contextualization, particularly for habitual actions and ongoing situations. The 6.5 percentage point increase from Year 1 to Year 2 represents the largest specific change, suggesting that intermediate instruction may emphasize present-tense temporal expression.

Future planning tasks show interesting progression, with Year 2 again showing peak usage (70.7%). The high temporal marking in the future context across all years challenges assumptions that future time reference relies primarily on morphological marking (will + verb), indicating that learners consistently feel the need for lexical temporal specification when projecting future scenarios.

Particularly, the range between the highest and the lowest task performance decreases across years (9.3% → 6.4% → 6.3%), suggesting that advanced learners develop more consistent temporal marking strategies across discourse contexts, rather than showing extreme variation based on task demands.

E. Summary of Results

The cross-sectional analysis reveals that temporal expression development in Albanian ESL learners follows a complex, non-linear trajectory that challenges existing acquisition models:

1. *Non-linear progression*: Temporal adjunct usage peaks in Year 2 (70.7%) rather than decreasing linearly, creating an inverted-U pattern *(Year 1: 66.1%, Year 2: 70.7%, Year 3: 65.4%).* This suggests that intermediate language learners experience heightened temporal awareness before achieving naturalistic balance.
2. *Persistent morphological simplicity*: All proficiency levels maintain 75%–80% reliance on simple tenses despite advancing proficiency, indicating resistant L1 transfer from Albanian's implicit aspectual system.
3. *Differential adjunct development*: Temporal adjunct types follow distinct trajectories, where frequency adjuncts peak in Year 2 (25.4%), point-in-time adjuncts show U-shaped development with the highest usage in Year 3 (45.3%), while sequence and duration markers remain stable.
4. Late aspectual emergence: Perfect aspect usage remains minimal (1.7%–2.1%) until Year 3's sharp increase to 7.2%, driven primarily by past perfect acquisition, suggesting complex aspectual relationships require advanced proficiency.
5. Task sensitivity: All groups appropriately adjust temporal marking by discourse context, with past narratives consistently eliciting the highest usage (70%) across proficiency levels, while the range between tasks decreases with proficiency (9.3% → 6.4% → 6.3%), indicating the development of unified strategies.

The findings indicate that Albanian ESL learners' temporal expression development involves multidimensional reorganization rather than simple lexical-to-morphological progression, with Year 2 representing a critical developmental phase.

V. DISCUSSION

The present study investigated temporal expression development among Albanian ESL learners, revealing an unexpected non-linear trajectory that challenges established models of second language temporal acquisition. Rather than the predicted steady decrease in temporal adjunct usage from Year 1 to Year 3, an inverted-U pattern emerged, rising from 66.1% in Year 1 to 70.7% in Year 2 before declining to 65.4% in Year 3. These findings do not fully support either H1 or H2, which predicted linear relationships. Instead, the data suggest more complex developmental processes that warrant careful interpretation.

The Year 2 peak phenomenon represents a particularly intriguing finding that may reflect a critical reorganization phase in temporal expression development. This pattern is tentatively consistent with McLaughlin's (1990) restructuring hypothesis, which proposes that L2 development involves periodic reorganization rather than linear accumulation. However, it is important to acknowledge that the cross-sectional design of this study limits our ability to confirm whether this peak represents a universal developmental stage, cohort-specific variation, or effects of other factors such as curriculum changes or increased metalinguistic instruction at the second-year level. The decrease in implied temporal references from 10.9% to 5.4% between Year 1 and Year 2 is consistent with this interpretation, suggesting that learners

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at this stage may consciously monitor their temporal expressions, deliberately avoiding ambiguity through explicit marking. The specific increase in frequency adjuncts from 20% to 25.4% similarly suggests that Year 2 learners may actively compensate for aspectual distinctions that Albanian encodes implicitly, though alternative explanations are possible.

This pattern may also be understood through Schmidt's (1990) noticing hypothesis, where conscious attention to L1-L2 differences can trigger temporary overcompensation before more balanced expression emerges. The relatively heightened temporal awareness in Year 2 could reflect learners' emerging metalinguistic understanding of the gap between their L1 and L2 systems, though without detailed instructional data or learner interviews, we cannot determine the precise mechanisms underlying this pattern.

The subsequent decline in Year 3 should not be interpreted as regression but may reflect proceduralization (DeKeyser, 2007), the transition from controlled to automatic processing. This interpretation is supported by qualitative changes such as point-in-time adjuncts serving more sophisticated discourse functions ("currently," "at this very moment") rather than basic temporal anchoring ("yesterday," "last week"). These more advanced forms suggest functional evolution in how learners use temporal expressions. However, longitudinal data would be needed to confirm whether this pattern represents genuine proceduralization or reflects other developmental processes.

Equally striking is the persistent reliance on simple tenses, remaining at 75%–80% across all proficiency levels. This pattern is consistent with persistent L1 transfer effects from Albanian's implicit aspectual system, potentially extending Hawkins and Liszka's (2003) aspectual deficit hypothesis to a new population. The minimal use of progressive aspects (5.7%–7.6%) may reflect what Slobin (1996) terms "thinking for speaking" patterns—deeply ingrained conceptualizations of how temporal information is encoded. Since Albanian expresses ongoing actions through simple forms plus contextual cues, learners may not perceive a strong communicative need to mark progressivity morphologically, even after years of English instruction. This explanation aligns with Jarvis and Pavlenko's (2008) conceptual transfer hypothesis, suggesting that L1 conceptual categories continue to influence L2 production well into advanced stages. However, without comparative data from learners of other L1 backgrounds, we cannot definitively attribute this pattern to L1 influence rather than other factors.

Similarly, the late emergence of perfect aspects provides further evidence of substantial acquisition challenges in this domain. Perfect aspect usage remained minimal (1.7%–2.1%) in Years 1 and 2, increasing sharply to 7.2% only in Year 3, driven primarily by past perfect acquisition (6.6%). This pattern is consistent with Slabakova's (2016) bottleneck hypothesis, which identifies features absent in the L1 as showing the greatest acquisitional difficulty. The specific difficulty with the present perfect, which remains below 1% across all years, may reflect what Lardiere (2009) terms "feature reassembly" problems, where learners must reconfigure their understanding of how temporal relationships are encoded. However, without analyzing accuracy or error patterns, we cannot definitively determine whether low present perfect frequency reflects incomplete acquisition, learner avoidance, or strategic simplification. This represents an important limitation of the current study. The preferential development of past perfect over present perfect may reflect task effects, since Task 1 emphasized narrative past events, or may indicate that anteriority in past contexts is more conceptually accessible than present relevance for Albanian learners. Alternatively, the low frequency of the present perfect could reflect the reduced need for this structure in learners' communicative contexts. These competing explanations underscore the need for more detailed analysis in future research. Ayoun (2025) similarly demonstrates that even advanced L2 learners of English exhibit persistent difficulties with tense-aspect-modality features absent in their L1, supporting the view that feature reassembly challenges are a broad acquisitional phenomenon not limited to Albanian learners.

Notably, this late emergence contrasts sharply with studies of learners from languages with explicit aspectual systems, who typically demonstrate earlier acquisition of perfect forms (Ayoun & Salaberry, 2008). This difference supports the contention that typological differences between L1 and L2 systems significantly constrain acquisition trajectories, though comparative studies would be needed to confirm this pattern across diverse learner populations. This concern is further underscored by Minnillo et al. (2024), who found that task modality is a significant predictor of accuracy in L2 past tense-aspect production, confirming that written narrative tasks, as used in the present study, systematically influence learners' tense-aspect choices in ways that must be considered when interpreting cross-sectional frequency data.

The varied developmental trajectories of different adjunct types further complicate the picture and challenge unitary models of temporal expression acquisition. While frequency adjuncts show an inverted-U pattern peaking in Year 2 at 25.4%, point-in-time adjuncts follow a U-shaped curve (42% → 40.8% → 45.3%), and sequence and duration markers remain relatively stable across years. These differential patterns are consistent with emergentist approaches (Ellis & Larsen-Freeman, 2006) that view language development as non-linear and multidimensional. The Year 2 peak in frequency adjuncts appears directly linked to strategies for expressing habituality, a concept that Albanian handles through context rather than explicit morphological marking. Meanwhile, the resurgence of point-in-time adjuncts in Year 3 with more sophisticated forms (e.g., "currently," "at this very moment") suggests functional evolution rather than simple frequency increase, consistent with Bardovi-Harlig's (2000) observation that advanced learners repurpose temporal adjuncts for discourse coherence and rhetorical emphasis rather than basic temporal grounding.

While these patterns are intriguing, it is important to emphasize that the cross-sectional design limits causal claims about temporal development. The relationship between lexical and morphological temporal marking suggests they exist

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in dynamic interaction rather than in a substitutional relationship. Rather than viewing these systems as competing, the data suggest that both lexical and morphological systems may strengthen during intermediate proficiency before achieving a more balanced and target-like distribution. However, the mechanisms driving this dynamic interaction remain unclear and warrant further investigation.

The Year 2 peak may represent what Larsen-Freeman (2006) identifies as a "phase shift" in complex dynamic systems—a reorganization point where the system temporarily destabilizes before settling into a new state. However, recent critical appraisals of dynamical systems theory as applied to SLA caution that phase shift interpretations must be grounded in empirically testable hypotheses rather than metaphorical description alone (Pienemann et al., 2024), a limitation that applies to the present study's cross-sectional data and that longitudinal research designs would be better positioned to address. If this interpretation is correct, it would suggest that intermediate proficiency may represent a period where multiple systems (lexical, morphological, and conceptual) compete and interact before stabilizing into more naturalistic patterns. However, confirming this interpretation would require longitudinal data tracking individual learners over time.

It should be noted that alternative explanations for the Year 2 peak exist and cannot be entirely ruled out with the current design. The peak could potentially reflect increased metalinguistic instruction specific to this cohort, greater task familiarity as students progress, or other institutional factors that cannot be separated from genuine developmental processes in a cross-sectional study. Additionally, the relative recency of Year 2 instruction (students at a more recent point in their studies) may create different instructional contexts than Year 1 or Year 3. These confounding factors underscore the importance of longitudinal and comparative studies to isolate developmental mechanisms from external influences.

The findings demonstrate that learners whose L1 features implicit temporal-aspectual systems may follow qualitatively different developmental paths than those assumed by current models based primarily on learners from languages with explicit systems. The non-linear trajectory observed here suggests that temporal expression development involves multidimensional reorganization rather than simple lexical-to-morphological progression. However, determining whether these patterns represent universal developmental principles or are specific to Albanian learners requires comparative research with learners from other L1 backgrounds.

VI. Conclusion

This study examined temporal expression development among 36 Albanian ESL learners across three university proficiency levels, investigating whether temporal adjunct usage would decrease linearly as morphological competence increased. The findings fundamentally challenge this prediction, revealing instead an unexpected non-linear trajectory that provides new insights into how learners from languages with implicit temporal-actual systems navigate the acquisition of English's explicit marking system. The most striking finding is the inverted-U pattern in temporal adjunct usage with a peak at intermediate proficiency (70.7% in Year 2), which is not consistent with predictions of linear decrease. This non-linear trajectory suggests that temporal expression development involves distinct phases: initial establishment of basic temporal marking (Year 1: 66.1%), heightened metalinguistic awareness leading to hypervigilance (Year 2: 70.7%), and eventual strategic consolidation (Year 3: 65.4%). The Year 2 peak may represent a critical reorganization phase where learners' growing awareness of the fundamental differences between Albanian's implicit and English's explicit system could trigger compensatory strategies that temporarily intensify explicit temporal marking.

Equally revealing is the persistent reliance on simple tenses (75%–80%) across all proficiency levels, combined with minimal progressive aspect usage (5.7%–7.6%) and late emerging perfect aspect (7.2% in Year 3). These patterns suggest that typological differences between L1 and L2 temporal systems may create significant acquisition challenges. The findings are consistent with the hypothesis that Albanian learners' implicit L1 aspectual system may create conceptual transfer effects that persist even at advanced levels, a finding that aligns with research emphasising the role of L1 conceptual categories in shaping L2 acquisition trajectories, though comparative studies would be needed to confirm this. This interpretation is consistent with the broader direction of recent scholarship, which increasingly emphasises the role of L1-specific aspectual features and typological distance in shaping individual acquisition routes beyond what universal models predict (Almakrob & Alduais, 2025; Ayoun, 2025).

Similarly, the differential development of temporal adjunct types, with frequency adjuncts peaking in Year 2, point-in-time adjuncts showing U-shaped development, and sequence/duration markers remaining stable, further challenges unitary models of temporal acquisition. This multidimensional pattern indicates that temporal expression involves multiple, partially independent systems following distinct developmental trajectories rather than a single, unified progression. The qualitative evolution in adjunct usage, particularly the shift from basic temporal anchoring to sophisticated discourse functions in Year 3, suggests that advanced learners may not simply abandon temporal adjuncts but may repurpose them for more complex communicative needs.

Theoretically, these findings suggest that the relationship between lexical and morphological temporal marking may not be substitutional but rather dynamically interactive. The Year 2 peak is consistent with the possibility of developmental reorganization phases that may not be captured in current linear models, and it suggests that intermediate proficiency may represent a period where heightened awareness temporarily affects performance before more balanced

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expressions emerge. This aligns with complex dynamic system approaches to SLA, which view development as characterized by periods of variability and phase shifts rather than steady progression.

Study Limitations

The findings of this study should be interpreted in light of several methodological constraints. First, the cross-sectional research design does not allow for definitive conclusions regarding developmental progression; therefore, it remains uncertain whether the observed peak in Year 2 represents a universal developmental stage or is specific to the cohort under investigation. Furthermore, the relatively small sample size (n = 36), drawn from a single institution, limits the generalizability of the results to wider learner populations.

In addition, the analysis is based exclusively on written data, leaving learners' spoken discourse patterns unexplored. Finally, the absence of an accuracy-based analysis makes it difficult to distinguish between genuine tense errors and instances of strategic simplification, which may mask learners' underlying competence.

Further Research Recommendations

Several research directions could extend and validate the present findings. Longitudinal studies would be particularly valuable in tracking individual developmental trajectories over time and in clarifying whether the observed patterns reflect stable stages of acquisition. Including learners from other first-language backgrounds with implicit aspectual systems would also help determine whether the results are typologically driven or language-specific. Moreover, future research should combine frequency-based measures with accuracy analyses to provide a more comprehensive account of tense–aspect development. Finally, incorporating both spoken and written production data would offer a fuller understanding of how temporal and aspectual features are realized across different modes of language use.

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Agentic AI as Process Scaffolding in Undergraduate ESL Instruction: Effects on Proficiency, Engagement, and Self-Regulated Language Learning

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***Abstract*—Recent AI-assisted language learning research has focused mainly on reactive chatbots that respond to prompts but offer limited support for planning, monitoring, and follow-up. This study examined whether a bounded agentic AI environment designed as process scaffolding would be associated with stronger ESL outcomes than a reactive AI interface. Using an explanatory sequential mixed-methods, quasi-experimental design, 128 undergraduates from four intact academic communication sections at two private universities in the Philippines participated in a 12-week intervention. Students in the experimental condition used an Agentic English Coach that supported weekly goal setting, task decomposition, reminders, reflection prompts, adaptive resources, and teacher escalation; the comparison group used a reactive chat interface to complete the same course tasks. ANCOVA results controlling for pretest scores showed that the agentic AI group outperformed the reactive AI group in posttest English proficiency, learner engagement, self-regulated language learning, and agentic engagement. Within the experimental group, plan completion, reflection completion, revision cycles, and speaking practice turns positively predicted posttest proficiency. Interview data indicated that agentic AI reduced task uncertainty, supported sustained practice, made progress more visible, and shifted teachers toward orchestration and oversight of feedback rather than constant procedural prompting. The findings suggest that AI is most pedagogically valuable in ESL instruction when it structures learning processes over time rather than only generating on-demand responses.**

***Index Terms*—agentic artificial intelligence, ESL instruction, learner engagement, self-regulated language learning, language pedagogy**

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I. Introduction

Generative artificial intelligence is moving quickly from an emerging technology to a routine part of language education. In English language classrooms, this shift is especially visible because drafting, rehearsal, revision, and feedback can all be supported through conversational interfaces. Recent research shows that AI tools can enhance English learning achievement, participation, and motivation when their use is tied to clear pedagogical tasks and teacher guidance (Kasneci et al., 2023; Wei, 2023; Xu & Wang, 2024; Wu, 2024). In ESL and EFL settings, AI-mediated practice has also been associated with gains in speaking performance, willingness to communicate, and academic engagement (Fathi et al., 2024; Wang & Xue, 2024; Zhang et al., 2024).

At the same time, most AI applications in language learning remain reactive. Learners can ask a question, submit a prompt, or request a revision, and the system responds to that request immediately. Although this form of support can be useful, it often leaves the burden of planning, pacing, monitoring, and follow-up almost entirely with the learner. That is a significant pedagogical limitation because successful language learning rarely depends on isolated answers alone. It is more often sustained by sequences of forethought, practice, feedback, strategic adjustment, and reflection. For many learners, especially in undergraduate ESL classrooms where proficiency, confidence, and study habits vary considerably, the difficulty lies not only in producing language but also in organizing the process by which improvement occurs.

The emerging concept of agentic AI offers a potentially important shift. Agentic systems are distinguished not merely by their ability to generate language, but by their ability to pursue bounded goals through planning, memory, monitoring, and coordinated action across multiple steps (Plaat et al., 2025). Rather than functioning only as answer engines, they can act as learning partners that help learners set subgoals, track progress, recommend next actions, and reroute activity when difficulties arise. In educational terms, this matters because it connects AI not just to content support, but to the architecture of learning behavior itself. Molenaar (2022) argues that effective human-AI regulation depends on productive coordination between learner control and intelligent scaffolding. Likewise, Liu et al. (2025) show that AI-mediated English learning can foster agentic practices when learners use digital tools to make purposeful decisions about their own progress.

This perspective is especially relevant to learner engagement and self-regulated language learning. Engagement has traditionally been conceptualized as behavioral, emotional, and cognitive involvement in learning (Fredricks et al., 2004), yet later work highlights a fourth dimension, agentic engagement, in which learners actively shape instruction rather than simply respond to it (Reeve & Tseng, 2011). Self-regulated learning, meanwhile, emphasizes the learner's capacity to set goals, select strategies, monitor performance, and reflect on outcomes (Zimmerman, 2002; Panadero, 2017). These constructs are deeply interconnected in ESL learning, where progress depends on repeated cycles of intention, strategic action, and adaptation. If agentic AI can make those cycles more visible and manageable, then its effects may be felt not only in final performance but also in the quality of learners' ongoing participation.

Recent research offers promising but still incomplete evidence. ChatGPT and related tools have been linked to self-learning routines among EFL learners, yet studies also note variability in the depth of use, the quality of strategies, and critical evaluation (Tram et al., 2024; Yang & Li, 2024). Other work suggests that AI can support self-regulated learning when systems are designed around autonomy, competence, and reflective prompting (Chiu, 2024; Xia et al., 2023). A systematic review by Guan et al. (2025) concludes that educational chatbots can scaffold planning, monitoring, and feedback, but that many implementations still focus on short-term interactions rather than long-horizon orchestration. In other words, the strongest theoretical promises of AI for language learning may depend less on the quality of one-time responses and more on whether the system can sustain purposeful learning trajectories over time.

The present study addresses this gap by comparing a bounded agentic AI environment with a reactive AI interface in undergraduate ESL instruction. The intervention was situated in a Philippine higher education context, where English functions both as a medium of academic work and as a resource for social mobility. Rather than asking whether AI is generally useful, the study examines a narrower pedagogical question: what changes when AI is designed to scaffold learning processes across time rather than answer prompts on demand? By analyzing English proficiency, learner engagement, self-regulated language learning, system-use patterns, and post-intervention perceptions, the study aims to clarify how agentic AI may reshape routines of practice, feedback, and teacher orchestration in contemporary ESL pedagogy.

II. Literature Review and Conceptual Framework

A. From Reactive Chatbots to Agentic AI in Language Education

The distinction between reactive and agentic AI is critical for interpreting current developments in language education. Reactive systems respond to prompts users provide, but they typically do not maintain long-term instructional intent unless learners explicitly reconstruct it in each interaction. Agentic AI, by contrast, is oriented toward goal pursuit across time. Plaat et al. (2025) describe agentic large language model systems as architectures capable of planning, tool use, memory retention, and multi-step action under explicit constraints. From a pedagogical standpoint, these properties matter because learning tasks are not single events. A student writing an argumentative paragraph, preparing an oral presentation, or building vocabulary for a disciplinary topic must manage a sequence of interconnected decisions over time. A tool that can remember these goals, propose next steps, and monitor partial completion may therefore function differently from a

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tool that simply waits for the next prompt.

Language education research has already begun to reveal the limits of purely reactive support. Yang and Li (2024) note that many current L2 applications of ChatGPT are strongest in feedback and idea generation but weaker in ensuring strategic progression, task continuity, and responsible use. Tram et al. (2024) likewise found that self-learning with ChatGPT could promote flexibility and convenience, yet learners' gains depended heavily on whether they adopted disciplined routines rather than sporadic prompt experimentation. In a formal ESL curriculum, that distinction becomes even more significant because progress must be aligned with course outcomes, assessment rubrics, and teacher expectations.

Agentic AI is also relevant to how pedagogy is distributed between human and machine. Molenaar (2022) proposes hybrid human-AI regulation, in which intelligent systems can support phases of self-regulation without displacing the teacher's interpretive and ethical role. That framing is useful for language classrooms because AI support is most beneficial when it extends rather than replaces pedagogical judgment. In an ESL setting, for example, a system may help learners schedule speaking rehearsals, flag repeated grammar errors, or prompt self-explanations after revision. However, teachers remain crucial for calibrating accuracy, contextualizing language use, and ensuring that learners do not outsource meaning-making itself.

The notion of agentic practices is especially salient in digitally mediated English learning. Liu et al. (2025) link AI-mediated informal digital learning of English to learners' critical digital literacies and agentic decision-making. Their findings suggest that AI becomes educationally powerful when learners use it to organize effort, negotiate strategies, and evaluate information rather than passively consume outputs. This insight implies that the pedagogical effectiveness of agentic AI depends not only on the system's technical sophistication, but also on whether classroom design positions learners as active managers of their own language development.

B. Agentic AI and Learner Engagement

Engagement remains one of the strongest predictors of language learning persistence and quality. Fredricks et al. (2004) conceptualize engagement as a multidimensional construct that includes behavioral participation, emotional involvement, and cognitive investment. Reeve and Tseng (2011) extend this framework by introducing agentic engagement, which refers to learners' constructive contribution to the flow of instruction through questions, preferences, and self-initiated input. In AI-supported language learning, this fourth dimension deserves special attention because the very presence of interactive technologies may either expand or suppress learner initiative depending on how the technology is designed.

Empirical findings in L2 education suggest that AI can increase engagement, but the mechanisms vary. Wang and Xue (2024) found that AI-driven chatbots can foster academic engagement in EFL classrooms when activities are structured and sustained across an intervention period. Fathi et al. (2024) reported gains in speaking skills and a willingness to communicate through AI-mediated interactions, suggesting that AI may reduce anxiety and increase opportunities for productive practice. Zhang et al. (2024) similarly showed that AI-supported speaking tools can help less confident learners move toward more active oral participation. These studies are encouraging, yet they mostly examine systems that respond during task performance rather than systems that proactively sustain engagement before, during, and after tasks.

Agentic AI may influence engagement through several pathways. First, it can lower initiation barriers by transforming broad assignments into manageable action steps. Second, it can make progress visible through reminders, dashboards, and checkpoints, which may encourage behavioral persistence. Third, it can invite learners to shape the learning sequence itself by selecting goals, revising plans, or requesting additional practice, thereby supporting agentic engagement. Reeve and Shin (2020) argue that teaching for agentic engagement involves creating structures that welcome learners' constructive input. An agentic AI system, when designed carefully, may operationalize that principle at scale by prompting learners to articulate preferences, make decisions, and respond to feedback loops more frequently than is feasible through teacher interaction alone.

Still, engagement gains should not be assumed automatically. Kasneci et al. (2023) warn that educational uses of large language models can lead to superficial compliance if learners rely on polished outputs without genuine cognitive investment. The issue is therefore not whether AI interacts with learners, but whether it does so in ways that deepen, rather than simulate, participation. This makes it important to study engagement not only as enjoyment or frequency of use, but as a pattern of visible effort, strategic input, and constructive initiative.

C. Agentic AI and Self-Regulated Language Learning

Self-regulated learning is central to language development because learners must manage distributed practice across classrooms, homework, revision, and informal exposure. Zimmerman (2002) organizes self-regulation into cyclical phases of forethought, performance, and self-reflection, while Panadero (2017) synthesizes multiple models that emphasize planning, monitoring, control, and evaluation. In ESL contexts, these processes are not optional extras. Learners who progress steadily tend to define language goals, allocate practice time, monitor breakdowns, seek feedback, and revise strategically. By contrast, learners who engage in fragmented or last-minute practice often struggle to convert exposure into durable improvement.

Research on AI and self-regulated learning has expanded quickly. Chiu (2024) proposes a classification tool to foster self-regulated learning with generative AI, grounded in principles derived from self-determination theory, arguing that AI support should enhance autonomy, competence, and reflective choice. Xia et al. (2023) found that self-regulated

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learning through AI chatbots is influenced by learners' psychological need satisfaction, suggesting that AI effectiveness depends partly on how learners perceive control and support during interaction. Dizon et al. (2025) report that university EFL students use ChatGPT for self-regulated language learning, involving planning, practice, and monitoring, but also note uneven strategy quality and a need for stronger pedagogical framing.

Systematic evidence reinforces both the promise and the challenge. Guan et al. (2025) conclude that educational chatbots can assist with planning, monitoring, feedback, and reflection, which are core functions of self-regulation. However, the review also shows that many chatbot interventions remain short-term, narrowly task-bound, or insufficiently integrated with curricular routines. In language learning, this is a serious concern because strong self-regulation depends on continuity across multiple practice episodes. An agentic AI system that stores goals, prompts reflection, and adapts next steps may offer a closer fit to the cyclical nature of self-regulated language learning than reactive tools that treat each exchange as independent.

There is also growing evidence that AI can contribute to measurable language achievement when its support is sustained and pedagogically aligned. Wei (2023) reported positive effects of AI in language instruction on English learning achievement, L2 motivation, and self-regulated learning. Meta-analytic findings likewise indicate overall positive effects of AI on English language achievement, although the strength of these effects varies across instructional designs and social-emotional conditions (Xu & Wang, 2024; Wu, 2024). The remaining question is whether agentic features make a distinctive difference. If AI can proactively support planning, revision, and reflection, then self-regulated learning may become the pathway to stronger language outcomes.

D. Research Questions

Based on the foregoing literature and conceptual framing, the study addressed the following research questions:

RQ1. To what extent is agentic AI-supported ESL instruction associated with higher posttest English proficiency than reactive AI-supported ESL instruction?

RQ2. What differences emerge between the two conditions in learner engagement, self-regulated language learning, and agentic engagement?

RQ3. Which patterns of agentic AI use predict posttest English proficiency within the experimental group?

RQ4. How do students and instructors perceive the influence of agentic AI on ESL learning processes and classroom pedagogy?

III. Methodology

A. Research Design and Context

The study employed an explanatory sequential mixed-methods, quasi-experimental design. Quantitative and qualitative phases were connected so that interview data could explain patterns observed in performance scores, survey responses, and learning analytics. The intervention lasted 12 weeks and was implemented in four intact undergraduate ESL sections across two private universities in the Philippines. The participating sections followed a shared syllabus for academic communication that emphasized paragraph writing, oral presentations, vocabulary development, source-based reading, and revision strategies.

To reduce instructional variance, the two course instructors worked from a shared weekly plan, common assessment rubrics, matched task prompts, and coordinated pacing. Each instructor handled one agentic AI section and one reactive AI section. Both conditions received the same contact hours, task genres, teacher feedback schedule, and grading criteria. The core difference lay in the AI support architecture used outside and during selected in-class activities.

B. Participants

Participants were 128 undergraduate students enrolled in required ESL courses. Sixty-four students were assigned to the agentic AI condition and 64 to the reactive AI condition via intact-section membership. Students ranged from first to third year and represented intermediate to upper-intermediate English proficiency bands based on local placement records and pretest performance. Table 1 summarizes the participant profile by condition.

Pre-intervention checks showed no statistically significant differences between groups in age, English proficiency, learner engagement, self-regulated language learning, or agentic engagement (all $p > .05$). This supported the comparability of the two cohorts at baseline, although the intact-section design meant that causal claims should still be interpreted with appropriate caution.

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TABLE 1
PARTICIPANT CHARACTERISTICS BY CONDITION

Characteristic	Total (N = 128)	Agentic AI (n = 64)	Reactive AI (n = 64)
n	128	64	64
Age, M (SD)	19.46 (1.14)	19.38 (1.10)	19.54 (1.18)
Female, n (%)	79 (61.7)	40 (62.5)	39 (60.9)
Male, n (%)	44 (34.4)	21 (32.8)	23 (35.9)
Non-binary/Prefer not to say, n (%)	5 (3.9)	3 (4.7)	2 (3.1)
B1, n (%)	73 (57.0)	37 (57.8)	36 (56.2)
B2, n (%)	55 (43.0)	27 (42.2)	28 (43.8)
First-year, n (%)	72 (56.2)	37 (57.8)	35 (54.7)
Second-year, n (%)	41 (32.0)	22 (34.4)	19 (29.7)
Third-year, n (%)	15 (11.7)	5 (7.8)	10 (15.6)

Note. Percentages are column percentages.

C. Instructional Intervention

Students in the experimental condition used an Agentic English Coach (AEC) embedded within the institutional learning management system. The AEC was configured as a bounded instructional agent rather than an unrestricted conversational tool. At the start of each week, the system asked students to set a target related to the week's language outcome, such as producing a thesis-driven paragraph, improving oral fluency for a short presentation, or mastering discipline-specific vocabulary. It then decomposed the target into a sequence of tasks, scheduled suggested checkpoints, and recommended resources from a teacher-approved repository. During the week, the system monitored task completion, issued reminders, generated focused practice prompts, and requested brief reflections after drafts or speaking attempts. When the system detected repeated uncertainty, contradictory outputs, or low-confidence interactions, it prompted the learner to consult the teacher and flagged the issue in the instructor dashboard.

To clarify the implementation boundaries, the AEC was configured through teacher-authored weekly workflow templates rather than an open-ended autonomous agent. The templates defined the course outcome, task sequence, resource bank, reminder schedule, reflection prompt, and escalation trigger for each week. The learning management system-integrated AI service adapted prompts, practice items, and feedback focus within those constraints; it did not assign grades, revise the syllabus, or make placement decisions. The study therefore evaluated a bounded process-scaffolding configuration rather than a comparison among model vendors or model architectures.

The reactive AI condition used the same learning management system and had access to a standard AI chat interface for idea generation, clarification, feedback requests, and language practice. However, the reactive interface lacked cross-session memory, automatic task planning, a progress dashboard, a reminder function, and proactive reflection prompts. Students could obtain help when they initiated it, but the system did not manage or sequence the learning activity. This contrast allowed the study to compare two forms of AI-supported pedagogy that differed primarily in instructional agency and process orchestration rather than in access to AI itself.

Figure 1 presents the instructional cycle used in the agentic AI condition. The figure illustrates how weekly goal negotiation, task decomposition, guided practice, monitoring, reflection, and teacher oversight formed a recurring loop. This design treated AI not as a substitute for instruction, but as a process manager that helped students sustain productive language learning routines between teacher contact points.

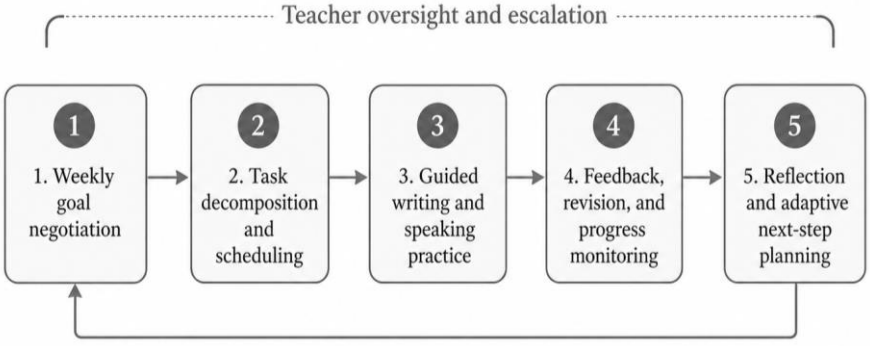


Figure 1. Weekly Instructional Cycle in the Agentic AI Condition

D. Instruments

English proficiency was measured through an integrated performance assessment administered in Weeks 1 and 12. The assessment combined a 250-word argumentative writing task and an individual speaking task lasting approximately four minutes. Writing and speaking were scored using analytic rubrics that covered organization, language control, vocabulary use, task fulfillment, and fluency. Scores were converted to a composite scale from 0 to 100. Two trained raters independently scored all performances. Interrater agreement, calculated through intraclass correlation, was .90 at pretest

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and .92 at posttest.

Learner engagement was measured with a 12-item scale adapted from the multidimensional engagement framework of Fredricks et al. (2004) and the agentic engagement work of Reeve and Tseng (2011). The scale covered behavioral participation, emotional involvement, cognitive effort, and agentic contribution. Responses were collected on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Internal consistency was acceptable in the present sample (alpha = .89 at pretest and .91 at posttest).

Self-regulated language learning was measured with a 12-item scale aligned with the forethought, performance, and reflection phases described by Zimmerman (2002) and summarized by Panadero (2017). Items targeted goal setting, planning, monitoring, strategic action, help seeking, and reflection. The same 5-point response format was used. Reliability was acceptable (alpha = .87 at pretest and .90 at posttest).

Agentic engagement was examined both as a subdimension of learner engagement and as a focal outcome in its own right, through four targeted items: expressing preferences, seeking clarification, requesting challenge adjustments, and reshaping the sequence of learning activities. These items were analyzed separately to capture the specific learner behaviors most directly related to the agentic AI intervention. Reliability was acceptable (alpha = .84 at pretest and .87 at posttest).

System log variables were collected for students in the experimental condition. These included plan completion percentage, reflection completion percentage, number of revision cycles, number of speaking practice turns, and number of teacher escalation flags. Finally, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 12 students selected to reflect variation in proficiency gain and platform usage, along with the two course instructors and two program coordinators who observed the implementation.

E. Procedure

Week 1 was used for orientation, consent, pretesting, and platform familiarization. In Weeks 2 through 11, students completed weekly instructional cycles tied to the course syllabus. Both conditions worked on the same genres and language targets, including paragraph development, oral rehearsal, vocabulary application, and source-based response writing. In the experimental condition, students began by confirming weekly goals in the AEC, completed staged tasks, and submitted short reflections after major activities. In the reactive condition, students accessed the AI tool as needed but did not follow any system-generated learning path.

Teachers reviewed classroom outputs in both conditions, addressed recurring language issues during scheduled lessons, and monitored academic integrity. In the experimental condition, teacher dashboards displayed incomplete plans, repeated error patterns, and escalation flags. Teachers used these signals to offer clarification and brief corrective feedback during the following class meeting. Posttests were administered in Week 12, after which interviews were conducted and transcribed for analysis.

F. Data Analysis

Independent-samples t-tests were used to assess baseline equivalence. To address RQ1 and RQ2, analyses of covariance (ANCOVAs) were conducted for posttest English proficiency, learner engagement, self-regulated language learning, and agentic engagement, using the corresponding pretest scores as covariates. Effect sizes were reported as partial eta squared. To address RQ3, multiple regression was performed within the experimental group to determine whether platform-use variables predicted posttest proficiency, controlling for pretest proficiency.

Qualitative data were analyzed through iterative thematic coding. After initial open coding, categories were compared across student and teacher transcripts to identify recurring patterns related to pacing, practice quality, feedback use, autonomy, and teacher role. The qualitative results were then used to explain and elaborate on the quantitative findings, especially the strong gains observed in self-regulated learning and agentic engagement.

IV. Results

A. Baseline Equivalence and Descriptive Statistics

Table 2 presents the descriptive statistics for all major outcomes. The two groups started from closely comparable baselines. The agentic AI group increased from a pretest mean of 59.36 (SD = 6.73) to a posttest mean of 72.59 (SD = 6.93), while the reactive AI group increased from 61.40 (SD = 6.68) to 69.18 (SD = 4.99). A similar pattern appeared in the self-report measures. The agentic AI group showed larger gains in learner engagement (mean gain = 0.67 vs. 0.25), self-regulated language learning (mean gain = 0.84 vs. 0.29), and agentic engagement (mean gain = 0.88 vs. 0.32).

Table 2
Descriptive Statistics for the Major Outcomes by Condition

Outcome	Agentic AI pretest, M (SD)	Agentic AI posttest, M (SD)	Reactive AI pretest, M (SD)	Reactive AI posttest, M (SD)
English proficiency	59.36 (6.73)	72.59 (6.93)	61.40 (6.68)	69.18 (4.99)
Learner engagement	3.20 (0.39)	3.87 (0.25)	3.18 (0.35)	3.43 (0.27)
Self-regulated language learning	3.08 (0.35)	3.91 (0.27)	3.10 (0.40)	3.39 (0.24)
Agentic engagement	3.09 (0.46)	3.97 (0.27)	3.01 (0.45)	3.33 (0.25)

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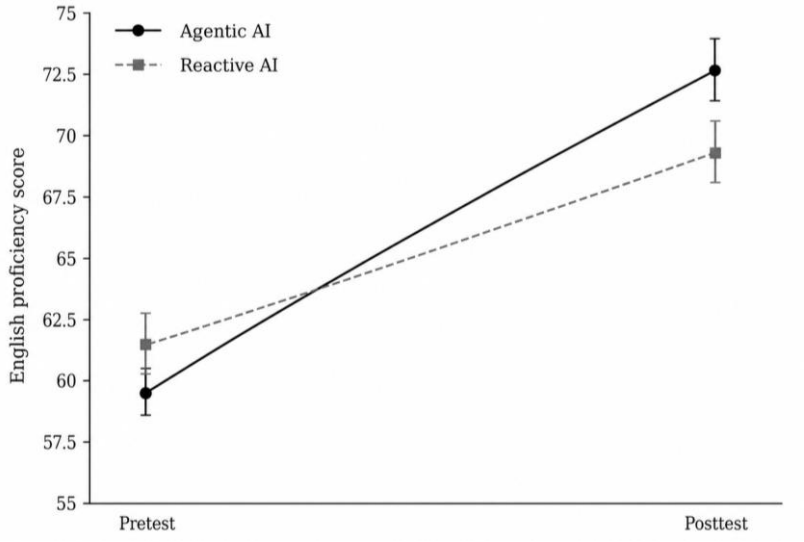


Figure 2. Pretest-to-Posttest Change in English Proficiency by Condition
Note. Error bars represent standard errors.

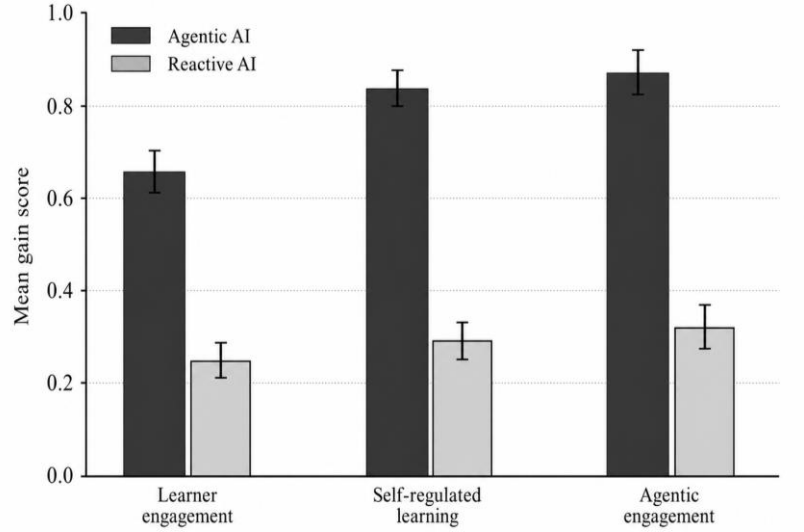


Figure 3. Mean Gain Scores for Learner Engagement, Self-Regulated Learning, and Agentic Engagement
Note. Error bars represent standard errors.

These descriptive patterns suggest that both conditions benefited from AI-supported learning, but the gains were consistently stronger when AI was configured to manage learning processes over time. Figure 2 visualizes the pretest-to-posttest change in English proficiency by condition, while Figure 3 summarizes mean gains across the three engagement-related outcomes.

B. Effects on English Proficiency, Engagement, and Self-Regulated Learning

The ANCOVA results in Table 3 showed a statistically significant effect of condition on posttest English proficiency after controlling for pretest scores, B = 4.57, SE = 0.84, t = 5.42, p < .001, partial eta squared = .19. The adjusted posttest mean for the agentic AI group was 73.16, compared with 68.60 for the reactive AI group. The raw-gain difference of approximately 5.45 points indicates a meaningful instructional advantage for the agentic AI condition over the 12-week period.

TABLE 3
ANCOVA RESULTS FOR POSTTEST OUTCOMES CONTROLLING FOR CORRESPONDING PRETEST SCORES

Outcome	Adjusted M Agentic	Adjusted M Reactive	B	SE	t	p	Partial η^2
English proficiency	73.16	68.60	4.57	0.84	5.42	< .001	0.19
Learner engagement	3.86	3.44	0.43	0.03	12.88	< .001	0.57
Self-regulated language learning	3.92	3.39	0.53	0.03	15.97	< .001	0.67
Agentic engagement	3.96	3.34	0.62	0.04	15.57	< .001	0.66

Note. Each model used the matching pretest measure as a covariate.

The effects on process-oriented outcomes were even stronger. For learner engagement, the condition effect was

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significant, B = 0.43, SE = 0.03, t = 12.88, p < .001, partial eta squared = .57. The adjusted posttest means were 3.86 for the agentic AI group and 3.44 for the reactive AI group. For self-regulated language learning, the condition effect was also significant, B = 0.53, SE = 0.03, t = 15.97, p < .001, partial eta squared = .67, with adjusted posttest means of 3.92 and 3.39, respectively. Agentic engagement produced a similarly large effect, B = 0.62, SE = 0.04, t = 15.57, p < .001, partial eta squared = .66, yielding adjusted means of 3.96 for the agentic AI group and 3.34 for the reactive AI group.

Taken together, these results indicate that the intervention's strongest effects emerged in the learning processes that agentic AI was explicitly designed to support. The system did not simply improve endpoint performance; it altered how students initiated, sustained, and adjusted their language learning activity during the semester.

C. Learning Analytics Predictors of Posttest English Proficiency

To understand which forms of system use were associated with stronger performance within the experimental group, a multiple regression model was estimated using posttest English proficiency as the dependent variable and pretest proficiency as a control. The overall model was significant, F(6, 57) = 37.19, p < .001, and explained 79.7% of the variance in posttest proficiency (R squared = .80, adjusted R squared = .78). Table 4 presents the full regression coefficients.

TABLE 4
MULTIPLE REGRESSION PREDICTING POSTTEST ENGLISH PROFICIENCY IN THE AGENTIC AI GROUP

Predictor	B	SE	β	t	p
Pretest proficiency	0.53	0.07	0.51	8.07	< .001
Plan completion (%)	0.12	0.05	0.19	2.48	0.016
Reflection completion (%)	0.11	0.05	0.17	2.23	0.029
Revision cycles	1.29	0.44	0.23	2.95	0.005
Speaking practice turns	0.08	0.04	0.21	2.33	0.023
Teacher escalations	-0.35	0.30	-0.08	-1.16	0.249

Note. Model statistics: R squared = 0.80, adjusted R squared = 0.78, F(6, 57) = 37.19, p < .001.

Pretest proficiency remained the strongest predictor of posttest performance (beta = .51, p < .001), but four engagement-with-process variables also made significant positive contributions. Plan completion predicted higher posttest proficiency (B = 0.12, beta = .19, p = .016), as did reflection completion (B = 0.11, beta = .17, p = .029), revision cycles (B = 1.29, beta = .23, p = .005), and speaking practice turns (B = 0.08, beta = .21, p = .023). Teacher escalations carried a negative coefficient but did not reach statistical significance (B = -0.35, beta = -.08, p = .249).

This pattern is notable because it suggests that productive use of agentic AI was not captured by access alone. Students benefited most when they actually completed plans, reflected on performance, revised repeatedly, and engaged in sustained speaking rehearsal. The non-significant negative coefficient for teacher escalations may indicate that students who required more intensive intervention were also those who faced greater language difficulties, rather than that teacher support itself reduced performance.

D. Qualitative Findings

The interview data helped explain why the agentic AI condition produced stronger gains in engagement and self-regulated language learning. Four themes were identified: proactive structuring reduced uncertainty, visible progress monitoring strengthened self-regulation, iterative practice improved communicative confidence, and teacher oversight remained essential for pedagogical trust. Table 5 summarizes these themes with representative excerpts.

TABLE 5
QUALITATIVE THEMES EXPLAINING THE AGENTIC AI EFFECT

Theme	Description	Representative excerpt
Proactive structuring reduced uncertainty	Students described the agentic system as breaking large tasks into manageable weekly actions that reduced procrastination and clarified what to do next.	"The weekly steps made the task feel smaller. I did not wait for the deadline because I already knew the next action." (S4)
Visible progress monitoring strengthened self-regulation	Dashboards, completion markers, and reflection prompts helped learners compare earlier and later work and notice patterns in language weaknesses.	"The reflection box made me look at my first and last draft. I could see the same grammar problem coming back." (S9)
Iterative practice improved communicative confidence	Repeated speaking turns and revision loops encouraged rehearsal, experimentation, and more confident oral and written production.	"For speaking, it kept asking me to try again with better transitions. After a few rounds, I sounded less hesitant." (S2)
Teacher oversight remained essential for pedagogical trust	Students valued the system most when teachers verified feedback, clarified inaccuracies, and intervened when the platform signaled repeated difficulty.	"My job became checking the quality of the path students were following, not only the final product they submitted." (T1)

Students in the agentic AI group repeatedly described the AEC as a system that kept them moving. Rather than waiting until deadlines were near, they reported being nudged into smaller weekly actions. Several participants noted that the platform's task sequencing made large assignments feel more manageable. This perception aligns with the quantitative gains in behavioral and agentic engagement because students felt less dependent on moment-to-moment willpower and

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more guided by a visible process.

A second theme concerned monitoring and reflection. Students explained that the dashboard, completion markers, and reflection prompts made it easier to notice weak areas across writing and speaking tasks. Instead of stopping after receiving a generated answer, they compared earlier and later versions of their work, which helped them identify patterns in grammar, cohesion, and vocabulary use. This theme provides a strong qualitative explanation for the sizable differences observed in self-regulated language learning.

Interviewees also emphasized the value of iterative rehearsal, especially for speaking. The system's repeated invitations to try again, varied expressions, and rehearsal of transitions appeared to reduce hesitation and increase practice volume. At the same time, both students and teachers stressed that human oversight was necessary when AI feedback became too generic, overly confident, or inconsistent with classroom expectations. Instructors described their role as shifting from constant explanation toward orchestration, verification, and timely intervention. This suggests that the pedagogical strength of agentic AI lies in coordinated support rather than in replacing teacher judgment.

V. Discussion

The findings suggest that agentic AI can contribute to ESL pedagogy not simply by improving the convenience of question answering, but by structuring learning activity across time. When AI was designed as a bounded process scaffolding, students achieved higher posttest proficiency and reported stronger engagement, self-regulated language learning, and agentic participation than peers who used a reactive interface. The pattern supports the argument that the pedagogical value of AI depends less on the quality of isolated responses than on its alignment with the cyclical nature of language learning.

The proficiency results extend previous evidence that AI can support English learning achievement (Wei, 2023; Xu & Wang, 2024; Wu, 2024). However, the present study adds a more specific interpretation. The agentic AI advantage did not appear to stem merely from having better language generation available. Both groups had AI access. The difference was that one group used a system that translated course outcomes into sequenced actions, monitored completion, prompted reflection, and encouraged return visits. This helps explain why the raw proficiency gain was larger in the agentic AI condition despite comparable baseline levels and shared instruction.

The much stronger effects for learner engagement, self-regulated learning, and agentic engagement are especially important. These are precisely the processes that agentic AI was intended to influence. The results therefore align well with the work of Reeve and Tseng (2011), who describe agentic engagement as learners' constructive contributions to the flow of instruction. In the present intervention, students were repeatedly invited to choose goals, request more challenge, reflect on obstacles, and adjust next steps. The technology effectively created more opportunities for learners to act on the instruction rather than simply receive it. Reeve and Shin (2020) argue that classrooms can be structured to support this kind of agentic contribution, and the current results suggest that well-bounded AI systems may help operationalize that principle.

The study also reinforces self-regulated learning as a key mechanism. Zimmerman's (2002) model emphasizes that strong performance arises from forethought, performance monitoring, and self-reflection. The intervention mapped closely onto those phases. Students planned weekly goals, monitored completion, received targeted prompts during practice, and reflected after drafts and speaking turns. The regression findings are consistent with this interpretation because plan completion, reflection completion, revision cycles, and speaking practice turns all predicted posttest proficiency within the experimental group. These are not simply indicators of exposure. They are indicators of sustained, strategic participation in the learning process.

This process-oriented interpretation resonates with recent literature on AI and language learning. Chiu (2024), Xia et al. (2023), and Dizon et al. (2025) all highlight the importance of autonomy-supportive scaffolding, psychological need satisfaction, and guided strategy use when learners interact with generative AI. Guan et al. (2025) similarly argue that chatbot support is most educationally powerful when it assists planning, monitoring, and reflection rather than isolated content retrieval. The present study builds on these insights by showing that when such functions are organized into a persistent agentic system, they can produce not only perceived benefits but measurable classroom differences.

The qualitative findings further illuminate why these effects emerged. Students repeatedly described the system as reducing uncertainty by converting broad language tasks into smaller actions. That matters in ESL pedagogy because many learners know what they are expected to produce but are less certain about how to distribute effort across time. Agentic AI appears to have served as a bridge between curricular outcomes and daily learning behavior. This supports Liu et al.'s (2025) suggestion that AI-mediated English learning becomes more meaningful when learners adopt agentic digital practices rather than passive consumption.

The interviews also reveal a crucial boundary condition: teacher oversight remained indispensable. Students trusted the system most when its suggestions were tied to teacher-approved materials and when escalation pathways existed for confusing or inaccurate feedback. Instructors did not disappear from the pedagogy. Instead, their role shifted toward orchestration, verification, and targeted intervention. This echoes Molenaar's (2022) concept of hybrid human-AI regulation and offers a practical design principle for ESL programs. AI should manage recurrence and routine, while teachers should remain responsible for interpretation, quality control, and ethical framing.

Several implications for language teaching follow from these findings. First, AI in ESL programs should be designed

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as a bounded coaching layer for goal setting, pacing, rehearsal, and reflection, not merely as a source of generated text. Second, teachers should make process indicators visible, because completion data, revision frequency, and reflection logs can become actionable forms of formative information when linked to classroom feedback. Third, teacher oversight should remain integral. Escalation rules, approved resource banks, and scheduled verification help ensure that AI support stays aligned with course outcomes and does not displace human judgment. Finally, assessment design should reward revision, rehearsal, and strategic engagement alongside final performance. In this sense, agentic AI is most pedagogically useful when it strengthens teacher-led language instruction rather than automating it.

The study has several limitations. The quasi-experimental design relied on intact sections, so random assignment was not possible and causal claims should remain cautious. The intervention lasted one semester, which limits conclusions about longer-term retention or transfer. The proficiency measure combined writing and speaking into a single composite score, and the engagement measures were self-reported. In addition, the study examined one bounded agentic AI configuration in one national context. Different course levels, institutional AI policies, or system designs may produce different patterns. Future research could use randomized or longitudinal designs, separate writing and speaking outcomes, and compare specific agentic features within teacher-supervised language courses.

VI. Conclusion

This study shows that the pedagogical significance of agentic AI in ESL instruction lies in its capacity to organize language learning as a sustained process rather than a series of isolated prompts. Across a 12-week intervention, students who used a bounded agentic system achieved higher posttest English proficiency and reported stronger learner engagement, self-regulated language learning, and agentic engagement than students who used a reactive AI interface. Learning analytics showed that gains were associated with concrete process behaviors, especially plan completion, reflection, repeated revision, and speaking practice. Interview data indicated that these advantages emerged because the system reduced task uncertainty, made progress more visible, and supported iterative rehearsal, while teacher oversight remained essential for accuracy, trust, and curricular alignment. The central implication is clear: in language education, AI is most valuable when it helps learners plan, persist, revise, and reflect within teacher-led instruction. For ESL pedagogy, agentic AI is best understood not as a replacement for teachers, but as a bounded process scaffolding that makes self-regulated learning more actionable in everyday coursework.

Appendix. Survey Items Used in the Study

Response scale for all items: 1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = neither agree nor disagree, 4 = agree, 5 = strongly agree.

Learner Engagement Scale

1. I completed the English learning tasks assigned for each week on time.
2. I stayed focused during AI-supported English activities even when they were challenging.
3. I participated actively in class and online tasks related to the course.
4. I felt interested in the English tasks I worked on during the course.
5. I enjoyed using course activities to improve my English.
6. I tried to understand ideas deeply instead of finishing tasks quickly.
7. I connected new English content with what I had already learned.
8. I looked for better ways to improve my work when feedback showed weaknesses.
9. I asked for clarification when I did not understand a task or feedback.
10. I suggested adjustments or requested extra practice when I needed it.
11. I used the AI tool to shape my learning process, not only to get answers.
12. I took initiative in deciding how to approach my weekly English goals.

Self-Regulated Language Learning Scale

1. At the start of the week, I set clear goals for what I wanted to improve in English.
2. I made a realistic plan for finishing my English tasks.
3. I broke large English tasks into smaller steps.
4. I checked my progress while working instead of waiting until the end.
5. I noticed quickly when I did not understand a language point.
6. I changed strategies when my first approach was not working.
7. I revised my writing after receiving feedback from the teacher or AI tool.
8. I practiced speaking more than once before submitting or performing.
9. I sought help when I could not solve a language problem by myself.
10. I compared my final work with earlier drafts or attempts.
11. I reflected on which study habits helped me improve my English.
12. I used what I learned from one task to plan for the next task.

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Diasporic Ecologies of Survival: Ecofeminist Approaches in Firoozeh Dumas' *Funny in Farsi* and Souvankham Thammavongsa's *How to Pronounce Knife*

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***Abstract*—Ecofeminism emphasizes the commonality between the experiences of oppressed women and a polluted planet. It is also a method of analysing how much each of these writers brings out the hushed voices of diasporic groups and how much they are connected with nature. This study examines the application of ecofeminism in comparing Firoozeh Dumas' *Funny in Farsi* and Souvankham Thammavongsa's *How to Pronounce Knife*. This research explores how and why each of these texts relates to Gender, Nature, and Cultural Identity. Dumas and Thammavongsa, in each of their autobiographical narratives, breach Patriarchal traditions and are struggling with environments that shape their identities. Dumas' *Funny in Farsi* amusingly defies her struggles with adapting to becoming an Iranian in America and is a subtle satire on Cultural Displacement and Nature. Similarly, Thammavongsa's collection of short stories, *How to Pronounce Knife*, voices concern for Lao Immigrants and their struggle with survival and resilience, not only within their environment but also within their societal position. This research examines how these two authors incorporate the concepts of ecofeminism within the description of Gender, Cultural Survival, and Ecological Awareness. It uncovers the intertwining of personal and communal histories with the physical and social landscapes in which they live. Through this comparison, the research identifies the role of environmental and gendered experiences in constructing narratives.**

***Index Terms*—Ecofeminism, Diaspora, cultural identity, Iranian immigrants, Laotian immigrants**

I. Introduction

Ecofeminism seeks to examine the intersectional oppression of women and nature based on patriarchal systems that devalue both. This concept developed in the 1970s women's and environmental movements as a response to the intersecting dimensions of gender and ecological justice. Ecofeminism draws on feminist, environmental, postcolonial, and indigenous perspectives to highlight the intersection of Gender, Race, and Class with ecological concerns. Ecofeminism opposes the current social systems that oppress nature and women. These systems are commonly accompanied by patriarchal power dynamics, colonial mastery, and capitalist exploitation. Ecofeminism holds that the same logic that is used to justify nature's exploitation as resource to be controlled and utilized for human advantage also justifies the control of women, often in the same practices and language (Plumwood, 1993). The feminist tradition of ecofeminism stresses the importance of gender in examining how both social and environmental injustices are felt by different groups of individuals, particularly women of colour, Indigenous people, and the working class. Ecofeminism is also centred on intersectionality, a theory that identifies how Gender, Class, Race, and Environmental categories intersect to create specific experiences of oppression. For ecofeminists, it is not sufficient to critique patriarchy or ecological degradation on its own; instead, they are interested in understanding how such problems intersect with other systems of power, including Colonialism, Racism and Capitalism. In Diaspora Literature, Ecofeminism highlights how dislocated communities, especially women, face double forms of exclusion: Environmental and Gendered. Diaspora works trace the intersection between identity, terrain, and survival, which resonates with ecofeminist critiques of domination and exploitation. Through the Ecofeminist analysis of Diaspora works, this study examines the positioning of women in terms of taking back their environment as well as agency.

This approach also substantiates the greater Ecological crisis and the need for intersectional solutions to Gender and Ecological issues. The greatest Ecofeminist contribution is its ability to tackle global issues on a Post-Colonialist and

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Diasporic basis. Postcolonial Ecofeminist theory analyses how colonialism has impacted the Race-Gender-nature relationship. Diaspora Ecofeminism emphasizes interreflection between Displacement, Migration, and home loss alongside Ecological and Gender conflict. Diasporic women experience intricate relationships between Land, Identity, and Survival as they encounter the Ecological and Cultural burdens of their host countries alongside their continuing ties to their original countries. In this context, Ecofeminism provides a framework for explaining how Diasporic women encounter Environmental and Gendered oppression, who themselves could be confronted with the issues of Classism, Racism, and Xenophobia.

This study's literature review highlights the absence of previous knowledge on the topics covered in the current study, making it more novel and original. The current study focuses on Souvankham Thammavongsa's *How to Pronounce Knife* and Firoozeh Dumas' *Funny in Farsi*.

II. Literature Review

Numerous studies have examined the short story collection *How to Pronounce Knife* and *Funny in Farsi*, a memoir.

In the article "Immigrant subjecthood in Souvankham Thammavongsa's *How to Pronounce Knife*" (Ignjatović, 2023) investigates the concept of subjecthood within the context of Canadian immigration policy, focusing on the racial and ethnocentric discrimination faced by noncitizens, including migrants, immigrants, refugees, and illegal immigrants. The findings show that Canada's immigration policies that stem from the economy devalue the credentials and knowledge of new immigrants bring to the table. In fact, the new policy suggests that new immigrants need to continue their education. While Canada considers itself a bright and multicultural society, the immigration system it has set up ensures that inequality prevails. After all, new immigrants in Canada must take up marginal roles that affect women. The case studies carried out by John Harles highlight the plight of Laotians as they try to assimilate into xenophobia.

Jafarbeglou (2026) in the article, "Hybridity in Translation: The case of *Funny in Farsi: A memoir of Growing up Iranian in America*" illustrates that hybridity in translated texts arises from the interplay between source and target cultures, resulting in what scholars term a "dual space" where both cultural systems coexist. Utilising the notion of hybrid texts as articulated by Schäffner and Adab (2001), the study underscores that these texts frequently encompass culturally specific elements that may seem unfamiliar or "out of place" within the target culture, thereby presenting challenges for translators. This study interprets hybridity within diasporic frameworks. Migrant narratives inherently reflect cultural combination. Identity and cultural negotiation are articulated through linguistics and translation. Language is integrally linked to its cultural context. Accordingly, translation forms a process of intercultural negotiation cannot be reduced to a simple linguistic transfer. Also, the study discusses important translation strategies such as domestication and foreignization, especially through Venuti's (1995) framework. This implies that translators seek a balance between preserving differences in culture and ensuring the text is accessible for the target audience. This research implies that hybridity in translation is deeply connected to cultural identity, diaspora, and the translator's deliberate choices. Overall, these elements impact the translation of meaning and cultural differences among languages.

Casco-Solís (2025) states that Souvankham Thammavongsa's short story collection *How to Pronounce Knife* contests the prevailing representational frameworks that constrain immigrants to narratives of trauma and victimization. This study analyzes how Thammavongsa's Lao immigrant characters counter neoliberal narratives that exploit happiness to enforce assimilation while preserving cultural identity and dignity. Thammavongsa does not portray immigrants as helpless victims or criminals. Instead, she shows them as complicated people who are trying to keep their language, roots, and cultural traits despite pressure to fit in. This study employs Sara Ahmed's concept of happiness and vulnerability scholarship to examine the influence of economic instability on immigrants' relationships with the promises of prosperity in host nations. The study reveals how the immigrant characters can be interdependent, show solidarity, and care for each other, which are all forms of collective resistance. These emotional connections help cultures stay alive and fight against erasure by giving people new ways to think about life as immigrant. Thammavongsa breaks down stereotypes by placing everyday experiences in everyday places at the centre of her work. This study represents how immigrants deal with being displaced and build community.

Dumas' ability to exist in this hybrid space allows her family to interact with Americans, with her experiences being enriched by the blending of cultures, unlike her parents, who remain rooted in traditional Iranian values. Raheja (2022) in the thesis "Diasporic Playgrounds: How coming-of-Age Stories Unsettle Official Multiculturalism in Carrianne Leung's *That Time I Loved You* and Souvankham Thammavongsa's *How to Pronounce Knife*", focuses on how these stories oppose the hegemonic government narratives of multiculturalism in Canada. Both novels portray the complexities of intergenerational trauma, mental illness, and cultural assimilation, especially through the lives of "1.5 generation" children who must navigate linguistic and cultural boundaries to reconcile their family's trauma. This generation, working overtime or double shifts, resorts to coping through art, but their work offers a specific intersection of diasporic subjectivity and traditional knowledge passed down through generations. In addition, the thesis believes that such coming-of-age literature foregoes heteronormative epistemologies in normative knowledge for paradigmatic transformation in which children's imaginations take precedence in dialogue about social, economic, and environmental justice.

This study is part of expanding literature that gives voice to and places in the foreground silenced voices, offering new lines of understanding about the mundane lives of refugee and immigrant peoples. According to Adlesgruber (2023), the author discusses food consumption in Anglophone Canadian short fiction by Zalina Reid Benta in *Frying Plantain* and

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Souvankham Thammavongsa's *How to Pronounce Knife*, highlighting the themes of migration, identity, and memory in Anglophone Canadian Literature. Food is discussed as a symbolic representation throughout these narratives for purposes such as love symbolization, intergenerational conflict, and transcending cultural assimilation.

III. Methodology

This study applies a qualitative, text-based literary analysis to assess the intersection of Ecofeminism, Diaspora, and Cultural identity in Firoozeh Dumas' *Funny in Farsi* (2004) and Souvankham Thammavongsa's *How to Pronounce Knife* (2020). This study applies a comparative qualitative research methodology to analyse thematic, linguistic, and ecological patterns in both primary texts. This study theoretically supported in Ecofeminist theory (Plumwood, 1993; Merchant, 1980), post-colonial diasporic theory (Bhabha, 1994), and intersectionally (Mohanty, 2003), collectively offering a multidimensional analytical framework for the exploration of gender, race, ecology, and displacement within diasporic narratives.

Existing research critically analysed and contextualizes this study. Ignjatović (2023) analyses immigrant subjectivity and racial discrimination in Thammavongsa's work, highlighting disparities in Canadian immigration policy. Jafarbeglou (2026) explores hybridity in translation in *Funny in Farsi*, emphasising how diasporic narratives reflect intercultural negotiation and linguistic dislocation. Casco-Solís (2025) addresses happiness and resilience in Thammavongsa's short story collection, highlighting how immigrant characters overcome neoliberal assimilation pressures via social solidarity. Raheja (2022) studies how coming-of-age diasporic narratives challenge multiculturalism, emphasizing intergenerational suffering and cultural dislocation experienced by the immigrant group. Adlesgruber (2023) analyses food as a symbolic focus of memory, migration, and identity in diasporic works, which is closely compatible with this ecofeminist concept of food and nature. These primarily address immigration, hybridity, and cultural identity. However, no study offers an ecofeminist approach for both texts. This work bridges a significant gap in the field by providing new findings on diaspora studies and ecofeminism through close reading and in-depth analysis of primary texts.

IV. Discussion

Nature has given symbolic meaning in the diasporic narratives, generally representing home, identity, and the tension between traditional culture and modernity (Bhabha, 1994). For women in the Diaspora, the space they inhabit is one of contradictions, marked by both internal turmoil and physical displacement (Anzaldua, 1987). In regard to this discussion, the female characters in the two selected texts relate to their surroundings in ways that reflect the struggles they face, including alienation, cultural assimilation, individual identity, and the power relations involved in the phenomenon of migration (George, 1996). The crossing of boundaries in gender, culture, and geography is indicative of its influence on the lives of women in the Diaspora in terms of their notions of belonging and identity (Mohanty, 2003). Lastly, nature can be used as the domain for resistance as well as the empowerment of women in the Diaspora, aiding in the recovery of their cultural identity in opposition to hegemonic discourse (DeLoughrey, 2007).

However, Thammavongsa adds another dimension to the notion of power-based alienation of the body and the nature of language, in which the female protagonist's identity is further constructed in relation to words, her voice, and how others perceive her. "The cultural tradition that treats nature as resource for exploitation are critiqued, advocating instead for a holistic and respectful understanding of nature, which indicates the moral treatment of women in society" (Merchant, 1980, p. 175).

The characters created by both Thammavongsa and Dumas are alienated from their homelands and roles within their respective cultures. In addition, nature plays a symbolic role in both works, highlighting how the protagonists' relationship with their cultures is shaped by their interactions with the social and natural environments they inhabit. Dumas' alienation is expressed not only in her personal dislocation but also in her separation from the landscapes of Iran, which she left behind, and the new landscapes of America that feel foreign. Thammavongsa captures the alienation of the body and mind.

Dumas' memoir presents the concept of 'Alienation of Women and Nature'. The novel contains many instances connected to this concept of the "other." Grosz states that "Diasporic women's alienation is often escalated by linguistic barriers, as their disconnection from both their cultural and natural environments is intensified by the struggle to communicate, reflecting the intersection of gendered, ecological, and linguistic oppression" (Grosz, 1996). In *Funny in Farsi*, Dumas' encounter alienation and social isolation experienced by herself and her mother, Nazireh, as they negotiate linguistic barriers and cultural displacement within an unfamiliar Socio- cultural environment. Dumas explained her battle and stated that,

> My mother and I did not speak English, so the meeting was just a conversation between my father and Mrs. Sandberg. All the students were watching us, not only because I had come to school with my mother, but also because we could not communicate in their language, and they thought we were foolish. (Dumas, 2004, pp. 4, 6)

In *Funny in Farsi*, the protagonist and her mother, Nazireh, feel disconnected and socially isolated due to their inability to understand English while living in a foreign country. They face various environmental and social challenges in their new homes. This theme is also present in the short story collection *How to Pronounce Knife* by Thammavongsa.

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> For the night meal, they had cabbage and chitterlings. Whenever she brought these meals to school, her classmates mocked her about the odor. In response, she retorted, "You wouldn't recognize a good thing even if it landed right on your face!" Miss Choi scanned the room and spotted her. "Joy, you haven't read it yet. Why don't you grab your book and read for us?" The girl started reading, and all seemed to be going well until she got to the specific word. She read it as her father had instructed, but the girl felt it was not the right one since Miss Choi did not turn the page. However, the girl was not sure what the right pronunciation should be. (Thammavongsa, 2020, pp. 4, 7)

The alienation of the child in her identity, her struggles to speak the language of the host land, and her diet are exemplary aspects where Ecofeminism meets the marginalization of society in terms of women. Chitterlings and cabbage, which are part of her culture, are undesirable to others, symbolizing the alienation of women, especially those from marginalized groups. Magnusson and Marecek's concept of interest in diasporic cultures is often associated with ethnicity. This culture is often associated with foreignness, threats, and tradition. Such representation generally tries to hold Diasporic communities as unique and unadaptable, stemming from the idea of cultural inflexibility or otherness (Magnusson & Marecek, 2012). Her ineptness at pronouncing the word 'knife' properly expresses her difficulty with the language that estranges her from her origins, embodying the concern of Woman's identity and cultural expression supressed within an environment governed by patriarchal, dominant, and colonial regimes. Her estrangement is also meshed with issues related to food and language, both expressing the need to adjust to the expectations laid out by the "alien land" of assimilation and subservience. Ecofeminism unmasks the degradation of both women and nature from particular backgrounds and those related to particular cultural traditions that experience estrangement and dismissal (Ghandeharion & Farshi, 2017). A woman's discomfort in the school environment portrays how women from particular or non-western cultures are alienated from established social performances, mirroring the derision given to nature within patriarchal paradigms.

In several places in the book, Dumas points out the disconnect in food customs and the longing for home food in America. In these places, Dumas explains that,

> In Iran food preparation consumed a large part of every day, beginning early in the morning when the narrator's mother instructed the household servant, Zahra, which vegetables should be washed and chopped. The vegetables were either grown in the family garden or bought the day before. The menus were dictated by what vegetables were in season. In summer, there might be eggplant or okra stew, served with fresh tomatoes and small cucumbers that the narrator peeled and salted herself. Celery or rhubarb stew might appear in winter, with cilantro, parsley, fenugreek, and the narrator's favourite fruit, the sweet lemon, an aromatic citrus fruit with a very thin skin, almost never found in the United States. Cooking requires patience, as hours are spent allowing flavours to combine. When lunch was finally prepared, the family gathered at the table to enjoy a meal as part of a traditional Persian feast. (Dumas, 2004, p. 25)

In these lines, Dumas conveys the nostalgic and intimate relationships between women, nature, and food under the Ecofeminist perspective. This reveals how intimacy pertains to a feeling of estrangement, as opposed to unity (Garrard, 2012). It also pertains to the need for seasonal and indigenous foods, along with patience and effort in food preparation. Similarly, in "Randy Travis", from the short story collection *How to Pronounce Knife*, the narrator conveys a great love for food from her homeland. The narrator says,

> My mother was delighted. She cooked meals my father liked. My mother has soaked sticky rice for three days prior to our trip. Once it had been cooked, she put the sticky rice into thipkhao and covered it with a blanket to keep it warm until it was served. Additionally, she made a papaya salad with a pounding of small dry shrimp and fried two quails, which she packaged in foil made of aluminium. It is a fact that prior to this experience, I had never recognized the beauty of a Lao meal. The colours of such meals starkly contrast with the colour of TV dinners. The colours seemed like a festive invitation. It seemed like she came from such a culture because of the special way she showed affection. It struck a chord about why my father liked only one type of food. (Thammmavongsa, 2020, pp. 50-51).

The protagonist's thought process about her mother's cooking is a great example of how nostalgia and alienation can come from food and the culture experiences that go along with it. The mother's cooking, consisting of thipkhao, a method of cooking little dry shrimps, and fried quails, is more than mere sustenance. Hashemipour (2011) suggests that this is her love for her homeland and her effort to relieve her family's sense of belonging and identity in a foreign land. This is directly relevant to the principles of Ecofeminism, which stress the interrelatedness of all forms of degradation, whether environmental, feminine, or cultural. Merchant (1980) suggests that by cooking indigenous cuisine, the protagonist's mother keeps herself connected to nature and her cultural heritage, thus resisting the experience of alienation in a foreign land. This points to how women, particularly diasporic ones, take up the challenge of confronting the issue of identity and belonging. Food, in its vibrant colours and flavours, becomes a means of retrieving and reclaiming authority over their alienated state, offering a sensory reminder of both home and the nurturing roles women play in preserving and transmitting culture. *Funny in Farsi* showcases the alienation and prejudice experienced by individuals from a marginalized group, specifically Iranian women. Dumas reports that,

> in Berkeley, people were either thrilled or horrified to meet Iranians. Sometimes, mentioning that I was from Iran completely ended the conversation. I never knew why, but I assume that some people fear that I might really

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> be yet another female terrorist masquerading as a history of art major UC Berkeley. My favourite category of question, however assumed that all Iranians were really just one big family: "Do you know Ali Akbari in Cincinnati?" people would ask. "He's so nice." (Dumas, 2004, p. 40)

This shows how gendered stereotypes intersect with environmental and geopolitical narratives about the "other." According to Glazebrook (2002), the Dumas case shows that women from marginalized cultures are often unfairly seen as violent and oppressive tropes. From an ecofeminist perspective, this also indicates how the female body becomes a site of control and misunderstanding, where a woman's identity is both politicized and racialized, just as nature is often objectified, exploited and misunderstood in global narratives. The short story "Edge of the world" from *How to Pronounce Knife* highlights the narrator's experience of racial discrimination based on cultural background:

> My mother encouraged me to play with other kids at the party. They were rowdy, running around, and speaking English with one another. I wanted to play with, but they kept pushing me on the arm and telling me I was "it." I did not know what "it" was, but every time I tried to get near one of them, any time I came close, they'd run from me like they didn't want to play with me at all. (Thammavongsa, 2020, p. 98)

The protagonist's experience of racial discrimination, driven by her cultural background, leads to profound social isolation. This example shows the struggles that members of the Diasporic community go through due to marginalization from cultural differences. As Singh (2019) argues, the issue brought out in the story is that of how this marginalization leads to the protagonist's isolation from her friends and, more importantly, her identity, as a consequence of a world that makes her an "other." In this light, the critique of interlocking oppressions as seen in this study discusses how women from a marginalized racial cultural background and others experience a kind of disempowerment based on a link between social isolation and the environmental and social context of their lives.

V. Results

The findings of this study show that nature serves as an effective tool in the articulation of alienation, cultural dislocation, and identity struggle for the protagonists of both *Funny in Farsi* and *How to Pronounce Knife*. Dumas' and Thammavongsa's protagonists experience dislocation not only from their homelands but also from the social norms and landscapes of their host lands. The intersection of Gender, Culture, and Language Barriers creates a complex site of alienation wherein food and language assume unmistakable dimensions of belonging and identity. This study interprets women's relationship with culturally rooted food within an ecofeminist critique, which stresses women's attempts to retrieve power and voice their identities in the context of exclusion. These narratives also tend to show that the environmental and social dislocation witnessed by these women is exacerbated by the racial and gender stereotypes they are confronted with, further sealing their position of alterity. Finally, the study demonstrates how the ecocritical approach makes it possible to perceive the interlinking between gendered, cultural, and ecological forms of oppression and suggests ways in which alienated women take up their alienation on both the individual and collective levels.

VI. Conclusion

In this study, Ecofeminism, Gender, and Cultural Identity were explored and examined through works such as *Funny in Farsi* by Firoozeh Dumas and *How to Pronounce Knife* by Souvankham Thammavongsa. Through Ecofeminist theory, this study shows how the characters in these works are affected by alienation and dislocation based on their connections with nature and society. The themes of food, language, and nature are important in highlighting the struggle of these characters in declaring their identities under the assimilation pressures of culture, chauvinism of gender, and racism. The findings of this research, apart from filling the gap in previous research by employing the concept of Ecofeminism in the study of Dumas' and Thammavongsa's works, also contribute to the wider argument of how literature can and should describe the struggles of marginalized women under a globalized environment of society. According to the ideology of ecological feminism, this research further provides an opportunity to understand how marginalized women resist the oppression they face in their environments and how these stories of survival also play a part in dealing with the wider argument of Social Justice, Environmental Sustainability, and Gender Equality. However, further research opportunities exist in these chosen works. Future researchers may investigate feminist and postcolonial issues in these short story collections and memoirs.

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A Comparison of Human and ChatGPT-Generated Translations of Chinese Architecture-Related Culture-Specific Items

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Abstract—**This study investigates the English translation of Chinese architecture-related culture-specific items (CSIs), particularly those related to vernacular dwellings, through a comparison between human and ChatGPT-generated translations. It examines human translations in terms of semantic accuracy, cultural retention, and reader comprehension, drawing on the theory of functional equivalence, with ChatGPT-generated versions used for contrast. The selected CSIs are treated as independent units and analyzed in isolation rather than within their original textual contexts, allowing culturally loaded meaning to be observed more directly in translation. The findings indicate that human translations are generally more adaptable, showing greater flexibility in balancing meaning transfer, cultural specificity, and reader accessibility. By contrast, ChatGPT-generated versions are less consistent. Some are concise and effective, whereas others follow the original too closely, with some loss of clarity and precision. The study therefore suggests that AI-assisted translation is useful for drafting and offering possible alternatives, but it functions more as a support tool than as a substitute for human judgment. The conclusion does not extend to broader discourse contexts or to other types of CSIs.**

Index Terms—**architecture-related culture-specific items (CSIs), Chinese-to-English translation, ChatGPT, translation comparison, functional equivalence**

I. Introduction

With the ongoing globalization of cultural interactions, Chinese cultural symbols have gained increasing visibility on the international stage. In this context, the accurate translation of culture-specific items (CSIs) has become an essential condition for facilitating effective cross-cultural understanding. As an important medium of cultural transmission, Chinese architecture embodies rich historical and cultural symbolism and has attracted growing interest worldwide. However, compared with other cultural domains, the translation of culturally and historically embedded expressions related to Chinese architecture has received relatively limited attention in both research and practice and remains underexplored in English, with no widely recognized or established equivalents. This situation may hinder the effective international dissemination of Chinese architectural culture and, more broadly, the representation of Chinese cultural heritage.

The growing demand for effective cross-cultural communication within the context of globalization has accelerated the incorporation of artificial intelligence (AI) into translation practices, fundamentally reshaping how meaning is conveyed across languages and cultures. While existing research has recognized the limitations of machine translation (MT) in dealing with CSIs (Sadikhova & Babayev, 2025; You et al., 2025), especially those related to architecture, the performance of large language models (LLMs), such as ChatGPT, in translating Chinese architecture-related CSIs remains insufficiently explored. This lack of focused investigation points to a significant research gap, with direct implications for cultural accuracy in AI-assisted translation.

In view of the background outlined above, this study explores the differences between human and ChatGPT-generated translations in handling Chinese architecture-related CSIs, with examples taken from the popular science text *Zhongguo Wenhua: Jianzhu* (Cai, 2014b), its English translation *Chinese Culture: Architecture* (Cai, 2014a), and the corresponding ChatGPT-generated versions. It is guided by the following three research questions:

1) How are Chinese architecture-related culture-specific items handled in human translation?

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2) What differences can be observed between human and ChatGPT-generated translations in representing Chinese architecture-related culture-specific items?

3) What implications do these observed differences have for AI-assisted translation practice in rendering architecture-related culture-specific items?

To address these research questions, this study examines selected Chinese architecture-related CSIs in human and ChatGPT-generated translations.

II. Literature Review

A. Related Studies

(a). The English Translation of Chinese Culture-Specific Items

Over time, studies on the English translation of Chinese CSIs have gradually evolved from theory-oriented discussions to practice-based investigations. Early research primarily focused on the application of established translation theories, such as adaptation theory (Zhuo & Wang, 2007), skopos theory (Liu, 2014; Wang, 2012), and functional equivalence theory (Bu & Wang, 2009), to explore how cultural characteristics of the source text could be conveyed and preserved in translation. Research has increasingly expanded to include a broader range of texts and case studies, extending from classical literature (Huang, 2015; Wei, 2016; Yang, 2018) to intangible cultural heritage (Chen, 2011; Hu & Wen, 2016). This expansion has contributed to both theoretical development and practical innovation in translation. In particular, Amenador and Wang (2022a) analyze 137 publications on the Chinese-to-English translation of public signs, suggesting the need for more thorough and diverse research and recommending improved training for translators. They subsequently turn their attention to the English translation of Chinese CSIs in food menus, where neutralization is found to be the dominant strategy, despite variations in the translation procedures adopted across different categories of CSIs and communicative purposes (Amenador & Wang, 2022b, 2023). Yu and Zhu (2024) describe the representation and translation of Chinese Spring Festival traditions through LEGO playsets by adopting a social semiotic multimodal approach. Their study reveals a form of participatory multimodal translation, in which tactile mediation facilitates flexible and direct engagement for both designers and players.

While existing studies on the English translation of Chinese CSIs have made substantial contributions, they have largely centered on a relatively narrow range of text types and cultural themes. By contrast, architecture-related CSIs, which are deeply embedded in Chinese architectural culture and material heritage, have received limited and scattered attention in Chinese-to-English translation studies (Ding et al., 2025; Liu & Xie, 2022; Wang & Yu, 2019). In addition, previous research has mainly focused on human translation, with much less discussion devoted to the performance and reliability of LLMs such as ChatGPT in translating CSIs, particularly those related to architecture. To address these gaps, the study compares human and ChatGPT-generated translations of Chinese architecture-related CSIs and examines how cultural meaning is conveyed in each.

(b). Human Translation and LLM-Based Machine Translation in Cultural Contexts: The Case of ChatGPT

Existing research on Chinese-to-English translation has increasingly adopted a comparative perspective to examine the performance of human and machine translation (Pan & Zhu, 2015). Across a wide range of text types, from literary to non-literary materials (Du & Lu, 2024) and from relatively simple to more complex linguistic structures (Afzaal et al., 2022), these studies generally suggest that machine translation tends to perform better in preserving surface form and structural consistency, whereas human translation demonstrates greater strength in conveying meaning, contextual nuances, and pragmatic appropriateness.

Meanwhile, the literature points to the need for further improvement in machine translation systems, particularly in handling complex grammatical relations and optimizing lexical choices (Zhang & Zhao, 2024). In response to these developments, recent attention has begun to shift toward LLMs, with ChatGPT emerging as a representative model for rethinking the relationship between human and machine translation. Specifically, Abu-Rayyash (2023) investigates the integration of ChatGPT-4 into translator training and finds that, although ChatGPT-4 enhances training effectiveness in technical translation, it remains inadequate in handling literary and culturally nuanced texts and should therefore be incorporated cautiously within a human-centered training framework. Zhang et al. (2024) conduct a comparative analysis of the English translations of Du Fu's poetry produced by ChatGPT and human translators and show that while ChatGPT reflects strengths in vocabulary diversity, professional human intervention is still required to improve clarity and to better convey Chinese culture. Shahgaldiyev et al. (2025) compare human and machine translation and demonstrate that AI-based machine translation systems are fast and scalable but remain limited in grammatical structuring, lexical equivalence, and discourse coherence, with the conclusion that a hybrid integration of human and AI approaches can enhance translation precision and cultural awareness. These studies consistently emphasize the need to adapt translation practice and translator education to ongoing advances in AI, particularly through the effective integration of human and AI translation, with ChatGPT frequently used as an illustrative case.

Taken together, previous studies have primarily compared human and LLM-based machine translation across various text types, highlighting their respective strengths and limitations in terms of quality, efficiency, and the handling of cultural meaning. However, such discussions have remained largely general, with relatively little attention to more

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specific types of CSIs. In particular, despite the richness of architecture-related CSIs, their translation is still insufficiently explored. To address this gap, the study therefore turns to the English translation of Chinese architecture-related CSIs by comparing how human translators and ChatGPT deal with culture-specific content.

B. Theoretical Framework

This study focuses on CSIs. Following Aixelá (1996), they refer to elements in the source text that may cause translation difficulties due to the absence of equivalents or cultural differences in the target language. Their translation therefore entails both linguistic transfer and cultural mediation. Due to their complexity, the analysis requires a framework that can address both meaning and cultural aspects. In this respect, the theory of functional equivalence serves as a useful guide.

According to Nida (2001), translation is not about absolute equivalence, but about achieving functional proximity so that target readers can understand the intended meaning of the source text. In this view, equivalence is dynamic and relative, influenced by linguistic, cultural, and cognitive factors. Functional equivalence thus gives priority to communicative effect over formal correspondence. It can also be understood as a continuum, within which full equivalence is rarely possible, especially in culturally loaded texts, but which still provides a useful way of assessing how meaning is conveyed and how readers respond.

Previous research shows that the theory of functional equivalence has been widely used in translation studies and offers a useful basis for interpretation. In literary translation, particularly in the analysis of lyric prose, it is applicable where equivalence is examined at lexical, syntactic and stylistic aspects (Zhou, 2022). Meanwhile, some scholars have applied the theory to the translation of CSIs, emphasizing how meaning is conveyed to and received by target readers, with a strong focus on communicative effectiveness (Bu & Wang, 2009). However, this perspective tends to prioritise readability and communicative effect in the target text, often at the expense of cultural specificity. For CSIs, translation cannot be reduced to accessibility alone, and it also requires that some of the cultural features embedded in the original be retained. This is why cultural retention is introduced as a complementary dimension to functional equivalence. Additionally, functional equivalence theory has recently been discussed in relation to machine translation (Pan & Zhu, 2015). While such studies contribute to the evaluation of translation, their concerns differ from those of this study. Functional equivalence involves a process of mediation that is closely tied to human judgement and cultural awareness, and is therefore more appropriately explored in human translation.

Given the discussion above, this study uses the theory of functional equivalence as a framework for analysing human translation. By treating CSIs as independent units of analysis, it focuses on semantic accuracy, cultural retention and reader comprehension. Within this framework, semantic accuracy refers to the accurate conveyance of the original meaning, cultural retention concerns the preservation of culturally specific features, and reader comprehension relates to the accessibility of the translation to target readers. Together, these three dimensions help to clarify how culture-specific meaning is rendered in translation.

III. METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a qualitative comparative design within the framework of functional equivalence theory. It aims to explore the human translation of architecture-related CSIs in terms of semantic accuracy, cultural retention and reader comprehension, with ChatGPT-generated versions used for comparison. To enable closer analysis, the selected CSIs are considered individually rather than within their original textual context.

The source material for this study comes from *Zhongguo Wenhua: Jianzhu*, a popular science book published by a Chinese state-affiliated press. It contains numerous Chinese architecture-related CSIs, covering buildings, structural elements and attached features. Through purposive sampling, the section on vernacular dwellings is chosen as a suitable focus for analysis because it is closely connected to everyday life and reflects rich cultural significance, including production patterns, customs, religious beliefs and aesthetic values, which also show regional inflections. Given the evident regional variation of Chinese vernacular architecture, the ten selected cases are discussed in broadly northern and southern groupings to broaden the regional coverage of the sample and support a more representative comparison. Each case includes the Chinese source text, the corresponding human translation, and the ChatGPT-generated version.

In this study, Chinese architecture-related CSIs are treated as independent units and analyzed in isolation, with particular attention to their semantic and cultural meanings. Functional equivalence theory is operationalized through three dimensions, namely semantic accuracy, cultural retention, and reader comprehension. Semantic accuracy addresses whether the core meaning of the original expression is conveyed with sufficient accuracy, cultural retention whether culturally specific features remain visible, and reader comprehension whether the translation is accessible to general target readers. These dimensions are selected to capture the main concerns of the analysis, with a focus on meaning transfer, cultural specificity, and reader accessibility. They are applied primarily to human translations, while ChatGPT-generated versions are used only for comparison.

The analysis focuses on selected CSIs and their corresponding human and ChatGPT-generated translations. Chinese architecture-related CSIs are first identified from the source text and matched with their published English translations. ChatGPT-generated versions are produced for each CSI using the basic 'vanilla' prompt "翻译为英文： (Translate into English)", under a consistent and minimally constrained translation condition without contextual information. The

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human translations are then likewise analyzed in isolation for semantic accuracy, cultural retention, and reader comprehension, and compared with the ChatGPT outputs to examine the main differences in their handling of architecture-related CSIs.

IV. Results

The following account examines ten Chinese architecture-related CSIs, which are divided into northern and southern groups. Attention is first given to how these selected CSIs are rendered in the human translations. The analysis, guided by the theory of functional equivalence, further focuses on semantic accuracy, cultural retention, and reader comprehension. On this basis, the corresponding ChatGPT-generated versions are introduced for comparison to reveal key differences in outcomes. Table 1 presents the ten cases.

Table 1
Ten Selected Chinese Architecture-Related Culture-Specific Items for Comparative Analysis

Group	No.	Source Text (Page No.)	Human Translation (Page No.)	ChatGPT-4
Northern	1	北京四合院 (p. 102)	Beijing Siheyuan Building (Courtyard Houses) (p. 124)	Beijing Courtyard House
	2	垂花门 (p. 102)	the festoon gate (p. 125)	Dripping Flower Gate
	3	庄窠 (p. 104)	-	Zhuangke
	4	天窑 (p. 105)	A “sky cave” (p. 128)	Open-air cave
	5	蒙古包 (p. 112)	Mongolian tents (p. 136)	Mongolian yurt
Southern	6	石牌坊 (p. 107)	Stone archways (p. 129)	Stone archways
	7	吊脚楼 (p. 109)	Hanging rooms (p. 132)	Stilt house
	8	五凤楼 (p. 109)	The Wufeng (Five Phoenixes) earthen houses (p. 133)	Wufeng Lou
	9	厝 (p. 109)	Cuo (p. 134)	Traditional house (often used in Fujian and Taiwan to refer to traditional Minnan houses)
	10	碉房 (p. 114)	Fortress-like stone houses (p. 140)	Watchtower house

Note. Source text: *Zhongguo Wenhua: Jianzhu*; Human translation: *Chinese Culture: Architecture*

A. Northern Chinese Architecture-Related Culture-Specific Items

In this group, the human translations show a mixed way of rendering, with some CSIs preserving culturally specific features, sometimes supplemented by brief explanations, others adopting more general, or using descriptive or functional equivalents to enhance readability, and one being omitted due to the lack of a straightforward correspondence. When compared with the ChatGPT-generated versions, these translations reveal different effects in terms of semantic accuracy, cultural retention, and reader comprehension.

Specifically, “北京四合院” is translated as “Beijing Siheyuan Building (Courtyard Houses)” through a combination of transliteration and explanation, retaining the architectural and cultural identity of the original while supporting reader comprehension. By contrast, “Beijing Courtyard House” is more immediately accessible but omits the culturally specific name “Siheyuan”, thereby weakening cultural retention and reducing specificity. “垂花门” is rendered as “the festoon gate” using a descriptive equivalent, capturing the ornamental feature of the source expression. Although “festoon” may not be readily familiar to all readers, the translation still evokes decoration and preserves more of the underlying meaning. ChatGPT-4’s “Dripping Flower Gate”, while more literal at the surface level, misrepresents the image conveyed by “垂花”, resulting in an odd and potentially misleading rendering. In this case, the human translation better achieves semantic accuracy, despite some limitation in readability. “庄窠” is omitted in the human translation, indicating the difficulty of finding a suitable counterpart, given its dialectal, historical, and context-bound nature. This leads to a clear loss of meaning and offers little support for reader understanding. The ChatGPT-generated version, which leaves the CSI “Zhuangke” through transliteration, does not improve interpretability and proves difficult for the reader to understand. From the perspective of functional equivalence, both approaches remain inadequate, suggesting that culturally opaque terms of this kind cannot be effectively conveyed without additional clarification. “天窑” is presented by means of through-translation as “a ‘sky cave’”, keeping the metaphorical image of the original expression and showing that the translation is culturally marked rather than a generic dwelling type. In comparison, ChatGPT-4’s “open-air cave” is more easily understood but tends to normalize this CSI and weaken the associations carried by “sky”. The human translation thus shows stronger cultural retention, but is harder for readers unfamiliar with such language to understand. “蒙古包” is expressed as “Mongolian tents”, a more generalized translation that reflects the use of a functional equivalent to enhance interpretability. While straightforward and accessible, this choice slightly reduces semantic precision, as “蒙古包” denotes a specific traditional structure rather than tents more broadly. ChatGPT-4’s “Mongolian yurt” is more precise in both ethnographic and architectural respects. In this instance, the human translation prioritizes ease of understanding at the expense of specificity.

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Overall, the human translations in this group show a range of different renderings, and such variation leads to differing degrees of functional equivalence. Across these five examples, the human translations reflect a clear tendency to balance semantic accuracy, cultural retention, and reader comprehension, broadly consistent with Nida's theory, in which the key issue for translation is not only whether the lexical meaning is conveyed, but also whether the target reader can understand the original term while retaining an adequate sense of the cultural specificity involved. The main strength of the human translations lies in their relatively more stable ability to maintain this balance, particularly in comparison with the ChatGPT-generated versions. A notable limitation is that some translations remain semantically incomplete or insufficiently transparent to the target reader, while the latter often achieve greater immediate readability, though this sometimes involves simplifying, generalizing, or misrepresenting culturally specific meanings. From this perspective, the human translations are generally more effective in preserving both meaning and cultural nuance, even when this may reduce accessibility for non-Chinese readers.

B. Southern Chinese Architecture-Related Culture-Specific Items

The human translations in this group tend to strike a balance between making meanings explicit and retaining certain cultural features, though the degree of accuracy varies across CSIs.

Specifically, "stone archways" for "石牌坊" adopts a functional equivalent and is direct and highly accessible. In terms of semantic accuracy, it conveys the material and general form of the structure, though it does not fully capture the ceremonial or commemorative function often associated with "牌坊". Since ChatGPT-4 gives the same version, there is no difference in translation effect here. From the perspective of functional equivalence, the human translation succeeds mainly in reader comprehension, but its cultural retention is relatively limited because the cultural element is not preserved. "Hanging rooms" for "吊脚楼" is a descriptive equivalent based on the surface image of the source expression, reflecting an attempt to reproduce the visual impression of the original structure. However, semantically it is less accurate, because "吊脚楼" refers to a stilt-supported building rather than simply a suspended room. Compared with ChatGPT-4's "Stilt house", the translation retains some imagery but has weaker semantic precision and may confuse readers. In this case, the human translation indicates that preserving literal meaning does not necessarily produce functional equivalence if the target reader cannot have an accurate understanding of the original. "The Wufeng (Five Phoenixes) earthen houses" for "五凤楼" shows a highly layered rendering. It preserves the CSI through transliteration, adds a gloss for the symbolic meaning, and is further supplemented by additional descriptive detail. With regard to semantic accuracy, the human translation is more informative than ChatGPT-4's "Wufeng Lou", which offers only a transliteration. It also performs better in reader comprehension, because the explanatory additions help non-Chinese readers grasp both the cultural image and the architectural nature involved. This is a strong example of functional equivalence achieved through triplets. "Cuo" for "厝" relies entirely on transliteration. This rendering keeps the original linguistic form and thus demonstrates a relatively high degree of cultural preservation, but it provides almost no immediate semantic content for readers unfamiliar with Minnan culture. By contrast, ChatGPT-generated version, although somewhat lengthy, is more helpful for understanding because it includes cultural and regional explanation. In this example, the human translation places greater emphasis on cultural retention over reader comprehension, but functional equivalence remains incomplete without some explanatory support. "Fortress-like stone houses" for 碉房 is a descriptive equivalent that highlights the stone-built appearance and gives readers an immediate visual impression. This translation is not entirely precise, however, since "碉房" in the Tibetan context is not primarily associated with defense, but rather with adaptation to the climate and environmental conditions of the Qinghai-Tibet Plateau. It is more natural and somewhat easier to understand than ChatGPT-4's "Watchtower house", but both tend to weaken the environmental and regional connotations embedded in the original expression. Despite this, the human translation is more accessible to target readers, with cultural retention only partially achieved.

Taken together, the human translations tend to favour non-literal rendering when architecture-related CSIs are likely to be opaque to target readers, but they also preserve source-cultural elements in some cases through transliteration. Their main strength lies in making these CSIs easier to understand without being fully domesticated. Their weakness is uneven semantic accuracy, as some translations are informative and balanced, while others remain either too vague or too dependent on the source-language form. They more often seek a balance between cultural retention and reader comprehension, compared with the ChatGPT-generated versions, which is closer to the goal of functional equivalence.

Based on these results, the translation of architecture-related CSIs requires a careful balance between semantic accuracy, cultural retention and reader comprehension. The human translations demonstrate greater flexibility, preserving culturally specific features in some cases while adopting clearer expressions in others. By contrast, the ChatGPT-generated versions vary in quality, as some translations are concise and effective, while others rely on simplified or form-based transfer that fails to fully convey the original meaning. These findings suggest that AI-assisted translation has clear potential in dealing with these CSIs. It can provide efficient and often useful initial renderings, particularly where the cultural dimension is less prominent or where readability is a priority. At the same time, its value lies not only in generating output, but also in serving as a supportive resource for handling such culture-related elements.

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V. Discussion

A. Challenges in Translating Architecture-Related Culture-Specific Items

The findings above indicate a relatively flexible handling by the translator. This suggests that the translation of architecture-related CSIs is shaped by several interrelated factors. First, deeply rooted in local history, material culture, regional practices, and collective memory, such CSIs refer not only to physical architectural forms, but also to ways of life, social hierarchy, religious beliefs, aesthetic values, and regional identity. Accordingly, the translator is dealing not only with lexical transfer, but with culturally embedded meanings that arise from the interaction between language and its broader context. This helps explain why the human translations tend to show greater flexibility rather than following a single fixed way. A second challenge comes from the nature of architecture-related CSIs themselves. Those related to traditional dwellings and local building forms are often highly specific, but the target language does not always offer established equivalents. Even when a roughly similar expression is available, it may still fail to convey the historical associations, symbolic meanings, or regional distinctiveness of the original. In many cases, such CSIs denote not only a type of building, but also a way of living in and using space influenced by local environment, social custom, and long-term cultural practice. Their meanings are therefore both material and symbolic, which makes straightforward translation particularly difficult. For this reason, the translator often has to balance semantic accuracy, cultural retention, and reader comprehension, and the human translations examined reflect this tension, with some retaining more source-culture features while others rely on more explicit explanation or use clearer, more familiar expressions. This apparent inconsistency should not simply be seen as a weakness, but rather reflects the fact that such CSIs cannot easily be translated in the same way. This point becomes more evident when the architecture-related CSIs in this study, all drawn from popular science texts, are treated as independent units and analyzed in isolation. What matters at this stage is not merely why these CSIs are hard to translate, but how this issue is reflected in the divergences among human translations, especially in how human translators pursue a satisfactory rendering while deciding how far the source culture should be retained without making the translation unnecessarily difficult for readers. This can be clearly found in the human translations discussed above, whose differences are better understood not simply as a lack of coherence, but as the result of efforts to remain semantically accurate, retain culturally specific features, and also keep the translation accessible to non-specialist readers. In other words, the flexibility shown in the human translations is better taken not as mere variation in translation choices, but as a practical response to the challenge of balancing semantic accuracy, cultural retention, and reader comprehension in the translation of CSIs. From this perspective, such tendency shows how translators respond differently to different kinds of cultural information, even when each CSI is considered independently rather than in its full textual context.

The findings also help explain why ChatGPT-generated versions often appear less consistent than human translations in dealing with architecture-related CSIs. This is mainly because translating such CSIs involves more than lexical correspondence. It also requires the ability to recognise culturally embedded meanings, distinguish literal sense from actual referent, and make interpretive judgments when no direct equivalent is available. When a CSI is relatively transparent or has an established counterpart in the target language, ChatGPT can sometimes produce concise and acceptable translations. But when those CSIs are more strongly tied to local culture or historical context, their outputs become less reliable, tending to overgeneralise, remain too close to the literal form of the original expression, or stay at the level of formal conversion without fully conveying the cultural meaning involved. A further reason for this difference lies in the asymmetry between the source and target cultures. Human translators are generally better able to judge when direct transfer will not work and when some degree of adjustment or explanation is needed. By contrast, AI-generated versions may seem fluent even when the underlying interpretation is still incomplete, and this is most clearly seen in the translation of architecture-related CSIs with strong ethnic and cultural associations, where a seemingly simple CSI may in fact refer to something highly specific, closely connected with local geography, social custom, and historical practice. In this sense, fluency alone does not ensure precision, since a translation may read naturally to target readers while still failing to convey the intended meaning with sufficient semantic and cultural accuracy. At the same time, the comparison should not be reduced to a contrast between the strengths of human translation and the weaknesses of AI-generated translation. Rather, the findings suggest that what matters most is the nature of CSIs themselves. This view is also supported by previous research on the translation of CSIs. Beyond Aixelá's (1996) influential discussion, studies across different language pairs and text types, particularly in literary works and film subtitles, have likewise shown that such translation involves more than lexical form alone, because the meaning to be conveyed is often rooted in culture (Bila & Kačmárová, 2018; Zeghar & Benlakdar, 2022). Once CSIs are considered in isolation, the limits of direct equivalence become more visible, and translation depends more heavily on cultural knowledge and interpretive judgment. Human translators respond through selective adjustment, whereas ChatGPT is less steady because it does not always tell the difference between what reads smoothly and what is actually appropriate. Seen this way, comparing human and ChatGPT-generated translations in this respect therefore offers useful insight into both the strengths and the shortcomings of current AI translation. More importantly, this makes clear that CSI translation is not simply a matter of finding a fixed match, but of mediating meaning between different cultural backgrounds. From this perspective, the differences found in both human and AI translations are not accidental, but arise from the inherent complexity of culture-bound elements whose meanings extend beyond lexical level alone. This in turn highlights the value of human-

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AI collaboration in translation (Shahgaldiyev et al., 2025; Zhang et al., 2024), with AI contributing initial renderings and possible alternatives, while human translators take responsibility for cultural sensitivity and final decisions.

B. Implications for AI-Assisted Translation of Architecture-Related Culture-Specific Items

The findings suggest that AI-assisted translation has real potential for handling architecture-related CSIs, but it is more useful as support than as a stand-alone solution. One clear implication is that AI can be particularly helpful in producing an initial translation. When a CSI is relatively transparent, or when a more accessible rendering is required, AI-generated output can quickly provide reasonable translation options. Its contribution lies not only in improving efficiency, but also in giving translators more possible ways to express meaning at an early stage of the process. At the same time, the findings also show that the value of AI-assisted translation depends largely on how it is used. When CSIs need more careful interpretation, selective explanation, or greater sensitivity to cultural meaning, AI tends to perform less reliably. This means that AI is more effective as a tool for human judgment than as an automatic replacement for the translator (Abu-Rayyash, 2023; Qian & Kong, 2024). In actual use, its main value lies in generating alternatives, broadening the available options for expression, and helping translators compare different versions in terms of semantic accuracy, cultural retention, and reader comprehension. For this reason, AI assistance works best when human translators review and refine the output rather than take it as a final solution. Additionally, the findings indicate that AI is better used as part of a process when translating such CSIs. Instead of expecting AI to generate a correct equivalent in a single attempt, it may be more productive to design prompts so that different translations can be explored (Aldosari & Altuwairesh, 2025; Jiao et al., 2024; Moreno García & Mangiron, 2024). More specific guidance on style, explanation, or translation priorities is also more likely to improve the results. The key point is not simply whether AI can produce a right answer at once, but whether it can contribute to a translation process that allows greater control and reflection.

Practically speaking, AI-assisted translation may be valuable in at least three respects. First, it can speed up the preparation of initial versions. Second, it can offer alternative renderings that make different options more visible. Finally, it can help translators reflect on how translations place emphasis differently on semantic and cultural aspects. This is especially important for CSIs, because what matters is often not whether they are translatable, but what is highlighted and what is downplayed in the original meaning.

Taken as a whole, the findings suggest that AI is most valuable in this context not as a replacement for human translators, but as a support for a more flexible translation process. In the case of architecture-related CSIs, a more effective approach is one in which AI contributes speed, lexical variety, and help with initial rendering, while human translators remain responsible for semantic judgment, cultural awareness, and the final output of the translation. In this sense, AI-assisted translation is not simply a matter of efficiency, but can also offer a practical way of dealing with CSIs more carefully and more adaptively. These implications extend not only to translators, who may use AI more effectively as a tool for producing initial versions and comparing alternatives, but also to developers of LLMs, who need to improve translation performance, especially in relation to cultural meaning. They are also useful for translation teaching and training, where learners should develop both a better understanding of how prompting can be used well and a more careful attitude towards AI-generated suggestions.

VI. Conclusion

This study investigates the English translation of Chinese architecture-related CSIs through a comparison between human translators and ChatGPT. Taking each CSI as an independent analytical unit, it aims to clarify how culture-bound meanings are conveyed in human translations within the theory of functional equivalence in terms of semantic accuracy, cultural retention, and reader comprehension, with ChatGPT-generated versions providing a comparative reference.

The findings indicate that translators tend to handle such CSIs with some flexibility. What may appear as inconsistency is better understood as an effort to balance semantic accuracy, cultural retention, and reader comprehension. In contrast, ChatGPT is somewhat less consistent. It can produce concise and effective versions when the underlying meaning is relatively clear, but may also rely on generalised expressions or fail to capture more specific cultural features. These observations further suggest that examining these CSIs in isolation makes the challenges of translation more visible. Additionally, the study shows that AI-assisted translation can be helpful with CSIs, particularly in the preparation of draft renderings and the exploration of possible alternatives. Its value, however, lies less in replacing human translators than in supporting a more flexible translation process in which human judgement remains essential.

At the same time, the study has some obvious limitations. Since the discussion focuses on individual CSIs in isolation rather than their surrounding context, it cannot fully explain how the translations function within broader discourse. The corpus is also relatively narrow, both in size and in scope, largely confined to architecture-related CSIs. Future research may therefore expand the range of CSIs considered, incorporate contextual dimensions into the analysis, and further consider how human translators and LLMs might be brought into productive collaboration in culturally sensitive translation.

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DECLARATION OF THE USE OF AI

This study focuses on comparing human and ChatGPT-generated translations. Accordingly, the presence of ChatGPT-generated translation samples in the manuscript reflects the nature of the study rather than AI-generated writing. ChatGPT-4 is used exclusively to generate research data and support comparative analysis, with full human supervision. Specifically, it is employed to directly produce the ten AI-generated translation samples presented in Table 1. All outputs are retained in their original ChatGPT-generated form and used solely for comparison.

For language improvement, the first author consults ChatGPT for suggestions, but all content is manually reviewed and rewritten to maintain academic integrity and originality. Specifically, ChatGPT-5.2 is used throughout the manuscript solely for checking basic language elements, including grammar, spelling, punctuation, and stylistic clarity. No AI tools are used to develop the research design, and all core academic content is independently completed by the first author.

The first author takes full responsibility for the content of this manuscript and ensures that the use of AI tools complies with academic and publication ethics standards.

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How Close Is a Close Counterfactual? The *Avertive* and Its Tense-Aspect-Modality Interface

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***Abstract*—The *avertive* is a semantically elaborate grammatical category encoding events that were on the verge of occurring but did not materialize. Its definition scope, determined by event types and contextual factors, distinguishes the broad-sense *avertive* from the narrow-sense variant, which takes counterfactual *almost* as its prototype. Avertive meaning emerges from the interaction of three dimensions: aspectually, it specifies the interrupted stage of event realization (the full event, preparatory stage, inner stage, or result stage); temporally, it requires past-tense anchoring to provide the necessary hindsight perspective; and modally, it encodes polarity reversal, whereby a positive construal of an event results in negative actualization. This tense-aspect-modality interface constitutes the distinctive semantic composition of the avertive, distinguishing it from related categories through the integration of aspectual imminence, past temporal anchoring, and counterfactual polarity reversal.**

***Index Terms*—avertive, counterfactuality, proximative, non-realization, tense-aspect-modality interface**

I. Introduction

Counterfactual thinking refers to the mental simulation of alternatives, specifically mental representations of past events, actions, or states (Byrne, 2005). Counterfactual statements enable interlocutors to conceive of alternatives to perceived reality. One core determinant of counterfactual thinking is outcome closeness, defined as the degree to which an individual retrospectively perceives the actual outcome as having nearly attained a more desirable alternative (Roese, 1997, p. 136). This perceived "closeness" or "distance" between the actual outcome and a possible alternative outcome is also reflected in the linguistic expression of counterfactual possibilities (Roese, 1997, pp. 136-137). For instance, a passenger who misses a flight by only five minutes is far more likely to be described using constructions such as Example (1a), (1b) or (1c), compared with a passenger who arrives 30 minutes late (Doan et al., 2024; Kahneman & Varey, 1990; Markman & Tetlock, 2000). Such constructions contrast with conditionals like (1d), which typically encode "far-fetched" or "distant" counterfactuals. These distinct linguistic strategies for framing reality stem from a universal human psychological sensitivity to closeness or proximity. Statements that highlight the "proximity" or "closeness" between alternative representations of reality are termed *close counterfactuals*, a concept first proposed by Kahneman and Varey (1990) from a social psychology perspective. Their framework has since exerted a profound influence on subsequent research on counterfactuals across psychology, philosophy, linguistics, and related disciplines.

Example 1:
a. Mr. Wang almost caught his flight.
b. Mr. Wang barely missed it.
c. Mr. Wang could easily have caught it.
d. If Mr. Zhang had left 30 minutes earlier, he would have caught his flight.

Many languages employ lexical items or syntactic structures to encode close counterfactuals. Cross-linguistic examples include the Chinese adverbs *chabuduo* (差不多, "almost") and *cha(yi)dian(er)* (差(一)点(儿), "almost/nearly") (Shen, 2015, p. 95); the English adverbs *almost* and *nearly* (Ziegeler, 2016); the French *s'en falloir de peu*, an auxiliary construction with the verb *faillir* ("to fail") (Peyraube, 1979); the Spanish lexical construction *por poco (no)+VP* (Salvador & Schewenster, 2005); Japanese constructions such as the verbal suffix *もう少しで～そうになった* and the adverb *危うく+VP* (Yuan & Jung, 2015); Korean constructions including the auxiliary adjective *VP+ 뻔하다* and the adverb 가까스로/간신히+*VP* (Lee & Jiao, 2018); and the German particle *fast* (Schwellenbach, 2019).

Example 2:
a. 河水差不多结冰了。
The river is almost frozen.
b. 河水差点儿结冰了。
The river almost froze.

Example 3:
a. He almost fell when he went to open it. (William Thackeray, *Vanity Fair*, 1843)

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b. ... securing the anchor, and two of them were nearly drowned, though they swim like fish. (Lucie Duff Gordon, *Letters from Egypt*, 1866-9)

Example 4:

Il s'en est fallu de peu qu'il tombe.

He almost fell.

Example 5:

a. Marta por poco llega a tiempo.
Marta almost arrived on time.

b. Marta casi llega a tiempo.
Marta almost arrived on time.

Example 6:

a. もう 少しで 転びそうになりました。
I almost fell.

b. 私は 危うくつまずきそうになりながら。
I almost (nearly) fell.

Example 7:

a. 차에 치일 뻔했다.
I was almost hit by a car.

b. 그는 간신히 살아가고 있었다.
He was barely surviving.

As evidenced in Examples (1) to (7), the linguistic forms encoding close counterfactuals vary cross-linguistically. The diachronic sources of avertive markers are diverse, including proximatives, contrastive markers to volitional verb phrases and other irrealis constructions (Alexandrova, 2016; Caudal, 2023; Kuteva, 1998, p. 138; Overall, 2017). Despite the terminological variation in defining the lexical items and structures, all such linguistic forms denote the core meaning of "events that nearly occurred but did not actually happen" and thus fall under the broader category of counterfactuals (La Roi, 2024; Yong, 2016; Ziegeler, 2016). In the expression of close counterfactuals, the *avertive*[1] has been widely acknowledged as the prototypical category since Heine and Kuteva first defined it typologically as a "marker for an action or event that was on the verge of taking place but did not take place" (Heine & Kuteva, 2019; Kuteva, 1998; Kuteva et al., 2019). A range of terminologies have been proposed in existing literature to refer to this semantic category, including *approximator* (Quirk et al., 1985), *decompositional adverb* (Dowty, 1979), *avertive* (Heine & Kuteva, 2019; Kuteva, 1998; Kuteva et al., 2019; la Roi, 2024), *failed attempt/closely missed event* (Yong, 2016), *counterfactual almost* (Ziegeler, 2016), *proximative adverbs* (Yuan & Jung, 2015), *chadian(er)* redundant negation (Chen, 2018), *danger-evaluative adverbs* (Zhao & Ruan, 2020), *jincha* (*仅差*)+negator+VP construction (Sato, 2003), *avertive format* (Chen & Gan, 2024), and *avertive constructions* (Wang, 2025). For the purposes of the present study, the term *avertive* is adopted to designate this category.

II. What a Close Counterfactual Is: Avertive's Definition and Status

From a typological perspective, Kuteva initially referred to this category as "action narrowly averted" (Kuteva, 1998) and later renamed it the *avertive* (Kuteva, 2001; Kuteva et al., 2019). She posits that the avertive is a semantically elaborate grammatical category characterized by four core meaning components: (i) imminence (aspect); (ii) past (tense); (iii) counterfactuality/non-realization (modality); and (iv) the non-realization of the entire verb situation. While the first three components pertaining to aspect, tense, and modality are widely recognized as the defining features of the avertive, the fourth, "non-realization of the entire verb situation", has not been universally accepted as an invariable feature.

In line with Kuteva's framework, the avertive concerns the non-realization of the verb situation as a whole, which was about to take place in the past (Kuteva et al., 2019, p. 861). The avertive (Example 9) falls under the broader domain of "non-realization," which also includes *apprehensional* (Example 8), *frustrated initiation* (Example 10), *frustrated completion* (Example 11), and *inconsequential* (Example 12) (Kuteva et al., 2019, p. 852).

Example 8:

He was put in a cell with no clothes and shoes lest he injure himself. (*apprehensional*) (Collins COBUILD English Grammar, p. 355)

Example 9:

[1] In the present study, the term *avertive* designates a linguistic construction that encodes a verb situation which was on the verge of occurrence yet ultimately unrealized (i.e., was on the verge of V-ing but did not V). It denotes the non-realization of a past verb situation that was once imminent, where the verb situation is viewed as a whole. This category is exclusively employed in past-tense contexts (Kuteva, 2019, pp. 857-858). This understanding of the avertive differs from the usage of the same term by Lichtenberk (1995, pp. 298-302), who applied it to label a functional category closely analogous to the subordinator *e-V…kwajejje~kwanijje*, a morpheme bearing the meaning of "lest". Lichtenberk's avertive encodes a semantic link between an undesirable event and a responsive action intended to "avert" that event. He argued that *fear*-complements express this so-called "avertive" meaning, and referred to the use of a *lest*-marked element in precautionary or apprehension-causing contexts as an instance of the avertive.

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A sudden pang seized him, and his knees felt so weak that he almost fell. (*avertive*) (*The Moon and Sixpence*, Chapter 39)

Example 10:

a. Before Gallacher could catch up with the ball, Nadlovu had beaten him to it. (*frustrated initiation*) (Collins COBUILD Advanced Learner's English-Chinese Dictionary)

b. I almost wrote a dissertation on Chopin's works. (*frustrated initiation*)

Example 11:

I think this gave him a bit of heart. So he stayed and almost won the Championship. He got beaten by a shot by Kel Nagle. (*frustrated completion*) (British National Corpus)

Example 12:

The doctors tried their best to save the patient, but to no avail. (*inconsequential*)

The concept "non-realization[2]" as employed in this study refers to a conceptual-semantic continuum that encodes situations which have not been (fully) realized in some way or other. This concept concerns the degree of realization of a verb situation and/ or its expected/resultant state. Non-realization may involve different aspects of the verb situation: the non-realization of the verb situation as a whole (*apprehensional*, *avertive*); the non-realization of its initial stage (*frustrated initiation*); the non-realization of its final stage (*frustrated completion*); or the non-realization of its expected/desired result or resultant state (*inconsequential*) (Kuteva, 2019, p. 961). While these five subcategories all pertain to the non-realization of an event, they differ in their degree of closeness or proximity to the conceptual boundary of the situation denoted by the main verb, and to actual reality itself.

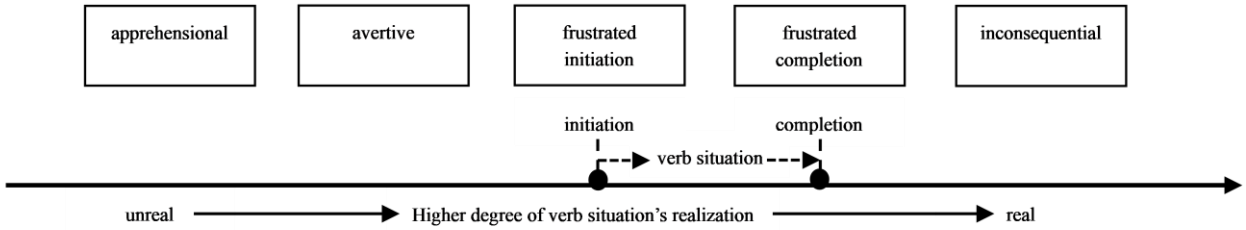


Figure 1. The Different "Closeness" of Non-Realization Subcategories to the Boundary of a Verb Situation (adapted from Kuteva et al., 2019, p. 862)

Several questions arise in interpreting the subcategories of non-realization, which in turn creates difficulty in identifying the avertive. First, the avertive should be distinguished from the proximative, as the two categories share certain core structural features in expressing the meaning of "imminence". For instance, the English adverb *almost* can function as a proximative, triggering the predictive modality of possibility in the utterance "The project is almost done"; in this context, the project may or may not be completed imminently. The adverb *almost* can also function as an avertive, triggering a counterfactual modal meaning of "almost happened but actually did not" in the utterance "The project almost failed, but succeeded in avoiding failure". This raises a key question: what criteria can be used to rigorously identify the avertive category?

Second, the non-realization of an event's initial phase appears to imply the non-realization of the event as a whole, just as the non-realization of the complete event appears to imply the non-realization of its initial phase. For instance, in the utterance "John almost closed the door", it is not easy to differentiate whether the event of "close the door" has a zero degree of realization, or whether its realization was interrupted at the initial stage. A critical unresolved question thus emerges: at which stage of event realization should an event encoded by the avertive be deemed to have been interrupted?

In addition, as the avertive embodies the dual meaning of "being on the verge of V-ing but not V", the avertive reading often seems semantically incomplete without an explicit or implied cancelling clause, i.e., contextual information. For instance, the utterance "He almost died" can be strongly interpreted as avertive (he did not die) due to its past-tense marking and perfective predicate. However, a concessive *but*-clause in "He almost died, but the doctors saved him" can make the avertive meaning explicit. This prompts another core inquiry: what role do contextual factors play in the interpretive process of the avertive?

As a semantically elaborate grammatical category, the avertive exhibits distinct yet interfaced features across the dimensions of tense, modality, and aspect. To identify the type of non-realization described by the avertive, it is therefore necessary to clarify how its aspectual, temporal, and modal features interact with one another.

[2] Discussions of the event "non-realization" were first introduced by Talmy (1985, pp. 130-131), who defined the "degree of realization" as a semantic category concerned with how languages mark the extent to which an event's "essential core features" (those necessary for the event to be construed as "completed") and "peripheral associated features" (common but non-essential accompaniments) are actualized. The "degree of realization" can be expressed via lexical devices such as *almost* and *barely*, which represent two distinct manifestations of incomplete or minimally complete event realization.

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III. How the Event Was Incomplete: The Avertive's Features in Aspect

Aspect in the avertive highlights the non-realization of the event and emphasizes the specific stage (preparatory, inner, result) at which the event failed to reach realization. This aspectual property interacts closely with verb actionality (telic/atelic) to shape the interpretive reading of the avertive.

A. Imminence in Aspect: From and Beyond the Proximative

In aspectuality, the semantics of the avertive subsumes that of the proximative, with imminence (being on the point/verge of V-ing) as its core defining feature (Kuteva, 1998, p. 130; Kuteva et al., 2019, p. 860). Imminence is inherently an aspectual feature tied to the *proximative*, which Heine (1994, p. 36) defined as "a temporal phase which is located close to the boundary of the situation described by the main verb".

Imminence does not directly assert whether the event happened or did not happen; instead, it marks the final stage of an event's progression from gradual proximity to inevitable occurrence, a critical cognitive node connecting event preparation and final outcome, emphasizing the event's critical temporal boundary. Medvec and Savitsky (1997) refer to this critical turning point as a *categorical cutoff point*. Based on Medvec and Savitsky's (1997, pp. 1284-1285) "categorical boundary effects," Kühberger et al. (2011) argue that counterfactual thinking is triggered when an actual outcome falls near a categorical boundary. This closeness effect in counterfactual reasoning relies on the interpretation of a counterfactual's proximity to reality as close as possible. This requires a perceptually salient and cognitively accessible "reference value" to serve as the critical point for assessing the margin by which the target event was missed. This "reference value" is termed by Kühberger et al. (2011, p. 141) as the *category boundary*, which is the point at which an event is "realized/unrealized." The category boundary represents the divide between two opposing event outcomes, such as catching vs. missing a plane, winning vs. missing a medal, or life/death. Missing this critical point results in two distinct event outcomes, a distinction central to interpreting the point at which an event is averted.

Unlike the prototypical proximative, the avertive is semantically more elaborate and is regarded as a highly grammaticalized, semantically specialized subtype of the proximative. The two categories share the core feature of "proximity to an event boundary" but differ in the actualization status of the event (Ziegeler, 2016; Wu & Li, 2025).

Example 13:

a. He *is almost* there. (*proximative*)
b. He *almost fell* (*avertive*)
c. I hadn't worked for about a year and a half, and I *was about to compromise* — to take a part in a stupid comedy. (*proximative*) (BNC)

Example (13a) and (13b) both mark an event's proximity to a critical boundary (e.g., the initiation, completion, or occurrence of the event). In (13a), however, the event is merely close to its intended endpoint, with no implication of subsequent realization or non-realization. In (13b), by contrast, the event is close to the boundary of "falling," and the construction carries an explicit entailment of non-realization. The notion of "proximity" or "closeness" in the avertive is often conceptualized via a spatial metaphor — the progression toward an action is like physical movement toward a location. This metaphorical mapping naturally yields modal inferences (e.g., prediction, counterfactuality), since temporal closeness implies proximity to factuality (Ziegeler, 2006, p. 139).

In sum, the proximative is the broader aspectual category denoting temporal proximity to an event boundary. Unlike the avertive, however, the proximative is a pure aspectual expression of imminence, carrying no inherent modal (e.g., counterfactuality) or temporal (e.g., pastness) meaning. Its modal implications (prediction or counterfactuality) are primarily pragmatic and context-dependent. For instance, in (13c), the speaker ultimately did not compromise or take a role in a stupid comedy; this illustrates that in past-tense contexts, the proximative can generate a conversational implicature of non-occurrence (Ziegeler, 2006). In essence, the proximative merely indicates that an event is on the verge of occurring, with no commitment to the event's eventual realization (the event may or may not happen).

Table 1
Proximative and Avertive's Aspect, Tense and Modality

	Proximative	*Avertive*
Imminence	+	+
Pastness	–	+
Counterfactuality	–	+

The proximative thus provides the general framework of "boundary proximity," and the avertive fills the niche of "non-realized proximity." Imminence therefore functions as a pivotal aspectual feature: proximity to an event readily triggers counterfactual modal readings that encode what could or would have happened.

B. Event Types: Bounded or Unbounded?

The event type described by the predicate, alongside contextual features, may influence the interpretation of the avertive. As mentioned previously, the avertive embodies the property of imminence featuring a "critical turning point". In line with the avertive's definition "was on the verge of V-ing but did not V," the verb situation described by the avertive is compatible with bounded situations, i.e., an event or action with an endpoint. The endpoint may be a natural

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one as in the telic event with an inherent, bounded goal or completion, or a conceptualized one as in the perfective event viewed as a single bounded whole with no ongoing process.

In telic events, when used with past-tense telic predicates (i.e., actions with a terminal endpoint), the same language form can yield two distinct interpretations. For instance, the English adverb *almost* permits two readings: (i) the event was about to happen but actually did not occur at all, or (ii) the event started but did not reach its endpoint.

In Example (14), English lacks dedicated linguistic expressions to distinguish readings (14a) and (14b), so the adverb *almost* serves as a single form encoding both meanings. In (14a), the preverbal *almost* modifies the accomplishment verb "close": in the utterance "John almost closed the door," John came close to initiating the action of closing the door, yet did not perform it at all. In (14b), by contrast, John initiated the action of closing the door, but failed to achieve the result state of a fully closed door (Xu, 2016).

Example 14:

John almost closed the door.

a. John almost closed the door. He planned to close the door but forgot to do it the last minute because of an emergency phone call. (*achievement* or *accomplishment*)

b. John almost closed the door. He got close to fully closing the door because it was too heavy. (*accomplishment*)

Accomplishment predicates ([+durative], [+telic]), which denote actions that unfold over time and possess a terminal endpoint, accommodate both readings of (14a) and (14b). Achievement predicates ([−durative], [+telic]), which denote instantaneous actions with a terminal endpoint by contrast, only permit reading (14a). Utterances featuring perfective achievement predicates therefore only yield avertive interpretations pertaining to the non-realization of the entire event or its resultant state.

In perfective events, perfectivity is associated with the "boundedness" of a verb situation, while imperfectivity correlates with "unboundedness". Based on a typological analysis of avertive constructions, Kuteva et al. (2019) note that in languages with a grammatical distinction between perfectivity and imperfectivity, the main verb in an avertive construction is invariably perfective. In their definition of *avertive*, the verb situation it describes is viewed as a complete, bounded whole, a feature that entails the use of the perfective form for the main verb, and a bounded construal of the situation denoted by that verb. However, in cases such as Example (15), the entire past situation is not fully realized. For instance, the utterance "John almost won the race" presupposes that John participated in the race and performed well, implying he was the runner-up or that the outcome was extremely close (e.g., losing by a split second, tripping just before the finish line). He thus came very close to winning the race yet ultimately failed, establishing a scenario that was on the verge of being true (John winning) and asserting that this scenario did not in fact materialize.

Example 15:

John almost won the race. (*frustrated completion*)

Kuteva et al. (2019) explain that due to the modal counterfactuality inherent in avertive constructions, such constructions can combine with the perfective aspect of verbs to generate counterfactual meaning in languages that grammatically distinguish perfective and imperfective aspects. They add that even in languages lacking dedicated grammatical markers for perfectivity and imperfectivity, the avertive still entails a semantic meaning of perfectivity, carrying an implicature of semantic perfectivity. This phenomenon is attested in some European languages, which encode such meaning via dedicated lexical or morphological markers (Arkadiev, 2019; Caudal, 2023; Kuteva et al., 2019, pp. 858-859).

The boundedness tendency of VPs in Chinese avertive construction "*cha(yi)dian(er)*+VP" is attested in several studies (e.g., Chen & Gan, 2024). Similar to English adverb *almost*, the Chinese construction *cha(yi)dian(er)* (literally "miss by a little") also exhibits the dual meaning of "approaching the realization of VP yet failing to achieve it." Semantically, it displays this duality in two distinct ways: first, when *cha(yi)dian(er)* applies to the predicate as a whole, it conveys that an event came close to occurring but ultimately did not. In Example (16), *chayidian* modifies the entire predicate "majored in mathematics", indicating that the act of majoring in mathematics was nearly realized but not fulfilled.

Example 16:

当年他差一点读了数学专业。

In those years, he almost majored in mathematics. (Lu, 2014)

Second, when the meaning of *cha(yi)dian(er)* only targets the quantity element within the predicate, it conveys that a certain degree of an event was nearly attained but not fully achieved. In Example (17), the predicate denotes an event that did in fact occur, yet the degree of "running out" was not completely reached. Although *cha(yi)dian(er)* can target the quantity element within a predicate, this does not mean it will necessarily do so whenever a quantity element exists in the predicate; the construction may still modify the entire predicate. Its specific semantic scope is therefore context-dependent.

Example 17:

钱差一点花完了。

The money almost ran out. (Lu, 2014)

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In sum, the event type plays a pivotal role in interpreting the avertive. The avertive is compatible with past, telic, perfective, punctual achievement events. Unbounded actions or events lack such a boundary are not typical instances of the avertive, unless they are coerced into a bounded interpretation by context, which will be discussed in next section.

C. Context: Decisive or Optional?

Contextual factors may also influence aspectual construal when interpreting the avertive as one of the subcategories of non-realization. In Example (18), the adverb *almost* can modify past perfective VPs and convey the meanings of *avertive*, *frustrated initiation*, *frustrated completion*, and *inconsequential* in four distinct contexts (Kuteva et al., 2019, pp. 887-888).

Example 18:

I almost cleaned the house.

a. I almost cleaned the house. I hate cleaning the house. But I hate boredom even more. Fortunately, your proposal to go have coffee saved me. (*avertive*)
b. I almost cleaned the house. But you came to get me to go have coffee with you just as I was about to start. (*frustrated initiation*)
c. I almost cleaned the house. When you came to get me to go have coffee with you, I had already gotten down to the last room. (*frustrated completion*)
d. I almost cleaned the house. I dusted and vacuumed for hours and hours but no matter how much I had at it, the place just looks grimy. (*inconsequential*)

For *frustrated initiation*, whose focus is on the initial or preparatory stage of the event described by the verbal predicate, it is difficult to determine whether the subject has clearly initiated the action. A key factor in distinguishing these non-realization subcategories is the subject control[3]. In Example (18b), for instance, a frustrated initiation reading is only possible when the context shows the agent was actively preparing to clean the house. Simply saying "I was about to start" is insufficient to yield a frustrated initiation interpretation of "I almost cleaned the house." Some visible preparatory behavior is required, e.g., holding a broom or a vacuum cleaner, which guarantees the agent's active preparation for the cleaning action. The non-realization of an event's initial phase thus implies the non-realization of the event as a whole.

Conversely, the non-realization of a complete event also implies the non-realization of the initial phase. For the *inconsequential* subcategory, an event may unfold in three ways: (i) it never reaches its typical outcome, (ii) it reaches the outcome but incurs unwanted side-effects that compromise it, or (iii) it reaches the outcome, but the result fades quickly or fails to persist as expected (Caudal, 2023). This type of result-stage non-realization is similar to *antiresultativity*, a verbal category that marks a situation in which the expected resultant state fails to materialize even after the action itself has been completed (Plungian, 2001; Overall, 2017, pp. 8-9). While *antiresultative* can be found to be expressed in the same way as the avertive in some languages (e.g., Amazonian languages) (Overall, 2017, pp. 488-490), many avertive markers do not encode this meaning. The avertive focuses on an action that was imminent yet narrowly averted, whereas *antiresultative* emphasizes the non-realization or cancellation of an expected resultant state. For clauses that do not encode event outcomes and focus solely on "imminence before occurrence," the final realization status of the event (happened or not) must be clarified by subsequent context (e.g., a *but*-clause, modal verbs). For example, (19a) implies interruption or prevention of an intended or imminent event, while (19b) implies the action itself may have been completed, but the resultant state failed to hold. Adaskina (2005, p. 8) further notes that the avertive is distinguished from *antiresultative* by the presence of subjective evaluation (surprise, relief, frustration, etc.) in its interpretation.

Example 19:

a. He almost fell (from the tree). (*avertive*)
b. He fell, but didn't get hurt. (*antiresultative*)

Therefore, *antiresultative* can be seen as a subtype of the avertive in a broad sense (corresponding to Plungian's second type *result not achieved*[4], 2001). Kuteva's definition of *avertive* operates in a narrow sense, with the outer reading of *almost* (counterfactual or non-scalar *almost*) as its prototype. The *avertive* in the broad sense should further encompass at least *frustrated initiation* and *frustrated completion* (Arkadiev, 2020).

[3] According to Caudal (2023), *subject control* refers to the degree to which the clausal subject can intentionally initiate, sustain, or terminate the event. It functions as a semantically relevant parameter for the avertive, influencing the aspectual interpretation (which stage is interrupted), the modal flavor (volition/attempt vs. expectation/proximity), and thus determining which type of avertive reading arises.

[4] Plungian (2001) identifies three subtypes of the *antiresultative*: (i) process interrupted (action incomplete); (ii) process completed, but result state absent (this constitutes the antiresultative proper); (iii) result state attained but later nullified.

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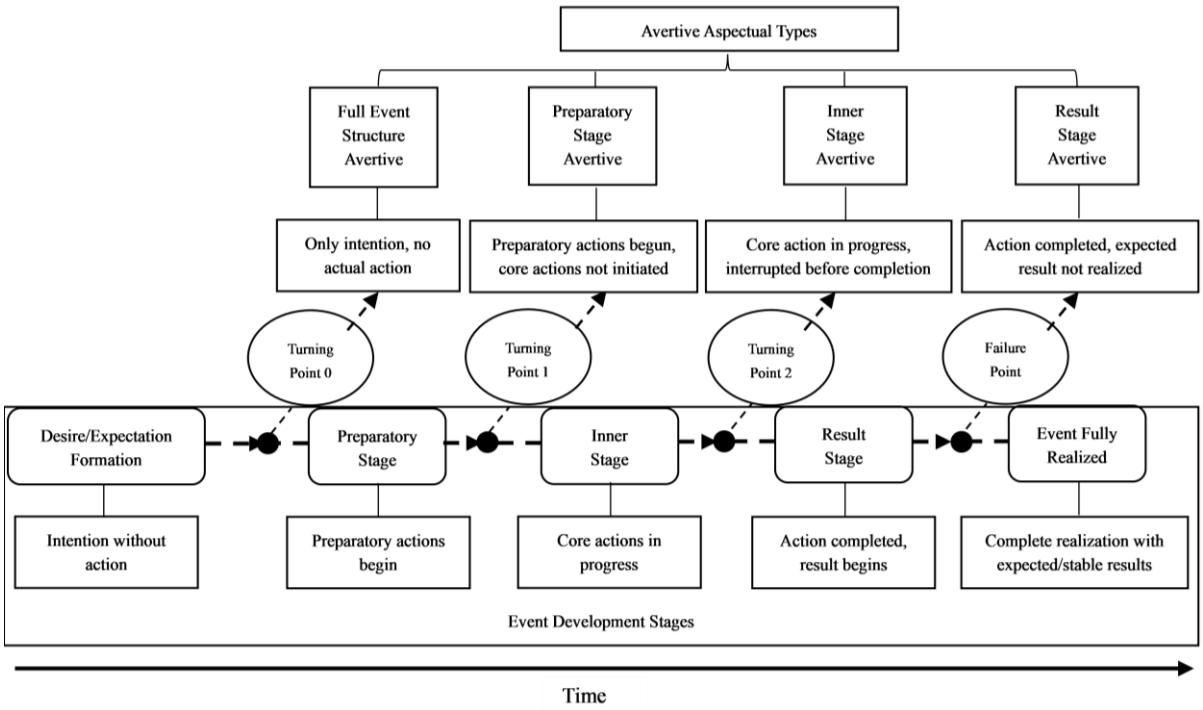


Figure 2. The Event Development Stages and Avertive Aspectual Types

In sum, to yield an avertive reading, the aspectual features of the avertive interact closely with event types and contextual factors, highlighting the specific event stage (full event, preparatory, inner, result) at which the event failed to reach realization (Caudal, 2023, p. 7). Based on this, Kuteva's classification of *avertive* is revised in alignment with its aspectual types, as follows (Fig. 2):

(i) *Full event structure avertive*: the event was merely at the stage of intention or expectation formation, with no overt action initiated; it is interrupted at the *Turning Point 0*, prior to the start of preparatory actions;

(ii) *Preparatory stage avertive*: the event merely reached the planning or preparation phase, with no execution of the core action; it is interrupted at the *Turning Point 1*, prior to the start of core actions;

(iii) *Inner stage avertive*: the event was in progress, with core action underway; it was interrupted at the *Turning Point 2*, prior to the completion of core actions;

(iv) *Result stage avertive*: the event was fully executed, with core action completed, yet failed to achieve the expected result state (or a stable open state) at the *Failure Point*.

IV. When the Event Was Anchored: The Avertive's Features in Temporality

Tense in the avertive is explicitly framed as "when the potential event could have occurred," and the category is thus inherently paired with the past-tense marking (including simple past tense and past perfective) by virtue of its necessary "hindsight perspective", a temporal reference to the past required to confirm the non-occurrence of the event. In line with the core definition of "on the verge of happening but not occurring", avertive markers are attested to be predominantly anchored in the past tense (Kuo, 2016; Yong, 2016; Kuteva et al., 2019; Caudal, 2023; la Roi, 2024). The past tense provides a temporal anchor for counterfactuality, ensuring its unambiguous semantic reference, while counterfactuality endows the past tense with the modal feature of "irrealis". This interaction forms the core semantics of the avertive, describing events that "almost happened but did not" or "were intended to happen but failed" in the past.

Within the temporal framework of past tense, the avertive negates the realization of the event, clarifying that "the event was on the verge of happening but ultimately did not occur". For example, in the Chinese utterance "差点儿跌倒" (chàdiǎner diēdǎo, "almost fell"), past tense anchors the potential occurrence of the action "falling" in the past, while the counterfactual meaning negates the actual occurrence of the action. Past-tense marking alone, however, does not entail counterfactuality: the Chinese utterance "他昨天跌倒了"(tā zuótiān diēdǎo le, "he fell yesterday") carries past tense but no counterfactual meaning. The realization of counterfactual meaning thus requires the presence of avertive markers such as "险些" (xiǎnxiē, "almost") and "差点儿" (chàdiǎner, "almost"). In Example (20), for instance, the *avertive* "险些" (xiǎnxiē) helps convey the meaning of "I came close to falling, but did not".

Example 20:

我险些跌倒。

I almost fell.

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The counterfactual meaning of the avertive is not inherently bound to past tense; rather, this association is a diachronic development formed through "context absorption[5]" (Kuteva, 2001, pp. 151-152; Kuo, 2016). Early avertive constructions (such as the usage of "危" (wēi, "danger"; "almost")) appear mostly in classical Chinese historical texts (e.g., *Hanshu* (汉书, *History of the Han Dynasty*) and *Shiji* (史记, *Records of the Grand Historian*)). In Example (21), for instance, the text conveys that the country was on the verge of destruction, but the ruler's advisors dared not remonstrate.

Example 21:

百官荒乱，诸侯并侵，国且危亡，在于旦暮，左右莫敢谏。

Officials in this country were in disarray, while other feudal princes were invading it together. The country was now threatened by destruction (or almost destroyed), which could happen soon (more literally, between dawn and dusk). But the prince's advisors did not dare to admonish him. (*Shiji*, 91 BC)

Such classical texts naturally focus on "events that happened in the past" and often supplement the fact that "the event did not occur" through subsequent narratives. In long-term use, the temporal property of past tense and the irrealis property of counterfactuality have gradually entrenched as inherent features of the avertive schema, establishing a conventionalized association of "past tense → counterfactual".

Given that the past tense provides a temporal reference for the avertive, and the counterfactual meaning of the avertive relies on the past-tense anchoring, the avertive is limited to "potential events that occurred in the past", excluding future or immediate present events (e.g., one cannot say "明天差点下雨" (míngtiān chàdiǎner xiàyǔ, "tomorrow almost rained"). Past-tense marking delimits the scope of counterfactual meaning, thereby avoiding interpretive ambiguity: if separated from past tense, the counterfactual meaning may be vague. For example, "他差点儿及格"(tā chàdiǎner jígé, "he almost passed") requires contextual cues to determine whether the event is anchored in past or future, whereas "昨天他差点儿及格"(zuótiān tā chàdiǎner jígé, "yesterday he almost passed") clarifies the past-tense anchoring of the counterfactual meaning via the time adverb "昨天" (zuótiān, "yesterday"). By emphasizing the irreality of the event, counterfactuality further specifies the particularity of the past tense in the avertive, i.e., the past events in the avertive are not general past events, but specific events with a clear potential outcome that was not realized.

The counterfactual as a broader category originates in the past but freely extends to present or future via contextual cues or dedicated markers. The avertive, by contrast, is strictly bound to the past, with no such extension to present or future. The avertive exclusively targets past time, as illustrated in Examples (22) and (23), where the construction "past + perfective + *almost*" conveys the avoided event of "missing the flight". Future avoidance is merely prediction in nature, while present avoidance contradicts the hindsight perspective inherent to the avertive's realized past events; neither future nor present thus qualifies for avertive counterfactuality.

Example 22:

a. She almost missed the flight yesterday.

b. *I almost am late now.

c. *I will nearly succeed tomorrow.

Example 23:

a. 昨天她差点错过航班。

b. *我现在差点迟到。

c. *我明天险些成功。

In (22a) and (23a), past-tense anchoring is achieved via both the simple past verbal form ("almost missed"/ "差点错过") and the time adverb "yesterday"/ "昨天". Examples (22b), (22c), (23b), and (23c) are ungrammatical due to the absence of valid present or future extension for the avertive. Consequently, the avertive rarely stands alone in present or future tenses, even with contextual extension.

In sum, tense anchors the event firmly in the past, with avertive meaning derived from the contrast between the intended or imminent action and its negative outcome. Interlocutors employ past tense to express scenarios that contradict current or expected reality, a usage that relies on the conceptual link between past (known reality) and counterfactuality (hypothetical irreality). This is a link foundational to the avertive's tense-semantic interface.

V. Why the Non-Realization Matters: The Avertive's Features in Modality

The avertive, typically composed of a scalar adverb such as *almost* and a past-tense marker (mostly the perfective), conveys the meaning of "a past event that was imminent but not realized." Unlike counterfactual conditionals, which have long been regarded as the prototype of counterfactuals, avertives lack an antecedent and a consequence linked by a tight cause-and-effect relationship. In terms of modality, the *avertive* is classified as a type of counterfactual by virtue of

[5] *Context absorption* is mentioned by Kuteva (2001, p. 150) in her analysis of the "past volition" chain and the emergence of the counterfactual function of the future-in-past. It constitutes an observable result of semantic reinterpretation, whereby lexical forms acquire new functional meanings in new contexts.

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their shared feature of "polarity[6] reversal." This feature has been proposed to identify counterfactual markers (Van Linden & Verstraete, 2008, p. 1869) and is an integral part of counterfactuality's definition (Verstraete & Luk, 2021, p. 288).

Example 24:

He let her go so suddenly that she *almost fell*. (Ziegeler, 2016, p. 17)

As illustrated in Example (24), the avertive exhibits the feature of polarity reversal, entailing a switch from a positive event construal to a negative one. Polarity reversal in the avertive does not derive from a dedicated negation marker; instead, it emerges from the combination of two elements: a past perfective tense, which frames an event as a bounded situation, and a scalar adverb carrying negative implicatures. The semantic tension between these two components triggers the reversal of polarity (cf. Ziegeler, 2016, on English counterfactual *almost*). When speakers use this combination to assert that an event came very close to occurring, they draw on the past imminence of an unrealized situation to achieve specific pragmatic goals. In Example (25), "almost" conveys that the protagonist was on the verge of abandoning hope after a prolonged waiting and disappointment. The adverb "almost" highlights the emotional weight of the protagonist's long-awaited joy at the birth of his baby; the construction "had almost given up" serves as a narrative foreshadowing for the subsequent positive outcome of the baby's birth, creating a strong contrast between near despair in the past and a later turning point, thereby enhancing the vividness and affective resonance of the protagonist's happiness.

Example 25:

"I've got some news; Arlene had a baby boy yesterday; nine pounds, one ounce." "Kip, congratulations; that's wonderful news! You've waited a long time." "We're thrilled, of course. I had almost given up." "Now that you know you can do it, you'll have to have some more kids." (The Corpus of Contemporary American English)

Ziegeler (2016) argues that polarity reversal occurs when a scalar adverb with negative implicature combines with a past perfective event and takes the entire event as its semantic scope. According to Ziegeler's framework, interlocutors convey counterfactual meanings via the counterfactual *almost*. By using the combination of a scalar adverb with a past perfective event to assert that an event nearly occurred, interlocutors leverage the scenario of a past event that came close to realization yet ultimately failed to materialize, thereby achieving specific pragmatic purposes. This is the reason why Ziegeler designates the scalar adverb *almost* as "counterfactual *almost*", which can encode counterfactual meaning.

Polarity reversal in the avertive arises from the interplay between subjective intention/expectation and objective reality. In everyday cognition, humans consistently form intentions (volition), assess abilities (capacity), or predict outcomes (expectation). When these subjective states conflict with objective outcomes (e.g., desiring to act but being unable to do so), avertive markers encode this conflict as modal meaning. When paired with past-tense telic predicates, *almost* as an avertive marker encodes both modal and counterfactual meaning. The polyfunctional feature of the avertive reflects a deep level of grammatical integration: counterfactuality depends on modal markers to signal non-actuality, while modal markers expand their functional scope by absorbing counterfactual meaning. This may be attributed to the diachronic development of approximative adverbs, which undergo grammaticalization and develop into counterfactual markers. For instance, *almost* originated as a modifier of quantifying determiners, deriving from the Old English *mæst ealle/ealle mæst*, formed by the fusion of *eal* ("all") and *mæst* ("most"), with the core meaning of roughly "most all/mostly all." It subsequently grammaticalized into a counterfactual marker encoding the meaning of "it was on the verge of P, but P did not occur" (Ziegeler, 2006). The polyfunctional feature of the avertive is also attested cross-linguistically, as some languages exhibit irrealis-avertive inflections that simultaneously encode counterfactuals and other irrealis meanings (e.g., Australian languages) (Caudal, 2023).

The avertive offers a clear illustration of the hierarchical relationship "counterfactual ⊂ irrealis ⊂ modality". As the prototypical avertive marker, the proximative adverb *almost* in utterance such as "I almost fell, but I didn't" has a dual function: as a counterfactual, it posits the event of falling in a hypothetical world; as a proximative, it marks the near-occurrence of the event in the actual world. This dual function confirms counterfactuality as a specialized subtype of irrealis.

VI. The Integrated Tense-Aspect-Modality Mechanism: Avertive as a Semantically Elaborate Grammatical Category

The avertive does not encode a single semantic category (e.g., only aspect, only time, or only modality); instead, it simultaneously integrates three layers of meaning, namely, aspectual (describing the structural stage of an event), temporal (describing the temporal anchoring) and modal (describing counterfactuality). This integration is not accidental but rooted in the functional logic of the avertive. Constructions such as "almost did X" and "should have done X but did not" inherently require linking "how an event unfolded over time" (aspectual), "when an event was anchored" (temporal), and "whether or why an event deviated from actual reality" (modal).

Drawing on the framework "The Event Development Stages and Avertive Aspectual Types" (Fig. 2), Example (26) instantiates the Result Stage Avertive: at the aspectuo-temporal layer, the event is anchored in the past, with a*lmost*

[6] The term *polarity* refers to whether a statement is negative or affirmative, which is closely linked to "negation," the linguistic means of marking a polarity distinction (e.g., sentential, constituent, lexical, and metalinguistic negation) (Penka & Zeijlstra, 2010).

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specifying the core stage of the event ("missing the train"), namely, the event was imminent (near future in the past) and incomplete (not realized). At the modal layer, *almost* further encodes the meaning of "possibility + non-actuality", signifying that the event of "missing the train" was likely but did not occur in reality (the core avertive meaning). In this sense, *almost* cannot be split into only an aspectual or only a modal element; it fuses the aspectuo-temporal feature of past imminence with the modal feature of near-miss possibility.

Example 26:

She almost missed the train, but sprinted through the station just in time. (Result Stage Avertive)

Example 27:

我们本该昨天出发（但因为暴雨延误了），现在已经快到目的地了。(Preparatory Stage Avertive)

We should have left yesterday (but were delayed by heavy rain), and would have almost reached the destination by now.

Example (27) instantiates the Preparatory Stage Avertive: the construction "本该" (běngāi) anchors the event to the past future (with "yesterday" as the intended time of occurrence) and implies the event was "planned yet unfulfilled" and situated at the preparatory stage. "本该" encodes a composite meaning of "deontic modality + counterfactuality", which signals an obligation or planned action, while simultaneously marking that this action did not occur in reality. By fusing the temporal feature of a past plan with the modal feature of an unfulfilled obligation, "本该 (běngāi)" blurs the conceptual boundary between "when the event was supposed to happen" and "why it did not".

Across all examples, the avertive does not encode aspectual, temporal or modal meanings in isolation. Instead, it fuses these three semantic dimensions into a single, efficient semantic package — a form-meaning pairing driven by the communicative need to describe unfulfilled events (e.g., events that nearly happened, or were tried but failed). This fusion erases the traditional boundaries between aspect, tense and modality, as the avertive markers cannot be logically decomposed into purely aspectual or purely modal components.

VII. Conclusion

The *avertive* is a semantically elaborate grammatical category characterized by the interactive integration of temporal anchoring, event stage and modal attitude. Aspectually, it specifies the exact stage at which an imminent event was interrupted. This research identifies four distinct aspectual types: full event structure, preparatory stage, inner stage, and result stage avertives. Temporally, the avertive is exclusively anchored in the past tense, which provides the necessary hindsight perspective to confirm non-realization, and serves as the temporal anchor for counterfactuality. Modally, it encodes polarity reversal, shifting a positive event construal into a negative actualization. The findings regarding the avertive's TAM interface demonstrate that the avertive functions as a specialized subtype of irrealis, positing an event in a hypothetical world while marking its near-occurrence in the actual one. For future research, systematic corpus-based comparisons of avertive markers across different languages would help test the universality of the four aspectual stage types proposed here.

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Negotiating Alterity in Translation: Mapping the Cultural Grid in Al-Manfaluti's *Majdolin* and Lin Shu's *Zei Shi*

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***Abstract*—This paper redefines the translation of cultures as an interpretive and ethical endeavor shaped by historical and ideological influences. It relies on Ricoeur's hermeneutics and Bassnett's cultural analysis to create the cultural grid, which is the set of overlapping pressures and permissions that translators use to deal with differences while making sure that the target culture is understandable. The article demonstrates, through two case studies, Mustafa Lutfi al-Manfaluti's Arabic *Majdolin* and Lin Shu's Chinese *Zei Shi*, how European narratives are systematically re-inscribed to attain domestic resonance. Al-Manfaluti changes Romantic celestial innocence into Arabic-Islamic modesty (al-hayāʾ) and honor, mostly by leaving things out and changing the way people think about morality. Lin Shu reinterprets Dickensian empathy and social criticism through the lens of Confucian filial piety (xiào), obligation, and historiographical analysis. These interventions are perceived as ethically significant acts of linguistic hospitality that acknowledge loss while preserving meaning under constraint. The study gives a way to compare cross-cultural rewritings that goes beyond just finding mechanical equivalents by showing how translators act as cultural agents and moral lawmakers in the cultural grid. It argues that such rewritings secure equivalence without identity and enable forms of deep endorsement that outlast momentary linguistic similarity.**

***Index Terms*—Arabic translation, Chinese translation, cultural grid, hermeneutics, linguistic hospitality**

I. Introduction

Translation studies have moved beyond the traditional view of translation as the transfer of meaning from one linguistic system to another. Debates once centred on accuracy, faithfulness, and equivalence, often treating texts in a formalist vacuum. In contemporary theory, translation is approached as interpretation, cultural mediation, and ethical responsibility.

From a hermeneutic perspective, translation is never reproduction but a negotiation of the text's surplus of meaning. Ricoeur frames the task as an attempt at equivalence without identity, and as linguistic hospitality: welcoming the foreign word into the host language without assimilation (Ricoeur, 1977, pp. 45–48; Ricoeur, 2006, pp. 10–15).

The cultural turn, associated with Bassnett and Lefevere, locates this interpretive labour within histories of convention, ideology, and power. Translation becomes a situated rewriting for new audiences, shaped by norms of selection, reception, and cultural expectation. Read together, these frameworks clarify how translators negotiate alterity within the constraints of a receiving culture.

This article theorizes translation as an interpretive and ethical practice governed by a cultural grid: an ensemble of intersecting pressures and permissions that mediates between textual alterity and target-culture legibility. Ethically, the grid is illuminated by Ricoeur's linguistic hospitality and the pursuit of equivalence without identity; ideologically, it is structured by the cultural-turn insights of Bassnett and Lefevere, for whom translation is a rewriting shaped by power, norms, and reception. Through *Majdolin* and *Zei Shi*, the study traces systematic reinscription: Romantic innocence is recalibrated as Arabic-Islamic modesty, and Dickensian compassion is reframed as Confucian filiality. Such interventions show translators acting as cultural agents and moral legislators, enabling deep endorsement beyond superficial linguistic equivalence.

Accordingly, the article is guided by the following research questions. First, how does the "cultural grid"—conceived as a synthesis of Ricoeur's hermeneutics and Bassnett's cultural turn—function as the primary mechanism for negotiating textual alterity in non-Western translations? Second, in what ways do Al-Manfaluti and Lin Shu systematically re-inscribe European concepts of "Romantic innocence" and "Christian compassion" into the Arabic-Islamic and Confucian ethical systems? Third, to what extent do the narrative interventions and omissions found in *Majdolin* and *Zei Shi* demonstrate the role of the translator as an active "cultural agent" and "moral legislator" rather than a neutral linguistic conduit?

II. Theoretical Framework

A. Hermeneutics

Paul Ricoeur viewed translation as an abiding philosophical interest, positioning it centrally within his hermeneutical endeavor, a focus made explicit in his work *On Translation* (Garcia, 2008). The fundamental necessity for translation

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arises from the inescapable human condition of plurality and the diversity of languages and cultures (Bottone, 2014). Ricœur reflects with some astonishment on the fact that humanity only comes to realization through a plurality of cultures rather than a single, unified humanity, and he reads this plurality against the fractured, post-Babel condition of languages that makes translation both necessary and problematic (Ricoeur, 2006), a condition that Garcia identifies as the definitive marker of an original incohesion (Garcia, 2008, p. 332). Translation thus serves as essential mediation between the multitude of cultures and the underlying wager on the unity of humanity.

Linguistic hospitality (hospitalité langagière) functions in Ricoeur's work as an explicitly ethical model for translation, and not merely as a descriptive metaphor about language. Linguistic hospitality is presented as an ethical stance in which the translator accepts the "risk" and asymmetry involved in opening the host language to the foreign, rather than treating translation as a neutral technical transfer (Connelly, 2018). On this reading, translation becomes a form of moral engagement: to translate is to welcome the other's discourse, to let it unsettle the self-sufficiency of one's own language, and at the same time to take responsibility for how the foreign word is "received at home". This philosophical position centres on the welcome extended to the foreign text, requiring the host language to overcome its 'pretensions to self-sufficiency' and resist linguistic ethnocentrism (Ricoeur, 2006). Linguistic hospitality is specifically characterized as the pleasure of receiving, in one's own language, the word of the Other (Garcia, 2008).

The moral obligation is to make this integration happen without violence or forcing people to fit in, while still being truly open to differences. Ricoeur calls translation a difficult "work of mourning" in which the translator has to give up the idea of a perfect universal language and the idea of a completely accurate, flawless translation (Ricoeur, 2006, pp. 3–5; Dreyer, 2011). This giving up is not just technical; it is also moral, because it encourages a kind of humility that lets the translator aim only for what Ricoeur calls an "equivalence without identity." This shows that there is an irreducible distance between languages and cultures (Ricoeur, 2006, pp. 10–11; Simonotti, 2022). By permitting the host language to experience the "test of the foreign" and by opting to inhabit the other's word amidst conditions of loss and asymmetry, linguistic hospitality emerges, within Ricoeur's framework and its recent interpretation, as a paradigm for extensive cultural and even interreligious exchanges founded on respect, recognition, and responsible mediation (Dreyer, 2011; Simonotti, 2022).

The translator can give up the impossible goal of absolute adequacy and instead focus on the practical and moral goal of achieving "equivalence without identity." This important difference recognizes the "gap between adequation and equivalence," which means that translation conveys meaning without ever giving the original message an exact identity. This humility turns loss into a way to be "happy." The acceptance of 'loss and gain' is thus central to ethical interpretation, as it confirms the irreducible distance between languages and positions translation as a model for navigating human plurality (Kearney, 2007).

Ricoeur defines translation as an épreuve, a "test" that must be comprehended in a dual context: firstly, as a trial that presents the translator with resistance, loss, and the potential for failure; secondly, as a probation that scrutinizes and hones the desire to translate (Ricoeur, 2006). In this context, the translational test is inextricably linked to what he refers to as the "test of the Other," as it assesses the translator's readiness to allow the foreign work, its author, and its language to challenge the self-sufficiency of the mother tongue, thereby rendering translation an ethical examination of exposure to alterity.

B. Cultural Turn

Recent studies in translation studies confirm Bassnett and Lefevere's pivotal role in initiating the cultural turn during the late 1980s and early 1990s, particularly through their 1990 edited volume Translation, History and Culture, which redirected the field's emphasis from isolated linguistic comparisons to more expansive socio-cultural contexts. This paradigmatic shift dismissed assessments of translations conducted in a "formalist vacuum," wherein analysis was confined to source and target texts exclusively, advocating for the examination of texts within historical, ideological, and power-laden contexts (Koskinen, 2004). Contemporary scholarship continues to trace this evolution, noting how the cultural turn expanded translation studies to include issues of patronage, poetics, and reception, creating interdisciplinary bridges with sociology and cultural analysis (Dizdar, 2023).

The cultural turn necessitated an emphasis on overarching concerns of context, history, and convention in the practice of translation. The new focus was not on linguistic accuracy, faithfulness, or isolated equivalence, but on the text as something that is part of a network of cultural signs from both the source and the target (Bassnett, 2013). Because of this wider scope, it was necessary to look at how texts are manipulated, such as how texts are chosen for translation, what patrons and publishers do, how translation strategies are chosen, and how the text is received in the target system (Munday, 2022). For Bassnett, translation is always political and ideological, happening in a continuum and never in a void. It is also limited by both textual and extratextual factors (Gentzler, 2016).

Lefevere says that translation is a "rewriting of an original text, all rewritings reflecting a certain ideology and a poetics" (Lefevere, 1992). This poetics refers to the most common literary styles and conventions in the target culture. The ideology, on the other hand, includes the beliefs, morals, and power structures that shape the receiving society. This means that the process of translating is always a "manipulative textual process" because there are conscious or unconscious rules that determine how a text is chosen, how it is translated, and how it will be received in the target system (Lefevere, 2016, pp. 11–17).

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Translation is always a part of systems of representation, cultural identity, and the politics of meaning. Translators are acknowledged as cultural agents who mediate between conflicting discourses rather than as unseen servants of the source text. The choice of texts, the standards that guide translation strategies, and the influence of institutional factors like publishers, patrons, and editors are all seen as politically charged choices (Zhang, 2013).

Bassnett, for example, says that translation can be a powerful tool for control because it can impose meaning while hiding the power dynamics that shape that meaning. This is clear in historical acts of censorship (Bassnett, 2013). As a result, the translation is seen as a new cultural product that is shaped by the outside factors of the receiving culture and either supports or challenges existing cultural hierarchies.

Lefevere emphasized the analytical value of this concept, asserting that translation issues arise "at least as much from discrepancies in conceptual and textual grids as from discrepancies in languages" (Lefevere, 2016, p. 76). This statement puts cultural-epistemological structures, or grids, on the same level as language differences as the main causes of translation problems. The grid shows how translations between cultures, especially between Western and non-Western cultures, often change the meaning of the original text by putting it into Western terms. So, the grid is a dynamic network that maps the "interpretive, ethical, and cultural forces that shape the movement of texts." This means that the translator has to navigate through different structures of history and ideology to make the text understandable in the target culture (Yi, 2025). By analysing these grids, scholars can better understand how texts assume or lose 'cultural capital as they cross boundaries.

C. The Cultural Grid as the Ethical-Ideological Arena

The cultural grid is the space where these approaches converge. Bassnett and Lefevere foreground the constraint, ideology, poetics, and reception—that dictate permissible forms of rewriting in the target system (Bassnett & Lefevere, 1990, p. 5). Ricoeur provides the ethical demand that this rewriting remain a form of hospitality rather than assimilative violence, pursuing equivalence without identity under conditions of loss (Ricoeur, 2006). In synthesis, the grid names both the limits and the enabling conditions of translational practice: it restricts what can be said and shown, yet it also makes intercultural intelligibility possible through responsible mediation.

III. Methodology

Accordingly, the article will discuss the following hypothesis. First, the cultural grid is the primary arena where linguistic hospitality is negotiated under the ideological and aesthetic constraints of the receiving society. Translation is thus a dynamic rewriting governed by pressures and permissions that render alterity intelligible within the target culture's network of signs. Second, when European narratives enter Arabic and Chinese contexts, values such as Romantic innocence and Christian compassion are re-inscribed as Arabic-Islamic modesty and Confucian filiality. Deep endorsement depends on aligning a text's moral core with interiorised patterns of expectation in the target audience. Third, the translator operates as a cultural agent and moral legislator, using narrative intervention and strategic omission to preserve ethical integrity within the host grid. These acts realise equivalence without identity by prioritising the receiving culture's didactic imperatives over mechanical fidelity.

This article adopts a qualitative, comparative approach that discusses translation as cultural production and rewriting rather than as a purely linguistic exercise. It reads each translated text as embedded in a network of source and target cultural signs, and it operationalises analysis through the cultural grid. Analytically, the study integrates, first, a hermeneutic reading (Ricoeur) that evaluates linguistic hospitality and the pursuit of equivalence without identity; and second, a cultural-turn reading (Bassnett and Lefevere) that traces extratextual constraints, especially ideology, poetics, and reception, as they shape translational choices.

The cultural grid is defined here as the dynamic ensemble of intersecting pressures and permissions—interiorised patterns of expectation—that govern how a receiving culture selects, reshapes, and legitimises a foreign text. Applied to *Majdolin* and *Zei Shi*, the procedure identifies key source-text values (Romantic innocence; social compassion), maps their reinscription into target virtues (al-hayā'; xiào), and documents salient strategies such as censorious omission and commentative narration.

In addition, the analytical procedure follows these steps, first, pinpointing the foundational "cultural capital" of the source texts, such as Romantic innocence in Karr and social compassion in Dickens. Second, analysing how these values are transformed through the cultural grid into target-culture virtues, such as Arabic-Islamic modesty (al-hayā) and Confucian filiality (xiào). Third, documenting specific "manipulative" strategies, including censorious omissions (e.g., Al-Manfaluti's removal of sexual union) and commentative additions (e.g., Lin Shu's "external historian" intervention).

IV. Discussions

A. Cultural Grids and Core Values: Romantic Celestial Innocence and Confucian Moralization

The core European value embedded within the source text, Alphonse Karr's Romantic novel *Sous les Tilleuls*, that centrally enters the cultural grid is a concept of celestial innocence and spiritual purity. This value functions not merely as a moral measure, but as an aesthetic and ontological ideal essential to the Romantic worldview dominating the mid-nineteenth century, where the norm was European in cultural evaluation (Bassnett & Lefevere, 1998, p. 129). Within the

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narrative, this innocence is the foundational cultural capital defining the protagonists' relationship. Stephen's love for Magdeleine is clearly shown by how high and ethereal it is. The story says that he loved her so much that he thought she was an angel (Karr, 1890, p. 95). This spiritualization of the woman makes the relationship more than just a normal one; it makes their commitment a holy and virtuous union (Karr, 1890, p. 23). The contrast between Magdeleine and other female characters, like Marie, who was just a woman to him, makes this Romantic purity even stronger. This shows the difference between pure spiritual devotion and base physical desire.

Magdeleine's identity is fundamentally connected to her celestial innocence. Her anxiety about Stephen is mostly about keeping her innocence and my honor safe. The narrative framework establishes the source text value grid centred on the sanctity of purity, mirroring the prevalent aesthetic ideals in the European context. Susan Bassnett says that European cultures have a "common textual grid that comes from the Christian and Greco-Roman traditions" (Bassnett & Lefevere, 1990, p. 5) In the Romantic era, this tradition often channelled spiritual or transcendent desires through idealized feminine innocence. This made it an important standard for moral worth and textual integrity when translated.

The tragedy of Sous les Tilleuls hinges entirely on the violation and subsequent disintegration of this fundamental value. When Stephen finally seeks terrible revenge by corrupting Magdeleine, he breaks the sacred promise they made to each other, which is what he does sous ces mêmes tilleul (Karr, 1890, p. 302). This infringement of innocence culminates in Magdeleine's lethal despair. The ultimate failure of the love is not a social or economic disaster, but a metaphysical one, showing how deeply the idea of spiritual innocence was a part of the source culture's ideas about morality and human destiny.

Thus, when the text undergoes translation, the widespread value of Romantic innocence serves as a significant constraint or influencing factor on the receiving culture's system (Schor, 1992). The subsequent translation decisions, illustrated by the cultural transformations enacted by adapters such as Al-Manfaluti within the target culture (as examined in the contextualizing study), inherently interact with, and frequently recontextualize, this particular European notion of purity and its association with destiny and elevated moral status (Kilpatrick, 1974). The aesthetic appreciation of Karr's work, which facilitated its initial traction and success ('joli caractère, talents, énergie'), is founded on the deep spiritualization of love represented by this celestial innocence.

In another enlightening example of cultural-grid negotiation, Lin Shu's 1908 translation of Charles Dickens's Oliver Twist, titled *Zei Shi* (賊史), exemplifies the negotiation of the cultural grid, positioning translation as an interpretive and ethical endeavor. This method changes translation from just moving words from one language to another to a strategy of making things more Chinese. Lin Shu, a Chinese writer and Confucian conservative, used an oral interpreter named Wei Yi to help him understand the source text. He did this translation at a time when China was trying to use foreign knowledge as a cultural technology to help a country that was in trouble (Xu, 2023). Lin saw similarities between Dickens's London slums and China's own corrupt government and social decay (Li, 2025). He recognized the novel's ability to critique society by showing the problems of the lower class.

Lin's formal textual choices show that he is consciously ideologically anchored. First, the title, *Zei Shi* (Thief History), exemplifies Lin's domestication strategy, deliberately utilizing a Confucian historiographical reframing instead of a direct translation (Li, 2025). Second, by making Zei (thief) the main character, Lin brought out Oliver's stigmatized social identity and made fun of the systemic injustice that often leads poor people to crime. This focus makes the text similar to the moral lessons found in traditional Chinese writing (Li, 2025).

The use of the word Shi (History) did raise the story to the level of Sima Qian's Records of the Grand Historian, which brought stories that had been left out of the Chinese classical tradition into the fold. This strategy clearly included social criticism and placed the work in the context of the contemporary fiction revolution, which aimed to revitalize the nation through new literature. Lin's choice of Zei also showed how Confucianism corrected names (正名) (Li, 2025).

Lin was aware of his power as a translator throughout *Zei Shi* and used it to shape the work according to his own vision. His method is a clear example of how subjective a translator can be operating in different cultural settings, the translator is an active participant who chooses, adapts, and reconstructs meaning instead of just passing it along. Lin also often used the commentative narrative subject "外史氏曰" (external historian). This device changes the original third-person objective narration into the "史官介入" (historian intervenes) mode, which is typical of traditional Chinese narrative (Tang, 2024).

This author's voice also talks about events in a clear way through the lens of traditional Chinese morality. For instance, the phrase "外史氏曰" in one part shows how the translator feels about the warmth and coldness of human feelings and the turning point of fate (Li, 2025).

This makes sure that the moral center of the novel—Oliver's struggle and natural goodness—was set within the Chinese system's well-known moral limits. These systematic selections illustrate that Lin's objective was ethical interpretation rather than mechanical equivalence, thereby ensuring that the foreign text was rendered comprehensible and morally significant within the target culture.

B. The Translator as a Moral Legislator and a Parallel Author

The transition of Alphonse Karr's Sous les Tilleuls into the Arabic linguistic and ideological context illustrates the significant limitations imposed by the receiving culture, necessitating a fundamental re-evaluation of moral standards. The Arabic-Islamic cultural grid requires this transformative process, which goes far beyond just changing words. It puts

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the values of modesty (al-hayāʾ) and honor (al-sharaf) above the original Romantic aesthetics (Al-Manfaluti, 2014). The resulting textual adaptation, characterized by the core analysis as parallel authorship, serves as a pivotal mechanism for ideological reinforcement within the target system.

The supreme virtue of modesty (al-hayāʾ) serves as a central influence in the development of Magdeleine's narrative (Al-Manfaluti, 2014, p. 25). The Romantic idea of celestial innocence is what the relationship is based on in the source text. It is described as a holy and virtuous union that is later ruined by circumstances.

However, once in the Arabic context, the portrayal of female character development is strictly limited by moral consequence. For example, Al-Manfaluti's (2014) version changes the story so that Magdeleine, who had done something wrong (the perceived "treachery" or ghadr) (p. 81), gets punished and is then turned down with pride by Stephen. This decision is not based on aesthetics but on ideology; it changes the story from a Romantic tragedy about broken idealism to a moral reckoning that fits with the materialistic Western world by focusing on spiritual poverty. Moreover, the initial textual ambiguity concerning financial versus ethical motives is clarified in favor of the moral dimension associated with honor (al-sharaf) (Al-Manfaluti, 2014, p. 37).

The most important thing about these limits is that they show cultural hegemony at the time of text transfer. Instead of following the rule of faithfulness, the translator uses the "cultural turn" model to create a system of narrative justice. The resulting text must conform to the entrenched expectations of the target culture concerning female roles, the association of fate with moral integrity (Al-Manfaluti, 2014, p. 75), and the depiction of idealized behavior to the audience, illustrating how the Arabic-Islamic framework actively modifies texts to preserve its fundamental values. Consequently, Al-Manfaluti's work is assessed not by its fidelity to Karr's original text but by its coherence as a piece of authorship and composition that effectively integrates and validates local cultural ethics.

In a similar act of cultural re-inscription, Lin Shu's translation of Oliver's defense against Noah Claypole's insults about his dead mother shows how Christian-inflected social compassion can be strategically re-inscribed as Confucian filiality (Lin, 1908, p. 44). Dickens's English story shows Oliver's sudden, extreme violence as a natural, instinctive reaction to deep emotional harm. He says, "his spirit was roused at last; the cruel insult to his dead mother had set his blood on fire" (Dickens, 1843, p. 44). This emphasizes Dickens's criticism of systemic cruelty and the suffering of the lower class.

Lin Shu, on the other hand, was a self-proclaimed Confucian conservative who used a strategy of domestication to try to make things more Chinese. This translation act used the cultural grid to turn spontaneous, rebellious anger into a respected order. The mother's honor (xiao, or filial piety) is no longer a desperate personal outburst, but a moral duty to follow Chinese customs. Lin made sure that the European story had moral meaning and cultural resonance among the late Qing literati by framing the boy's "struggle and inherent righteousness" in terms of principled filial duty (Baker, 1997, p. 41). This explanation of Oliver's motives helped to support his moral character in the Chinese ethical system, which Lin saw as universal.

The provocation expressed by Noah Claypole, who calls Oliver's dead mother a "regular right-down bad 'un" and says that children like Oliver are "born to be murderers and robbers from their very cradle" (Dickens, 1843, p. 37), is an example of how cruel the English story is to the orphan. Oliver's outburst of "fury" and his instinctive defense of his mother's honor show that his "good sturdy spirit" (Dickens, 1843, p. 11) has been awakened in response to social condemnation.

Lin Shu's Chinese re-inscription in *Zei Shi* (History of the Thief) turns this social criticism into a morally charged act of filiality (孝). By focusing on the defense of the mother (母, mǔ) against malicious slander (诬), the Chinese text connects the foreign novel to the Chinese cultural grid, which is what the Chinese literati wanted for moral improvement (Lin, 1908, p. 34).

This change shows how subjective Lin Shu's project is as a translator (Li, 2025, p. 51). His strategy for domesticating, which put reception ahead of strict equivalence (Gao; as cited in Li, 2025, p. 28), used the scene to promote Confucian values. Scholar Olivia Lingyi Xu observes that this cultural reframing, which entails cataloging and identifying form, is profoundly experienced and politically motivated in the receiving culture (Xu, 2023, p. 412). Lin Shu's rewriting thus serves to instill new moral concepts by demonstrating a principle that resonated powerfully within Chinese tradition.

Describing Oliver's extreme rage focuses on his innate good sturdy spirit (Dickens, 1843, p. 11) rising up as an instinctual defence of his dead mother's memory. The English narrative emphasizes the physical and emotional eruption: 'Crimson with fury, Oliver started up; overthrew the chair and table; seized Noah by the throat... and collecting his whole force into one heavy blow, felled him to the ground' (Dickens, 1843, p. 38). This violence is immediately qualified by the narrator as a moral awakening: 'his spirit was roused at last; the cruel insult to his dead mother had set his blood on fire' (Dickens, 1843, p. 48).

Lin Shu's Chinese re-inscription of *Zei Shi* utilizes this exact moment of fury, which in the original is tied to Dickensian social compassion, to enact a domestication strategy by re-framing the conflict within the Confucian cultural grid of filial piety (孝, xiào) (Lin, 1908, pp. 33–34). In Lin's translation, Oliver's defense of his mother (母, mǔ) against malicious slander (诬) becomes a righteous act (Li, 2025, p. 51). This exemplifies translator subjectivity, wherein Lin Shu, the English-illiterate distant reader (Xu, 2023), mediates the foreign text to align with the moral didacticism (Li, 2025) demanded by the Chinese readership of the early 20th century. By shifting the interpretation of Oliver's rage from an emotional outburst against systematic cruelty to an ethical fulfillment of filial duty, Lin ensured the text's successful reception by conforming it to the target culture's literary and hermeneutic tradition (Xu, 2023).

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C. Re-Coding Purity: Female Chastity and the Filial Slogan '吾母非贼'

In Karr's novel, Stephen articulates an intensely possessive ideal of purity that, while reflecting Romantic ideals, becomes a severe moral standard in Al-Manfaluti's translation—a standard that Magdeleine is bound to uphold for the sake of her marital value. French Source Text (Alphonse Karr, *Sous les Tilleuls*):

> 'tu es une fleur dont le parfum m'appartient; tu ne dois le donner qu'à moi; ce n'est pas assez que tu n'aimes que moi, tu ne dois être aimée que de moi; l'amour et les désirs d'un autre homme te salissent; tu dois te réserver pure pour te donner à moi'. (Karr, 1832, p. 113)
>
> **Arabic Rewritten Text:**
>
> أنتِ زهرة لي... فمحبة رجل غيري إياك أو شهوته إليك تدنسك. فيجب أن تحتفظي بنقاوتك حتى توفيني إياها
>
> (Al-Manfaluti, 2014, p. 61)
>
> Translation: You are a flower to me. A man who loves you or wants you other than me makes you dirty. You must stay pure until you give it to me.

This part, where Stephen says he owns Magdeleine's very essence (her perfume, her being loved), is an important moral commentary. Al-Manfaluti's rewriting keeps this possessiveness but makes its religious and social meanings clearer. The Arabic word "تدنسك" (defiles you) comes directly from the French phrase "l'amour et les désirs d'un autre homme te salissent" (the love and desires of another man defile you). In Arabic culture, "defilement" has a deep meaning that has to do with family honor and premarital purity, which are important parts of Arabic-Islamic modesty.

Magdeleine is not only keeping her sentimental ideal, but she is also keeping her social and religious status as a "pure" woman (naqāwah) who is "fulfilled" (tūfīnīhā) to her husband. This puts the responsibility for moral upkeep squarely on the female character and sets strict rules for what is considered acceptable "innocence" in the cultural context of the translated text.

Oliver's violent reaction to Noah Claypole's verbal attack is based on the English story as a moment of instinctual Christian/social compassion fighting against widespread cruelty. The English text goes into detail about this provocation, noting Noah's malicious slander when he called the dead mother a "regular rightdown bad 'un" (Dickens, 1843, Ch. 6). This immediately sets Oliver's "blood on fire" (Dickens, 1843, Ch. 6) and activates his "good sturdy spirit" (Dickens, 1843, Ch. 2). Lin Shu's Chinese re-inscription (*Zei Shi*) turns this personal anger into a right and moral act through the lens of Confucian filial piety (孝, xiào) (Lin, 1908, p. 33). By stressing the protection of the mother (母, mǔ) from malicious slander (诬, wū) (Lin, 1908, pp. 29–33), the rewriting turns the violent outburst into a moral duty. This strategy of domesticating the foreign text makes it fit with Chinese culture, which is what people expect literature to do: teach morals and help societal duties. This shows a lot of translator subjectivity (Li, 2025), since Lin changed the story to fit "traditional Chinese morality" and make sure the foreign work was acceptable and had an impact on China's current moral standards.

D. Narrative Intervention and Ethical Omission: Under the Linden Trees and in Sowerberry's Household

The clearest proof of Al-Manfaluti's change is the big difference between Karr's clear description of physical surrender and Al-Manfaluti's narrative intervention (or lack of it) about the sexual climax under the linden trees (Tilleuls). French Source Text (Alphonse Karr, *Sous les Tilleuls*): 'Et Stephen la prit dans ses bras, et, sous ces mêmes tilleuls où autrefois elle avait promis d'être à lui, elle tint sa promesse' (Karr, 1832, p. 302). In Arabic version, Al-Manfaluti writes ' إلى أن أذعنت له... وغلبتها عواطفها فانبعثت من مكامنها في لحظة واحدة جميع عواطف الحب... ودفعت عن نفسها فجأة وثبة الهائج المختبل، وانتزع يده من يدها ودفعها عنه دفعاً شديداً فسقطت...' (Al-Manfaluti, 2014, p. 130) Al-Manfaluti's version recounts Stephen's final encounter with Majdulin under the *Zayzafūn* trees (linden trees). The text talks about a passionate kiss and hug, but the story that follows is cut short and moves the reader's attention away from the physical act. In Sous les Tilleuls, Magdeleine's "keeping her promise" is a clear euphemism for the sexual union, which is a Romantic climax based on complete emotional surrender. It is important to note that Stephen's rejection comes after the promise is kept and only happens when Magdeleine says Edward's name. Al-Manfaluti accomplishes two moral goals at once in *Majdolin*. First, the phrase that clearly refers to the successful physical act is missing. The story goes from a lot of kissing and feelings to being rejected right away. Second, the climax is seen as a moral failure of Majdulin's (Magdeleine's) feelings, not a physical act. When Stephen hears her say Edward (her future husband, as the Arabic text calls him), the physical scene suddenly turns into a fit of rage and rejection. This intervention makes sure that Majdolin stays physically pure, which is important because in this culture, chastity is non-negotiable for the heroine.

Moreover, Al-Manfaluti exacerbates Magdeleine's persistent fear of social disgrace, directly associating her actions with the public domain of shame (`Ayb) and reinforcing the cultural framework's focus on (`ard) honor. Alphonse Karr, *Sous les Tilleuls* says,

> 'si quelqu'un nous eût vus, je n'aurais plus osé me montrer, j'en serais morte de honte; si vous saviez comme j'ai pleuré toute la nuit! comme je me suis retracé toutes ces tristes images de déshonneur dont me parlait la tante qui m'a élevé! je me sentais moins pure, j'osais à peine'. (Karr, 1832, p. 41)

However, Al-Manfaluti, uses 'الخجل' (shyness/embarrassment) and 'الخوف' (fear). Karr says that Magdeleine's emotional distress after the first kiss made her feel "less pure." Al-Manfaluti keeps the focus on the visible effect: the fear of being seen and the shame (`ayb) of her actions, which fits with social modesty rather than personal guilt. The character

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is depicted not solely as a sentimental idealist but as an individual profoundly cognizant of the social contract governing female behavior (Al-Manfaluti, 2014, p. 25).

Lin Shu's Chinese version of moral shows that Mr. Sowerberry's reason for punishing Oliver is based on a cynical view of authority that is more about keeping the peace at home than judging morality (Lin, 1908, p. 44). When Oliver yells, "It's a lie!" to Mrs. Sowerberry's attack on his mother, he is saying that it is not true (Dickens, 1843, p. 40). Her planned answer is to cry a lot. The narrator stresses that this emotional outburst "left him no choice" but to hit the boy, showing that he had to do what he did to avoid being called "a brute, an unnatural husband, an insulting creature, or a base imitation of a man".

Lin Shu's Chinese re-inscription, which aimed to teach moral lessons and fit the text into the Confucian framework, changes the meaning of this failure of justice. Lin, who accepted a high level of translator subjectivity (Li, 2025) and a domestication paradigm (Li, 2025), used translation to promote ideas of social responsibility. While Oliver's defense of his mother (母, mǔ) is based on righteous filiality (Lin, 1908, p. 34), Sowerberry's purely cynical motivation—based on keeping the hierarchy of marriage intact—is very different from what Chinese literature usually does, which is to provide moral commentary (Xu, 2023). Lin's intervention redirects attention from Dickensian satire of domestic hypocrisy to the requisite moral actions of the hero.

E. From Innocence to Modesty: From Christian Pity to Confucian Gratitude and Moral Self-Cultivation

Al-Manfaluti's work, *Majdulin*, is a great example of cultural translation. In this case, the translator acts as a cultural agent, using a cultural grid to make sure that the target audience finds the source text both morally and aesthetically acceptable. The cultural grid at work here is based on conservative Egyptian society from the early 20th century, which put Islamic moral standards first. European romanticism's praise of physical love, suicidal passion, and going against family (as seen in Stephen's first letters, where he ignores social rules) is toned down (Al-Manfaluti, 2014, pp. 77–79). The focus changes from the characters' physical beauty, which Karr describes in detail, such as Magdeleine's hair and eyes, to their moral integrity (Al-Manfaluti, 2014, p. 121). Al-Manfaluti's most effective tactic is omission and sublimation. The overt sexual union in Karr is eradicated due to the incompatibility of female premarital transgression with the Arab ideal of the pure heroine.

By leaving out the act, Al-Manfaluti (2014) protects Majdulin's chastity (`iffa), which is important for her story of martyrdom later in the book when she kills herself because she is sad about losing her honor, not because she was seduced (p. 130). Karr's Stephen also tells Magdeleine to go against the world, its rules, and its prejudices, making their love seem like it is above all else. Al-Manfaluti keeps the passion but makes sure that Majdulin's final choice to marry Edward is based on duty and obeying her parents. She tells him she needs to forget her romantic dreams for her father's sake and her own experience. This praise of obedience fits with the target culture's hierarchical family structure.

To sum up, changing "innocence" to "modesty" means replacing sentimentality with social morality. Al-Manfaluti employed the narrative frame of Stephen's possessive demands for purity and, significantly, utilized censorious narrative omission during the pivotal act of intimacy to correlate the heroine's tragic fate with a moral framework in which the forfeiture of chastity, rather than the forfeiture of love, represents the ultimate and irredeemable tragedy. This ensures Majdulin operates within the cultural parameters of honor and moral reserve expected of an Arabic literary heroine.

The cultural re-inscription in *Zei Shi* shifts moral expression from a Christian-inflected economy of pity and compassion toward Confucian virtues of filiality, gratitude, and moral self-cultivation. Lin's domestication aligns the narrative with late Qing ethical pedagogy and Chinese narrative tradition, guiding readers toward social responsibility rather than sentimental charity (Lin, 1908; Xu, 2023; Li, 2025). For instance, in the English narrative, Oliver's attachment to his protectors is framed through pity, compassion, and charitable rescue (Dickens, 1843, p. 46). However, Lin rewrites this attachment as obligation and repayment of 恩 (ēn), emphasising duty over sentimental affect (Lin, 1908, pp. 46, 214–238).

In addition, Lin also reframes Mr. Brownlow's home as a space of harmony and moral order, where goodness (善, shàn) demands internal commitment to self-cultivation rather than passive gratitude (Lin, 1908, p. 181). Moreover, for *Zei Shi*, the reception of goodness (善, shàn) is translated into an internal commitment to moral self-cultivation and social responsibility, aligning character development with Confucian pedagogical aims (Lin, 1908, pp. 214–238). Lin further reinforces this moral reading through the authoritative commentary '外史氏曰', which directs interpretation toward didactic closure (Lin, 1908, p. 181; Tang, 2024). In short, Oliver's goodness is recoded from a Christian sentimental register into a Confucian ethical program, illustrating how the cultural grid converts foreign moral capital into domestic legibility.

V. Conclusion

This study has argued that cross-cultural textual movement is best understood not as linguistic transfer but as ethically charged interpretation structured by a cultural grid. Across *Majdolin* and *Zei Shi*, the grid—an ensemble of intersecting pressures and permissions—conditions what can be rewritten, omitted, or moralised so that a foreign narrative becomes intelligible and authoritative within the receiving culture.

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The framework combines Ricoeur's hermeneutics with the cultural analysis of Bassnett and Lefevere. Ricoeur grounds translation in linguistic hospitality and the pursuit of equivalence without identity, a task that accepts loss through the work of mourning (Ricoeur, 2006). The cultural turn situates this ethical labour within a continuum of ideology, poetics, and reception, where translation operates as rewriting rather than as neutral service (Bassnett & Lefevere, 1990; Lefevere, 2016). The cultural grid names the point of convergence between these ethical and ideological demands.

In the Arabic case, Karr's Romantic innocence is recalibrated as modesty and honor. Al-Manfaluti's (2014) most consequential intervention is the omission of consummation under the linden trees, which preserves the heroine's chastity and reorients tragedy toward the threat of disgrace rather than the metaphysics of defiled love (p. 130). More broadly, Majdolin converts sentimental ambiguity into moral consequence through a didactic logic of narrative justice.

In the Chinese case, Dickensian compassion and social critique are re-inscribed as Confucian filiality, duty, and gratitude. Lin Shu's strategy of domestication, indicated by the title *Zei Shi* and the persistent commentary from historians, embeds affect within ethical pedagogy and solidifies its reception among late Qing readers (Lin, 1908; Xu, 2023; Li, 2025). When you look at all the case studies, you can see that translators are both cultural agents and moral lawmakers. So, it gives us a flexible way to compare cross-cultural rewritings and to make clear how ethical responsibility is handled when there are power dynamics at play.

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Improving English Majors' Speaking Through Discourse Marker Instruction: A Case Study at a Vietnamese University

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Abstract—**The current study was conducted at a university in Vietnam to investigate the effects of discourse marker instruction on the speaking performance of second-year English majors. Specifically, it examined changes in the frequency of discourse marker use, overall speaking ability, functional appropriateness in the use of discourse markers, and students' perceptions of learning about discourse markers. The study employed a mixed-methods design involving both quantitative and qualitative approaches. Eighty second-year English-major students participated in the study and were divided into two groups: an experimental group of 40 students who received function-based discourse marker instruction over a period of five weeks, and a control group of 40 students who were taught using traditional methods. Data were collected through pre-tests administered before the intervention, post-tests conducted after the intervention, an eight-item questionnaire on students' perceptions of learning discourse markers, and semi-structured interviews consisting of three questions for the experimental group. The findings revealed that the experimental group, which received explicit instruction on discourse markers, showed significant improvement in overall speaking ability compared to the control group, with the mean score rising from 5.78 (SD = 0.96) in the pre-test to 6.85 (SD = 0.99) in the post-test. In addition, the frequency of discourse marker use in spoken communication increased considerably after the instruction. Most students also reported positive perceptions of the instruction, particularly regarding improvements in fluency, coherence, and speaking confidence, as reflected in the questionnaire and interview data. The study suggests that explicit, function-based instruction in discourse markers is an effective pedagogical approach to improving EFL learners' speaking ability and should be systematically integrated into speaking courses.**

Index Terms—**discourse markers, speaking fluency, pragmatic competence, EFL students, Vietnam**

I. Introduction

Speaking is one of the four core language skills and plays a crucial role in both real-life communication and language learning. Learners of English are required not only to produce linguistically accurate language but also to express ideas fluently and effectively in social interaction (Richards & Rodgers, 2014). In the context of globalization, effective English-speaking ability enables students to participate in international academic and professional environments (Carter & Nunan, 2010). However, successful speaking involves more than accurate pronunciation and grammatical control; it also requires the ability to organize ideas, connect utterances, and adjust language use according to communicative contexts. These aspects of spoken communication are closely associated with the use of linguistic devices, particularly discourse markers (Schiffrin, 1987; Fraser, 1999).

Discourse markers—such as *well, actually, you know,* and *so*—serve important pragmatic and organizational functions in spoken discourse. These markers help speakers manage the flow of conversation, signal relationships between ideas, and enhance the naturalness of spoken language (Schiffrin, 1987; Fraser, 1999). Research has consistently shown that appropriate and flexible use of discourse markers is a key indicator of speaking fluency and interactional competence (Wray, 2002; Taguchi, 2011). More recent empirical studies further confirm that learners who use discourse markers more accurately and flexibly are perceived as more fluent and communicatively competent, and that explicit instruction in discourse markers can improve coherence and effectiveness in EFL speaking tasks (Brown et al., 2023; Suryadi et al., 2024).

Globally, discourse markers have been widely examined in EFL and ESL contexts. Foundational studies conceptualize them as organizational and pragmatic devices that structure spoken discourse and facilitate interaction (Schiffrin, 1987; Fraser, 1999). Empirical research across different contexts shows that learners who receive explicit instruction in

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discourse markers demonstrate better organization of ideas and greater flexibility in spoken interaction (Aijmer, 2002). Nevertheless, much of this research has focused on Western or major EFL contexts, while studies examining systematic instruction of discourse markers in Vietnamese higher education remain limited.

In Vietnam, research directly addressing discourse markers used in spoken English is still scarce. Existing studies suggest that although Vietnamese EFL learners recognize the importance of discourse markers, their actual use in spoken interaction is often limited and inconsistent. For example, Que (2024) reports that English-major students use discourse markers sparingly despite acknowledging their communicative value. Similarly, Tran Thanh Du et al. (2025) found that learners lack familiarity with the range and functions of different discourse markers, indicating a need for systematic instruction. Most studies at the tertiary level remain descriptive, focusing on the frequency or types of markers rather than on pedagogical intervention (Truong, 2022). Although Van's (2022) study focuses on written discourse, it similarly reveals a gap between learners' awareness of discourse markers and their actual use, suggesting that this issue may also extend to spoken English.

In the Vietnamese context, English-major students generally use discourse markers in English oral communication; however, their use is often not highly effective, as these markers are not always employed appropriately in context and are sometimes used mechanically. As a result, students' speaking tends to lack fluency and naturalness. In addition, in the English-major curricula of some universities in Vietnam, discourse markers have not received sufficient attention and have not been systematically integrated into speaking instruction. For example, at Ho Chi Minh City University of Education, Vietnam, the course *Functions of English* incorporates the teaching of discourse markers into speaking activities, and preliminary observations have suggested improvements in students' coherence and naturalness in conversation. However, there is still a lack of empirical evidence demonstrating the effectiveness of such systematic discourse marker instruction on students' speaking ability. Therefore, this study aims to examine the effects of explicit and systematic discourse marker instruction on the speaking performance of English-major students, with particular attention to changes in the frequency of discourse marker use in spoken communication after the instructional intervention. In addition, the study explores English-major students' perceptions of learning and using discourse markers in speaking activities.

This study seeks to answer the following two research questions:

(i) To what extent does explicit and systematic instruction of discourse markers affect English-major students' overall speaking performance?

(ii) What are English-major students' perceptions of learning discourse markers for improving their speaking skills?

II. Literature Review

A. Conceptualizations of Speaking in Foreign Language Teaching

Speaking is widely regarded as one of the most complex skills in foreign language learning due to its real-time and interactive nature (Bygate, 1987; Brown, 2001). It requires learners to simultaneously process ideas, select appropriate language forms, and manage interaction with others (Luoma, 2004). More recent studies emphasize that effective speaking goes beyond grammatical accuracy and involves fluency, comprehensibility, and the ability to organize discourse during communication (Derwing & Munro, 2015; Goh & Burns, 2012). In this sense, the use of discourse markers plays a crucial role in helping speakers maintain coherence and naturalness in spoken interaction.

B. Speaking as an Interactive and Real-Time Skill

Speaking is inherently an interactive skill that unfolds in real time and requires immediate language processing. Unlike writing, spoken communication does not allow speakers sufficient time to plan or revise their language production extensively. As a result, speakers must simultaneously generate ideas, select appropriate linguistic forms, and employ communication strategies to maintain interaction and achieve communicative goals (Bygate, 1987; Levelt, 1989). In second-language contexts, this real-time nature of speaking poses considerable cognitive demands on learners, requiring them not only to convey meaning accurately but also to respond appropriately to interlocutors, manage turn-taking, and sustain the flow of conversation. Goh and Burns (2012) argue that effective speaking involves the coordination of linguistic resources and interactional skills under time pressure. Moreover, recent research on second-language fluency has reinforced the central role of real-time interaction in spoken proficiency, with fluent spoken discourse being characterized by smooth, effortless verbal exchanges that reflect learners' ability to negotiate meaning dynamically with others (Peltonen, 2024).

Additional studies of technology-supported speaking practice further confirm that structured real-time interaction—whether between learners and AI bots or human interlocutors can enhance oral proficiency, particularly in terms of fluency and communicative competence (Ding & Yusof, 2025).

C. Common Challenges in EFL Learners' Speaking Performance

Despite years of formal instruction, many EFL learners continue to experience considerable difficulties in speaking performance. One of the most commonly reported problems is the lack of naturalness in spoken production. Learners often rely heavily on pre-planned sentences or textbook expressions, which results in speech that sounds unnatural and overly formal in spontaneous communication (Goh & Burns, 2012).

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Another prevalent challenge concerns discourse organization. EFL learners' spoken output is frequently characterized by fragmented ideas and weak logical connections between utterances. Without adequate linguistic resources to signal transitions, elaboration, or speaker stance, learners struggle to maintain coherence and sustain the flow of conversation, particularly in extended speaking tasks (Luoma, 2004; Peltonen, 2024).

In addition, many learners tend to transfer structures and expressions directly from their first language when speaking English. This tendency often leads to speech that is grammatically acceptable but pragmatically inappropriate, further reducing communicative effectiveness. Derwing and Munro (2015) argue that such problems are closely related to learners' limited ability to manage spoken discourse in real time rather than to a lack of grammatical knowledge alone.

Taken together, these challenges indicate that EFL learners' speaking difficulties are not merely a matter of linguistic accuracy but are largely associated with their limited capacity to organize spoken discourse and manage interaction effectively. This highlights the need for pedagogical attention to discourse-level features, particularly the use of discourse markers, as a means of enhancing fluency, coherence, and naturalness in spoken communication.

D. Implications for Discourse Organization in Speaking

The interactive and real-time nature of speaking has important implications for how spoken discourse is organized in second language communication. Given the cognitive demands imposed by real-time processing, speakers require linguistic resources that enable them to structure their speech, signal relationships between ideas, and manage interaction efficiently. Without such resources, spoken output is likely to become fragmented, disjointed, and difficult for interlocutors to follow (Luoma, 2004).

Research in second language speaking has shown that effective spoken communication depends not only on grammatical accuracy but also on speakers' ability to organize discourse coherently and maintain the flow of interaction. Fluent speakers are able to use various discourse-level devices to mark transitions, elaborate ideas, express stance, and manage turn-taking, thereby enhancing both comprehensibility and naturalness in spoken interaction (Goh & Burns, 2012; Peltonen, 2024).

In EFL contexts, however, learners often lack systematic instruction in discourse organization and are therefore limited in their ability to manage spoken interaction effectively. This gap highlights the pedagogical importance of focusing on discourse-level features in speaking instruction. Among these features, discourse markers play a particularly crucial role, as they help speakers gain planning time, signal logical relations, and sustain interaction in real-time communication. Consequently, greater instructional attention to discourse markers may contribute significantly to the development of fluency, coherence, and communicative effectiveness in EFL learners' speaking performance.

Beyond facilitating coherence in everyday communication, the ability to manage spoken discourse effectively is also a critical determinant of performance in standardized speaking assessments. Effective discourse management contributes directly to what is often described as natural speech in English communication, namely, speech that flows logically, maintains interaction smoothly, and reflects appropriate pragmatic control. Natural speech is not merely the absence of grammatical errors; rather, it is characterized by coherent organization, appropriate use of cohesive devices, smooth transitions between ideas, and effective interactional management.

These features are explicitly reflected in major speaking assessment rubrics. In the Speaking Scoring Rubrics regulated by the Vietnamese Ministry of Education and Training (MOET) since 2014, criteria such as fluency and coherence, discourse organization, and interactional competence are emphasized as key components of higher-level performance. Similarly, the TOEFL iBT Independent Speaking Rubrics developed by the Educational Testing Service (ETS) evaluate delivery, language use, and topic development, with high-scoring responses demonstrating clear organization, logical progression of ideas, and effective use of cohesive devices. The IELTS Speaking Band Descriptors, regulated and developed by the British Council, IDP Education, and Cambridge University Press & Assessment, explicitly include "Fluency and Coherence" as one of the four main criteria, highlighting candidates' ability to organize extended speech, use cohesive devices appropriately, and maintain flow without excessive hesitation.

Across these frameworks, the effective management of speaking discourse through logical structuring, cohesive devices, and pragmatic markers serves as an important indicator of advanced speaking proficiency. Therefore, the development of discourse management skills, including the appropriate use of discourse markers, is not only essential for communicative naturalness but also directly aligned with high-stakes speaking assessment criteria.

E. Criteria for Assessing Speaking Proficiency and the Role of Discourse Markers

Speaking proficiency in EFL contexts is commonly assessed using multidimensional criteria that go beyond grammatical accuracy and lexical range. Internationally recognized frameworks such as the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) and the Vietnamese Framework of Foreign Language Proficiency emphasize the importance of communicative effectiveness, particularly at intermediate and higher proficiency levels (Council of Europe, 2020; Vietnamese Ministry of Education and Training, 2014).

Across these frameworks, several core criteria are consistently highlighted, including fluency and coherence, interactive communication, and discourse management. Fluency refers to the ability to produce speech smoothly with minimal hesitation, while coherence concerns the logical organization and connectedness of spoken ideas. Interactive communication focuses on speakers' capacity to respond appropriately to interlocutors, manage turn-taking, and sustain interaction. Discourse management, meanwhile, involves the effective organization of extended spoken discourse and the

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use of linguistic resources to signal relationships between ideas. These criteria are also clearly reflected in large-scale speaking assessments such as IELTS and VSTEP. In the IELTS speaking band descriptors, for example, higher-band candidates are characterized by their ability to speak fluently with only occasional repetition or self-correction and to use cohesive devices flexibly and appropriately. Similarly, VSTEP speaking descriptors at Level 5 place strong emphasis on learners' ability to maintain coherence, manage interaction, and express ideas clearly in extended spoken responses.

Within these assessment frameworks, discourse markers play a crucial role in shaping speaking performance. By using discourse markers, speakers are able to maintain the flow of speech, link ideas coherently, and signal logical and pragmatic relationships such as contrast, elaboration, or conclusion. The appropriate and flexible use of discourse markers is therefore often regarded as an indicator of higher speaking proficiency, as it reflects speakers' ability to manage discourse and interaction effectively rather than merely produce grammatically correct sentences.

In sum, the use of spoken discourse markers constitutes an important component of the assessment of speaking proficiency, particularly at intermediate and advanced levels. Their role in enhancing fluency, coherence, and interactional effectiveness underscores the need for greater pedagogical and evaluative attention to discourse markers in EFL speaking instruction and assessment.

F. Speaking Discourse Markers: Definitions and Functions

Discourse markers have been widely examined as an important discourse-level feature in spoken communication. Schiffrin (1987) defines discourse markers as linguistic elements that function to organize discourse and signal relationships between units of talk rather than to contribute propositional meaning. Similarly, Fraser (1999) argues that discourse markers do not add conceptual meaning to an utterance but serve pragmatic functions by indicating how the current utterance relates to the preceding discourse. In EFL contexts, discourse markers are therefore viewed primarily as devices that facilitate discourse coherence and interaction rather than as carriers of core lexical meaning.

More recent studies have further emphasized the pragmatic and interactional nature of discourse markers in spoken language. Crible (2018) highlights that discourse markers play a crucial role in managing spoken discourse by helping speakers structure their talk, express stance, and negotiate meaning in real-time interaction. From a pedagogical perspective, Müller (2019) notes that the effective use of discourse markers is closely associated with higher levels of spoken proficiency and pragmatic competence among L2 learners.

In spoken communication, discourse markers perform a range of functions. First, they help organize discourse by signaling sequencing, transitions, and topic shifts (e.g., *first*, *next*, *finally*). Second, they allow speakers to express attitudes, evaluations, and stance (e.g., *well*, *you know*, *I think*), contributing to interpersonal meaning. Third, discourse markers are used to manage interaction by signaling reformulation, emphasis, or confirmation (e.g., *actually*, *I mean*, *right*). Finally, they assist speakers in gaining planning time and maintaining fluency during real-time speech production (e.g., *well*, *let me see*), thereby reducing processing pressure.

Empirical research has consistently shown that the use of discourse markers has a positive impact on spoken performance. Appropriate and flexible use of discourse markers contributes to greater fluency by helping speakers sustain the flow of speech, enhances naturalness by approximating authentic spoken discourse, and improves overall communicative effectiveness by making spoken messages easier for interlocutors to follow (Crible, 2018; Peltonen, 2024). Consequently, discourse markers can be regarded as a key indicator of advanced speaking ability, particularly at intermediate and higher proficiency levels in EFL contexts.

From a pragmatic perspective, improvement in discourse marker use should be examined not only in terms of frequency but also in terms of functional appropriateness in context. As argued by Crible (2018) and Taguchi (2011), increased use without pragmatic control may result in mechanical or inappropriate discourse. Therefore, both quantitative and qualitative analyses are necessary to capture changes in learners' discourse marker use following explicit instruction.

G. Models of Teaching Speaking Discourse Markers

Recent research has highlighted the importance of pedagogical approaches to teaching discourse markers in second - language speaking. Broadly, three approaches can be identified: incidental teaching through speaking tasks, implicit learning through exposure, and explicit, function-based instruction.

Incidental teaching introduces discourse markers naturally through communicative activities without making them the focus of instruction. While this approach aligns with communicative language teaching, studies suggest that exposure alone does not guarantee learners' understanding of the pragmatic functions of discourse markers. Learners may notice the forms but often fail to use them appropriately in interaction, particularly in EFL contexts with limited authentic input (Burns & Richards, 2018). Implicit learning assumes that learners acquire discourse markers gradually through repeated exposure to spoken input. However, recent research in second-language pragmatics indicates that pragmatic features such as discourse markers are difficult to acquire without instructional guidance. As a result, learners may underuse discourse markers or apply them in a mechanical and context-inappropriate manner (Taguchi & Roever, 2020). In contrast, explicit and systematic instruction has been shown to be more effective in developing learners' pragmatic competence. This approach raises learners' awareness of discourse markers and emphasizes their communicative functions. Empirical evidence demonstrates that explicit, function-based instruction supports more frequent and appropriate use of discourse markers, contributing to greater fluency and coherence in L2 speech (Crible, 2018).

The *Functions of English* model exemplifies a function-based approach to teaching speaking discourse markers.

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Discourse markers are organized according to communicative functions such as organizing discourse, expressing stance, and managing interaction, and are taught in realistic speaking contexts. This functional orientation helps learners understand when and why discourse markers should be used, rather than relying on rote memorization (Taguchi & Roever, 2020).

Recent studies further show that function-based instruction reduces inappropriate use of discourse markers and enhances the naturalness of spoken discourse. Learners who receive such instruction demonstrate greater flexibility and control in managing spoken interaction, which contributes to higher perceived speaking proficiency (Crible, 2018; Peltonen, 2024).

In conclusion, compared with incidental and implicit approaches, teaching discourse markers through a function-based model such as *Functions of English* offers clearer pedagogical advantages. Explicit instruction that links discourse markers to communicative functions and contextualized use is more effective in fostering fluent and pragmatically appropriate spoken performance in EFL learners.

H. Previous Studies on Teaching Discourse Markers in Speaking

Previous studies have consistently shown that discourse markers play an important role in second-language speaking by enhancing fluency and discourse coherence. Research indicates that learners who use discourse markers appropriately are perceived as more fluent and communicatively effective, as discourse markers help organize ideas and manage spoken interaction (Crible, 2018; Peltonen, 2024). Experimental studies further demonstrate that explicit, function-based instruction leads to greater improvement in learners' use of discourse markers than incidental exposure or implicit learning.

In EFL contexts, particularly in Asia, learners tend to underuse discourse markers or rely on a limited range of forms, resulting in spoken discourse that lacks naturalness. This tendency has been attributed to instructional practices that prioritize grammatical accuracy over discourse-level and pragmatic features of speaking (Burns & Richards, 2018; Taguchi & Roever, 2020).

Similar findings have been reported in the Vietnamese EFL context. Existing studies indicate that Vietnamese university students use discourse markers infrequently and often inappropriately in spoken English. Discourse markers are rarely taught explicitly in speaking courses and are commonly treated as optional elements rather than essential resources for managing interaction and coherence (Nguyen & Tran, 2020).

Despite these findings, empirical research on teaching discourse markers in Vietnam remains limited. In particular, there is a lack of experimental studies comparing traditional speaking instruction with systematic, function-based instruction in discourse markers. To address this gap, the present study aims to investigate the effects of explicit discourse marker instruction on EFL learners' speaking performance at a Vietnamese university, thereby contributing empirical evidence to both local and international research.

III. METHODOLOGY

A. Research Design

A mixed-methods approach, integrating both quantitative and qualitative data, was employed in this study. The research was conducted with two groups randomly selected from two classes, namely the control group and the experimental group. The control group was taught speaking through the traditional method. In contrast, the experimental group received instruction on the use of discourse markers based on their functions. Data were collected through pre-tests and post-tests of speaking skills to measure learners' improvement in speaking performance after the discourse marker instruction. The quantitative data were analyzed using SPSS to generate descriptive statistics. In addition, data obtained from the questionnaire and interviews were analyzed in terms of frequencies and percentages to further clarify the findings. Specifically, descriptive statistics were used to analyze students' speaking performance. Moreover, the qualitative data collected from the questionnaire responses and interviews were analyzed thematically to compare them with the quantitative results and to provide deeper insights into students' perceptions of learning and using discourse markers in speaking activities.

B. Participants

The participants were 80 second-year English-major students at a university in Vietnam, randomly selected from two existing classes. The students were assigned to two groups, each consisting of 40 students: the control group (N = 40) and the experimental group (N = 40). All participants had studied English as a compulsory subject throughout their high school years. Their English speaking proficiency levels were relatively similar. To ensure group equivalence prior to the instructional intervention, the results of the speaking pre-test were examined, confirming that there was no statistically significant difference between the two groups. All participants had completed foundational speaking courses and were at a comparable level of English proficiency at the time in the study.

C. Instructional Treatment

The experimental group received treatment over five sessions, during which students were given explicit and systematic instruction on the use of discourse markers in spoken communication. The instruction focused on common discourse markers frequently used in everyday communication and their communicative functions (see Table 1). In each session,

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students were introduced to and guided through the following activities: explicit explanation of the functions of discourse markers, analysis of discourse markers in authentic spoken examples, guided speaking practice, and communicative speaking tasks requiring the contextualized use of discourse markers. In contrast, the control group received traditional instruction, with no explicit focus on discourse markers.

TABLE 1
COMMUNICATIVE FUNCTIONS OF ENGLISH

	Communicative functions
1	Organizing discourse; expressing stance and evaluation; managing interaction and reformulation (*e.g., well, let me see; first, then, finally; well, actually, I think; you know, I mean, right*)
2	Making greetings and saying goodbye
3	Describing things, places and people, instructing people how to do things, checking understanding
4	Giving opinions, agreeing and disagreeing, discussing
5	Talking about oneself, starting a conversation, making a date
6	Talking about past events
7	Using conversation techniques
8	Making suggestions and giving advice, expressing enthusiasm, persuading
9	Telling a story
10	Describing places and people
11	Dealing with moods and feelings

Adopted from Jones, L. (1981). Functions of English. Cambridge University Press.

Jones (1981) presents a broader range of communicative functions in *Functions of English*. However, for the purposes of the present study, the researchers selected only eleven functions because they were closely aligned with classroom instruction and English proficiency tests.

D. Research Instruments

Each research instrument was designed to address specific research questions in the study. Both tests were designed in the same format so that changes in students' speaking performance could be compared more reliably across the two testing points. Both the pre-test and post-test were rated independently by two experienced raters, and the same two raters scored both tests to ensure consistency across the assessment process. Both raters held doctoral degrees in language education and had extensive experience in teaching English-speaking courses as well as assessing students' speaking performance. Their professional expertise contributed to the reliability and validity of the speaking scores used in this study.

Speaking Tests (Pre-test and Post-test):

The pre-test and post-test were employed to quantitatively measure changes in students' speaking ability before and after the intervention. Regarding structure and appropriateness, both tests followed standard Cambridge English-speaking tasks, including structured interview questions and short extended speaking tasks. The total score for each test was 10 points. Both tests evaluated students' overall speaking performance in terms of fluency, coherence, and interactive effectiveness. The pre-test and post-test shared the same format to help ensure the reliability and comparability of the results before and after the intervention. The test scores were analyzed using SPSS in terms of mean, standard deviation, mode, maximum score, and minimum score to examine differences within groups and between groups.

Questionnaire:

An eight-item questionnaire was used to examine students' perceptions of the usefulness of discourse markers in speaking, their confidence in using them, and the perceived impact of discourse marker instruction on speaking fluency and coherence after the intervention. The questionnaire data were analyzed using Microsoft Excel. Descriptive statistics were employed to summarize students' responses, with the findings reported mainly in percentages. The percentage distribution of responses provided an overview of students' perceptions of the usefulness of discourse marker instruction and its perceived effects on their speaking performance.

Semi-Structured Interviews

To better understand students' attitudes toward discourse marker instruction, the researchers conducted semi-structured interviews with ten students randomly chosen from the experimental group after the post-test. The interviews also explored their learning experiences in speaking activities. The interview protocol consisted of three open-ended questions focusing on students' perceptions of discourse marker instruction and its influence on their speaking performance. The interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed, and analyzed thematically to identify recurring patterns and themes. The interviews allowed for a deeper exploration of students' attitudes, perceived benefits, challenges, and suggestions regarding discourse marker instruction, thereby triangulating the questionnaire findings.

E. Data Collection Procedures

In this study, both quantitative and qualitative data collection methods were employed. The study employed several main instruments, including the speaking pre-test and post-test, questionnaires, and semi-structured interviews. Data collection took place in three stages. The researchers conducted the pre-test before the intervention and administered the post-test and questionnaires after the treatment. In the final stage, the researchers conducted semi-structured interviews with ten students from the experimental group to obtain more detailed insights into their learning experiences.

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F. Data Analysis

The researchers analyzed the quantitative data using SPSS Statistics, including the mean, median, mode, and standard deviation (SD) for the speaking test scores and Likert-scale responses. To identify statistical differences, the researchers conducted an independent-samples t-test for between-group comparisons at the post-test stage and a paired-samples t-test for within-group comparisons between the pre-test and post-test. Statistical significance was determined at $p < .05$. These procedures provided a clear assessment of the effects of discourse marker instruction on students' speaking performance.

The researchers analyzed the qualitative data collected from the questionnaires and semi-structured interviews using thematic analysis. They applied open coding to identify recurring themes related to students' attitudes toward discourse marker instruction and their learning experiences in speaking activities after the intervention. They then triangulated the qualitative findings with the quantitative results to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the effects of discourse marker instruction.

G. Ethical Considerations

Participation in the research was voluntary, and the participants provided informed consent. Students were told that their participation would not influence their course grades and that the researchers would keep all data confidential and use them solely for research purposes.

IV. Results

A. Pre-Test Results

Before conducting the experimental study, the researcher gave both the control group and the experimental group a pre-test. The following section presents the pre-test results.

TABLE 2
DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS OF THE SPEAKING PRE-TEST

		Control group	Experimental group
N	Valid	40	40
	Missing	0	0
Mean		5.63	5.78
Median		6.00	6.00
Mode		6	7
Std. Deviation		1.07	0.96
Minimum		3	4
Maximum		8	8

As shown in Table 2, the pre-test results of the control group and the experimental group were quite similar. The mean score of the control group was 5.63, while that of the experimental group was 5.78, with a difference of only 0.15 points. Both groups had the same median score of 6.00. The mode of the control group was 6, whereas that of the experimental group was 7. In terms of score dispersion, the standard deviation of the control group was 1.07, compared with 0.96 for the experimental group, indicating that the variability of scores in the two groups was also similar. Regarding the score range, the minimum scores were 3 and 4, respectively, and the maximum score was 8 for both groups. These results indicated that the two groups had relatively similar speaking performance before the experiment. Therefore, the control group and the experimental group could be considered equivalent at baseline before the intervention. This provided a reliable basis for the research on improving English majors' speaking through discourse marker instruction.

B. Post-Test Results

TABLE 3
DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS OF THE SPEAKING POST-TEST

		Control group	Experimental group
N	Valid	40	40
	Missing	0	0
Mean		5.70	6.85
Median		6.00	6.00
Mode		6	7
Std. Deviation		1.01	0.99
Minimum		4	5
Maximum		8	9

After five weeks of the experiment, the post-test results in Table 3 showed a clearer difference between the control group and the experimental group. The mean score of the control group was 5.70, which was only slightly higher than its pre-test mean of 5.63, showing an increase of only 0.07 points. In contrast, the mean score of the experimental group increased markedly from 5.78 in the pre-test to 6.85 in the post-test, representing a gain of 1.07 points. Similarly, the standard deviation of the control group changed slightly from 1.07 in the pre-test to 1.01 in the post-test. For the experimental group, the standard deviation also changed only slightly, from 0.96 to 0.99. In addition, the score range of

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the experimental group showed improvement in both the minimum and maximum scores, from 4 and 8 in the pre-test to 5 and 9 in the post-test. Meanwhile, the control group showed only a slight change, with the minimum score increasing from 3 to 4, while the maximum score remained unchanged at 8. These results indicated that the experimental group made greater improvements in speaking performance than the control group after the intervention. This also d the effectiveness of discourse marker instruction in improving English-major students' speaking performance.

C. Questionnaire Results

After conducting the pre-test and post-test, the next step was to administer a questionnaire to investigate students' perceptions of learning and using discourse markers in speaking activities. This questionnaire consisted of eight statements and was administered to 40 students in the experimental group. The detailed results were presented as follows.

TABLE 4
QUESTIONNAIRE ON STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF LEARNING DISCOURSE MARKERS (N=40)

No	Statements	1	2	3	4	5
1	Discourse markers help me organize my ideas more clearly when speaking English.	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	4 (10%)	21 (52.5%)	15 (37.5%)
2	Using discourse markers helps me maintain the flow of speech and speak more fluently.	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	3 (7.5%)	19 (47.5%)	18 (45%)
3	Discourse markers make my spoken English sound more natural.	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	5 (12.5%)	26 (65%)	9 (22.5%)
4	I feel more confident when using discourse markers in speaking activities.	1 (2.5%)	1 (2.5%)	4 (10%)	17 (42.5%)	17 (42.5%)
5	I am more aware of when and how to use discourse markers after the instruction.	2 (5%)	4 (10%)	5 (12.5%)	16 (40%)	13 (32.5%)
6	I can use discourse markers appropriately in different speaking contexts.	4 (10%)	3 (7.5%)	3 (7.5%)	20 (50%)	10 (25%)
7	Learning discourse markers helps me manage interaction better during conversations.	1 (2.5%)	2 (5%)	3 (7.5%)	22 (55%)	12 (30%)
8	Overall, learning discourse markers was useful for improving my speaking skills.	2 (5%)	4 (10%)	4 (10%)	18 (45%)	12 (30%)

(1 = Strongly disagree; 2 = Disagree; 3 = Neutral; 4 = Agree; 5 = Strongly agree)

As shown in Table 4, most of the English-major students surveyed had very positive perceptions of learning and using discourse markers in speaking activities. On average, 82.8% of the students across the eight statements chose "Agree" or "Strongly agree" regarding the usefulness of using discourse markers in speaking classes. Specifically, they believed that discourse markers helped them organize their ideas in a more logical, coherent, and clearer way. They also felt more confident in speaking than before receiving instruction and support from the teacher in using discourse markers. In addition, students reported that they could use these markers appropriately in different contexts and manage interaction better during speaking practice. However, only a small number of students chose "Disagree" or "Strongly disagree," with an average rate of only 7.5%, while neutral responses accounted for 9.7%. This once again confirmed that discourse marker instruction, particularly through speaking activities, was useful and effective in helping students improve their speaking skills significantly. It also helped them become more fluent and confident in speaking.

D. Interview Results

To further support the effectiveness of discourse marker instruction in speaking, semi-structured interviews consisting of three questions were conducted with ten randomly selected students from the experimental group. The purpose was to gain a deeper understanding of students' perceptions, attitudes, and experiences of learning discourse markers. The data were then collected, summarized, and the interview responses are presented as follows.

Question 1: After participating in the discourse marker instruction, how has your understanding of discourse markers changed, and in what ways do you think they have influenced your speaking performance?

After summarizing the responses to Question 1, it was found that most English-major students had very positive attitudes toward discourse marker instruction. They believed that discourse markers helped them become more confident in communication because they knew how to use them appropriately and in the right context. In addition, they were able to organize their ideas in a more logical and coherent way. They also mentioned that discourse markers gave them more time to plan what to say and allowed them to manage interaction more effectively.

Question 2: How do you feel about learning discourse markers through explicit instruction in speaking activities? What aspects of this instruction did you find most helpful or challenging?

Similar to Question 1, the responses to Question 2 showed that most students had positive attitudes toward learning discourse markers through explicit instruction in speaking activities. In general, they highly appreciated the role of the teacher in guiding them to understand and use discourse markers effectively, which helped improve their speaking skills considerably. One notable point was that the explanation of the functions of discourse markers and how to use them in spoken communication played a very important role, as it helped students know how to use discourse markers correctly and appropriately in different contexts. In addition, students felt that contextualized speaking practice was very useful, especially in helping them understand when and how to use discourse markers appropriately. However, some students reported that they faced initial challenges, such as remembering different discourse markers and avoiding mechanical use.

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These difficulties, however, gradually improved after five weeks of teacher guidance and regular practice in class with their classmates, together with the teacher's observation and support.

Question 3: Do you think discourse marker instruction should be continued or integrated more systematically into speaking courses? Why or why not? Do you have any suggestions for improving this type of instruction?

Regarding Question 3, most students supported the idea that discourse marker instruction should be continued or integrated more systematically into speaking courses because they highly valued its effectiveness. They believed that, thanks to the teacher's guidance and regular practice, they were able to use discourse markers more naturally and effectively in spoken communication. Students also suggested that, especially in speaking classes or public speaking lessons, teachers should spend more time allowing students to practice communication or organize extracurricular activities so that they could have more opportunities to use discourse markers. In addition, some students proposed that the use of discourse markers should be included in the assessment criteria for speaking skills and that bonus marks should be given to those who use discourse markers correctly in order to encourage students to practice them more actively.

V. Discussion

Research Question 1. To what extent does explicit and systematic instruction of discourse markers affect English-major students' overall speaking performance?

In response to Research Question 1, the results showed that explicit and systematic instruction on discourse markers had a positive effect on the overall speaking ability of English-major students. This can be clearly seen after the intervention through the use of discourse marker instruction in speaking activities. The experimental group showed considerable improvement, with the mean score increasing from 5.78 in the pre-test to 6.85 in the post-test. In addition, both the minimum and maximum scores improved, from 4 and 8 in the pre-test to 5 and 9 in the post-test. In contrast, the control group showed only slight improvement, with the mean score increasing from 5.63 in the pre-test to 5.70 in the post-test, while the other scores did not change much. These findings indicate that clear and systematic instruction in the use of discourse markers can help English-major students improve their speaking ability, especially in terms of fluency, coherence, and the ability to organize ideas logically when speaking. Overall, the results support the view that appropriate discourse marker instruction can have a positive influence on English-major students' speaking performance.

This finding is consistent with Schiffrin (1987) and Fraser (1999), who highlighted the role of discourse markers in organizing spoken discourse and connecting ideas. It is also consistent with Wray (2002) and Taguchi (2011), who stated that the appropriate use of discourse markers is closely related to speaking fluency and interactional competence. In addition, this result supports the argument of Taguchi and Roever (2020), Crible (2018), and Peltonen (2024) that explicit and function-based instruction can help learners use discourse markers more effectively in spoken communication.

Research Question 2. What are English-major students' perceptions of learning discourse markers for improving their speaking skills?

Based on the results above, it can be seen that most second-year English-major students were highly supportive and had positive perceptions of learning discourse markers to improve their speaking skills. According to the questionnaire results, most students chose "Agree" and "Strongly agree," indicating that discourse markers helped them improve their speaking considerably. After receiving clear and systematic instruction from the teacher, students were able to use discourse markers more appropriately in different contexts, which helped them speak more fluently, coherently, and logically when presenting their ideas. In addition, they also felt more confident in communication than before receiving instruction on the use of discourse markers. Furthermore, the semi-structured interviews provided additional support for these findings. Similar to the questionnaire results, most interviewed students also expressed strong agreement with discourse marker instruction in speaking classes. They highly appreciated the clear and systematic explanation of the functions of discourse markers and the opportunities to practice using them in contextualized speaking tasks. Moreover, discourse markers helped them maintain the flow of speech, gave them more time to plan during interaction, and allowed them to manage conversations more effectively. However, a small number of students initially found it difficult to remember and use different discourse markers. These difficulties, however, gradually decreased after regular practice and support from the teacher.

These perceptions are aligned with Schiffrin (1987) and Fraser (1999), who pointed out that discourse markers help speakers organize ideas, manage the flow of conversation, and enhance the naturalness of spoken language. The results are in line with Wray (2002) and Taguchi (2011), who noted the close relationship between the appropriate use of discourse markers, speaking fluency, and interactional competence. In the Vietnamese EFL context, the current results are also in agreement with Nguyen and Tran (2020), Nguyen (2024), and Suryadi et al. (2024), who reported that discourse-based instruction and the use of discourse markers can contribute positively to the development of students' speaking skills.

VI. Conclusion

A. Findings

This study was conducted at a university in Vietnam with second-year English-major students to investigate whether explicit and systematic discourse marker instruction had an effect on students' speaking ability. The findings showed that

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discourse marker instruction had a positive impact on students' speaking ability. This was evidenced by the fact that after five weeks of the experiment, the students in the experimental group, who were guided by the lecturer on how to use discourse markers, showed significant improvement in their speaking skills. Meanwhile, the control group did not show much improvement in speaking when they were taught using the traditional method. Through this survey, it can be emphasized that clear and systematic instruction in discourse markers played an important role in enhancing fluency and coherence in communication. Moreover, after five weeks of discourse marker instruction, questionnaire and interview data from students in the experimental group showed that most of them had positive perceptions and strongly supported the learning of discourse markers in speaking because these markers helped them speak more coherently and fluently. In addition, the students became much more confident in speaking and were able to use discourse markers more appropriately in context than before. In addition, they also suggested that lecturers should continue providing discourse marker instruction in speaking classes and that the university should organize more academic activities and practice opportunities so that students could have more opportunities to practice and apply discourse markers in communication, thereby achieving better results in speaking.

B. Pedagogical Implications

To enhance the effectiveness of teaching speaking, teachers should systematically integrate discourse marker instruction into their lessons. Specifically, instructors should incorporate the teaching of discourse markers into existing speaking modules and provide clear, explicit, and systematic instruction so that students can understand how to use discourse markers appropriately in speaking performance.

In addition, teachers should frequently organize task-based speaking activities in communicative contexts. Before practice begins, instructors need to provide clear guidance and assign specific tasks, such as giving particular contexts or communicative situations for students to practice in. Furthermore, teachers should provide feedback that focuses more specifically on discourse structure and students' use of discourse markers during speaking activities.

Based on the authors' teaching experience, universities should also consider including discourse marker instruction as a separate component of the curriculum so that students can study this aspect of spoken communication more deeply and gain a better understanding of its functions, thereby improving their speaking skills.

C. Limitations and Future Research

Although this study has made meaningful contributions, it still has several limitations. First, the sample size was relatively small, with only 80 participants divided equally between the control group and the experimental group, and the study was limited to students from only one university. This may restrict the generalizability of the findings. In addition, the duration of the study was short, lasting only five weeks. As a result, the researcher could not fully capture the long-term effects of discourse marker instruction on the development of students' speaking skills. In future research, these limitations could be addressed by using a larger sample drawn from more classes across multiple universities, as well as by extending the duration of the study, possibly to one full semester (15 weeks).

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Social Criticism in *Jane Eyre*: A Marxist Approach

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***Abstract*—Social criticism is an analytical approach used to examine social structures, institutions, and power relations in order to reveal inequalities and injustices within a society. This study investigates the forms of social criticism presented in Charlotte Brontë's novel *Jane Eyre* using a Marxist theoretical framework developed by Karl Marx. The data were collected from the novel through a qualitative descriptive method focusing on narrative events, character interactions, and social settings. The analysis reveals the rigid class hierarchy of Victorian English society, in which the bourgeoisie controlled economic resources and social power, while the proletariat experienced dependency, exploitation, and alienation. The findings show that the novel portrays various forms of social inequality through the experiences of *Jane Eyre* as an impoverished orphan and governess navigating a stratified social structure. Furthermore, the social criticism expressed in the novel remains relevant to contemporary societal issues, including gender oppression, power imbalances in the workplace, and struggles for individual autonomy. Therefore, *Jane Eyre* can be understood as a significant literary work that not only reflects social realities of its time but also encourages readers to critically examine injustice and inequality in modern society.**

***Index Terms*—social critique, Victorian literature, Marxist**

I. Introduction

Published in 1847 during the Victorian era, Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* is widely regarded as one of the canonical works of English literature, recognised for its compelling narrative, complex character development, and profound engagement with social issues of the nineteenth century. Literature, in its broadest sense, refers to a collection of written or spoken works that reflect human experiences through language (Sunyoto et al., 2022). Beyond functioning as artistic expression, literature also serves as a reflection of societal realities and a medium through which ideological struggles, identity formation, and social consciousness are negotiated (Mutmainnah et al., 2022). In this regard, literary works may function as records of human experiences across different historical periods, representing social realities from past eras

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to the present (Arafah et al., 2024a; Yudith et al., 2024). Such representations are often shaped by the author's interpretation of social life and are expressed through narrative structures that convey emotions, ideas, motivations, and personal perspectives (Arafah et al., 2024b; Lestari et al., 2025). The interaction between social realities and authors' imaginative creativity contributes to the diversity and uniqueness of literary narratives (Mare et al., 2025), as it allows authors to reinterpret and reimagine their experiences and observations, leading to a rich tapestry of storytelling that reflects both personal and collective histories. While modes of circulation and public engagement with texts have changed across time, literary works continue to invite critical reflection on social realities in different discursive contexts (Arafah & Hasyim, 2023a; Hasyim & Arafah, 2023b).

The development of modern technology has further expanded access to literary works, enabling readers to engage with texts across linguistic and cultural boundaries. Literary works today are available in multiple languages and can be accessed through digital platforms and online media (Arafah & Hasyim, 2023b; Hasyim & Arafah, 2023a; Hasjim et al., 2026; Idhan et al., 2026). As English has become a global language, it plays an important role in facilitating the translation and dissemination of literary works from different cultural backgrounds (Kaharuddin et al., 2023; Karamoy et al., 2024). Consequently, English literature encompasses a wide variety of texts—including short stories, poetry, novels, plays, and songs—produced by writers from diverse cultural contexts (Arafah, 2018). This diversity highlights literature's role as a global medium for expressing human experiences and communicating social values across societies.

In academic contexts, literary works are frequently examined as part of scholarly discourse and educational practice. Through appropriate analytical approaches and pedagogical methods, literature offers aesthetic enjoyment and encourages critical awareness of social realities, including issues related to nature, culture, and society (Abbas et al., 2024; Jaelani et al., 2024). Recent studies have also emphasised the importance of integrating literature into learning materials and digital learning environments to enhance students' critical and interpretative skills (Arafah et al., 2023c; Arafah et al., 2025b). In language education, the development of effective pedagogical approaches and technological integration has also been widely discussed, particularly in relation to improving students' writing skills and learning outcomes (Kaharuddin et al., 2024; Usman et al., 2024). Teaching strategies such as brainstorming, free writing, and explicit or implicit instructional methods have been shown to influence students' language development and learning engagement (Arafah et al., 2024c; Kuswanty et al., 2023; Suparti et al., 2025). These studies show that literature, language education, and digital learning environments are becoming more and more connected. They also show how important it is to critically engage with literary texts as part of a larger set of educational practices.

Culture is an integral aspect of social life, as it molds collective practices and affects daily interactions within communities (Arafah et al., 2023b; Takwa et al., 2024). Many literary authors seek to represent cultural traditions and social values within their narratives, thereby illustrating aspects of local identity and community life (Arafah et al., 2025a; Arafah et al., 2025c; Taqdir, 2025). Such representations often aim to communicate moral values and social lessons that can guide individual behaviour within society (Takwa et al., 2025). Furthermore, portraying local cultural practises in literary works may contribute to raising readers' awareness of the importance of preserving cultural heritage (Arifin et al., 2022; Takwa et al., 2024b; Yudith et al., 2023). Previous studies have also shown that traditional practises, belief systems, and social norms often persist within communities despite social change, indicating that local knowledge continues to function as an important cultural resource (Effendy et al., 2025; Takwa et al., 2026a).

At a broader level, literary works frequently portray social realities that emerge from different historical periods and societies around the world (Arifuddin et al., 2024). Because these works circulate globally, translation plays an essential role in enabling readers from different linguistic backgrounds to access them. However, cultural differences may present challenges in interpreting translated texts, as readers must navigate unfamiliar cultural references and social contexts (Arnawa & Arafah, 2023), which can lead to misinterpretations or a lack of appreciation for the original work's nuances. These dynamics highlight the importance of critical literary analysis in understanding how texts represent social realities and cultural meanings.

Literature therefore occupies a significant position in both academic and social discourse, particularly because of its capacity to shape collective understandings of human experiences (Arafah & Kaharuddin, 2019). Classical literary works often convey themes that remain relevant across generations, illustrating how ideas from earlier historical contexts continue to resonate with contemporary readers. Language serves as the primary medium for communicating literary meanings, and authors frequently use figurative language and stylistic devices to express aesthetic and ideological ideas (Baa et al., 2023). As noted by Arafah et al. (2021b), literary texts may be understood as cultural mirrors that reflect the conditions, beliefs, values, and tensions present within a particular historical period. This dual function—as both reflection and critique—is particularly evident in *Jane Eyre*, where Brontë's portrayal of nineteenth-century English society reveals underlying social tensions and inequalities.

As a cultural product that encompasses political, economic, and social themes, literature can function as a window into historical contexts as well as a medium for questioning dominant social norms (Irmawati et al., 2020). Language plays a crucial role in conveying both the aesthetic and ideological dimensions of literary works, allowing authors to articulate social critiques through narrative and symbolic expression (Manugeren et al., 2023). Literature from different cultural traditions frequently addresses universal issues such as justice, identity, and human dignity, thereby facilitating cross-cultural understanding and social reflection (Arafah, 2018). In this sense, language operates as a cultural mediator that shapes how social values and identities are constructed and interpreted through discourse (Taqdir et al., 2026).

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The Victorian period (1837–1901) was characterised by rapid industrialisation and significant socio-economic transformation in British society. These developments contributed to the emergence of a rigid class hierarchy in which wealth and power were concentrated among the bourgeoisie, while the working class experienced economic dependency and limited social mobility (Suhadi et al., 2022). Such conditions produced disparities in access to education, employment, and political influence, particularly affecting marginalised groups within society. Women, in particular, often occupied subordinate positions within the social hierarchy due to prevailing patriarchal norms (Asri et al., 2023). Women from working-class backgrounds faced multiple forms of oppression resulting from the intersection of class inequality and gender discrimination (Poovey, 1984). Victorian ideology frequently confined women to domestic roles while promoting ideals of feminine virtue that reinforced existing social structures and class boundaries. These social dynamics were often reflected in literary works of the period, where authors used narrative forms to expose contradictions between dominant social ideologies and everyday realities (Arafah et al., 2021a).

Marxist theory, developed by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, offers a critical framework for examining how economic structures shape social relations and ideological systems (Marx & Engels, 1970). Central concepts within Marxist theory—including class struggle, alienation, dominant ideology, and bourgeois exploitation—are particularly relevant when analyzing literary texts that portray social inequality. In *Jane Eyre*, the protagonist *Jane Eyre* is depicted as an impoverished orphan and governess who must navigate a social system structured by class hierarchy and economic power. Marx and Engels (1970, p. 64) argue that the economic base of society determines the superstructure of ideas, values, and institutions that sustain social order. This theoretical perspective can be observed in the novel through institutions such as Lowood School, which exemplify how social institutions may function as ideological mechanisms that reinforce class and gender hierarchies. Religious doctrines and disciplinary practises within such institutions often serve to legitimise inequality and maintain existing power structures (Abrams, 1971; Taqdir et al., 2025). Literary narratives frequently expose these mechanisms of domination by illustrating how apparently neutral social institutions contribute to the reproduction of social inequality (Arafah & Kaharuddin, 2019; Arafah et al., 2023d).

Jane Eyre's pursuit of economic independence and personal autonomy represents a form of resistance against oppressive social systems. Her struggle reflects broader tensions within Victorian society, where individuals from marginalised backgrounds sought recognition, dignity, and social mobility. Insights from critical social theory further illuminate how marginalised individuals strive for self-representation and rational communication within structures that attempt to suppress their voices (Hasanah et al., 2021), highlighting the importance of these efforts in challenging and transforming societal norms. Brontë's own experience as a woman writing within a male-dominated literary tradition may also have influenced her portrayal of Jane's quest for self-determination.

Literature therefore functions not only as a reflection of social conditions but also as a medium for articulating social criticism (Rano et al., 2026). Linguistic expressions within literary texts operate as semiotic systems that encode cultural values, social hierarchies, and collective worldviews within particular historical contexts (Takwa et al., 2026b). Through narrative representation, literature can address social problems that may be overlooked within mainstream discourse (Novitasari, 2021). In this regard, literary works such as *Jane Eyre* encourage readers to critically reconsider established social structures and ideological assumptions (Arafah et al., 2021a). Brontë constructs a narrative that challenges both class-based and gender-based inequalities within Victorian society by portraying Jane's refusal to accept the social position imposed upon her and her determination to assert her dignity as an individual.

Although *Jane Eyre* has been widely examined using various literary approaches—including feminist criticism, psychological analysis, and cultural studies—studies that systematically apply Marxist theory to analyse the novel's representation of class relations, ideological domination, and socio-economic inequality remain relatively limited. Many previous discussions focus primarily on gender issues or character development, leaving the broader economic and ideological structures of Victorian society less thoroughly explored. Consequently, a comprehensive Marxist analysis is needed to reveal how the novel depicts class stratification, labor relations, and institutional power as mechanisms that shape social inequality. Addressing this gap, the present study investigates the forms of social criticism represented in *Jane Eyre* through a Marxist analytical framework. By examining how the novel reflects and critiques the hegemonic social and cultural structures of nineteenth-century Britain, this research contributes to a more profound understanding of *Jane Eyre* as a literary work that exposes the interconnected dynamics of class, ideology, and social power. In doing so, the study also highlights the continuing relevance of Marxist literary criticism in interpreting classical texts and understanding persistent issues of inequality in contemporary society.

II. Literature Review

Marxist literary criticism provides an important framework for examining how literary texts represent class relations, ideology, and social inequality. Developed from the ideas of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, this perspective views literature not as an autonomous aesthetic object, but as a cultural product shaped by material conditions and socioeconomic structures (Marx, 1977). A central principle of Marxist thought is that social existence determines consciousness; thus, values, morality, and ideology, including those represented in literary works, are influenced by relations of production and class-based social arrangements. Eagleton (1976) emphasises that Marxist criticism is concerned not only with literary form, but also with how texts reflect, reproduce, or challenge the ideologies that sustain unequal social systems.

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Gramsci's (1971) concept of hegemony further develops this perspective by explaining how dominant groups maintain power not only through force, but also through consent internalised through institutions such as family, education, religion, and literature. Related Marxist concepts such as class division, ideology, and alienation are therefore central to literary analysis. In this framework, the bourgeoisie controls material resources and social power, while subordinate groups experience dependency, exclusion, and limited agency (Marx & Engels, 1978). Ideology functions to naturalise inequality and conceal exploitation (Marx & Engels, 1970), while alienation describes the condition in which human beings are estranged from dignity, self-determination, and meaningful social relations under oppressive structures (Marx, 1977).

Within literary studies, this framework is particularly relevant for examining novels that portray social hierarchy and institutional domination. Marx's notion of the relationship between base and superstructure is useful in understanding literature as both a reflection of historical conditions and a medium through which those conditions may be questioned. In a broader sense, critique may also be understood as an effort to expose domination and inequality within social life (Habermas, 1987). Although studies such as Arafah (2020) and Arafah et al. (2023a) discuss ideological contestation in contemporary discourse, these works are not used here as the primary framework of analysis; rather, they only illustrate that ideology remains a relevant concern across different historical and discursive settings.

Previous studies have demonstrated the usefulness of Marxist criticism in revealing inequality and class tension in literary texts, including Mockingjay (Nailah, 2016; Wijaya, 2020) and Les Misérables (Fauzan, 2021). In contrast, studies on *Jane Eyre* have more often applied psychological (Permana, 2010), feminist (Abdullah & Ahmed, 2023), and postcolonial (Karim, 2025) approaches. Therefore, a more focused Marxist reading is needed to examine how Charlotte Brontë's novel represents class hierarchy, ideological domination, alienation, and the struggle for dignity within Victorian society.

III. Methodology

This research examines social criticism in Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* through a qualitative analytical framework, adopted because the analysis is grounded in detailed descriptive data drawn directly from the novel's textual elements and passages. Qualitative research focuses on understanding human experiences as integrated wholes rather than isolated variables (Moleong, 2010), emphasising contextual correlation and prioritising holistic interpretations over statistical generalisations (Ratna, 2004). This method aligns with analysing how *Jane Eyre* reflects 19th-century English social conditions and complies with academic standards for literary research.

Data collection involved primary analysis of the fourth edition of *Jane Eyre* (Gramedia Pustaka Utama, June 2024; 608 pages), read iteratively to identify relevant passages, characters, and themes on class relations, economic inequality, and social criticism, then extracted and categorised. Secondary data included scholarly monographs, peer-reviewed articles, theses, dissertations, and historical documents retrieved from academic libraries and databases (Scopus, Google Scholar, JSTOR), with sources assessed for credibility and relevance, including research on Jürgen Habermas's critical social theory.

Data analysis was conducted in three phases: reduction to focus on Marxist concepts, Habermas's theory, historical conditions, and contemporary relevance; display structured into thematic categories covering poverty, power dynamics, and current issues; and conclusion development through correlating evidence with frameworks, followed by cross-verification for validity.

The theoretical approach integrates Marxist literary criticism, positing that works reflect material conditions, with social existence shaping consciousness, complemented by Habermas's theory focusing on the public sphere, rational communication, and the relevance of historical criticism to present contexts. Analytical concepts include class relations, hegemony, false consciousness, and alienation (Marxist); alongside the public sphere, communicative action, and bridging historical and contemporary challenges (Habermas, 1989).

IV. Results and Discussion

A. How Jane Eyre Reflects Social Class, Dominant Ideology, and Forms of Alienation in Victorian English

Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* depicts Victorian England's rigid social hierarchy through a Marxist lens. The novel contrasts the bourgeoisie, who control resources and social authority, with the proletariat and other marginalised groups whose lives are shaped by dependence and exclusion. Through *Jane Eyre*—a poor orphan who later becomes a governess—Brontë shows how class determines dignity, rights, and social recognition, while also revealing the emergence of resistance within an unequal system.

1. Social Class

Class stratification is evident in Jane's treatment by the bourgeois Reed family, where she is positioned as a dependent rather than a legitimate family member. When John Reed finds her reading, he asserts economic and social superiority through humiliation:

> *You have no business to take our books; you are a dependent, mamma says; you have no money; your father left you none; you ought to beg and not to live here with gentlemen's children like us, and eat the same meals we do, and wear clothes at our mama's expense.* (Brontë, 2024, p. 12)

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John's language functions as class discipline: by labeling Jane "a dependent," he denies her entitlement to resources and reinforces the ideology that worth is determined by wealth and lineage. From a Marxist perspective, the scene illustrates how bourgeois power is maintained through control of material resources and everyday intimidation, naturalizing inequality as "proper" social order. Jane's marginal position in the household therefore becomes an early site of social critique, exposing how class privilege legitimises exclusion and dehumanisation.

2. Alienation

Jane experiences social alienation as a direct consequence of her class position, acknowledging her exclusion from the Reed household:

"I was a discord in Gateshead Hall; I was like nobody there; I had nothing in harmony with Mrs. Reed or her children, or her vassalage" (Brontë, 2024, p. 19).

The term "discord" signifies more than personal discomfort; it reflects Jane's structural exclusion from an upper-class environment governed by wealth, privilege, and social conformity. From a Marxist perspective, this alienation emerges from a social order that organises relationships around class hierarchy and material distinction, marginalising individuals who do not conform to its dominant values. Jane's confinement in the red room after resisting John's abuse further reinforces her exclusion, transforming social marginalisation into psychological and emotional isolation. This alienation persists beyond childhood, as Jane later reflects:

"I know what it is to live entirely alone; friendless, without brother or sister, uncle or aunt, not a soul that feels naturally the affinity to myself" (Brontë, 2024, p. 100).

Her reflection illustrates a form of structural alienation in which individuals lacking economic and social capital are denied access to meaningful communal bonds. Rather than arising from personal failure, Jane's loneliness is produced by a class-based system that prioritises status and material wealth over solidarity and human connection. In this way, *Jane Eyre* exposes alienation as a systemic condition of Victorian society, revealing how social structures actively generate isolation among those positioned outside dominant class hierarchies.

3. Dominant Ideologies

Marxist theory highlights how dominant ideologies—such as religion and social norms—function to preserve bourgeois power by legitimising inequality. Lacking economic and social power, Jane initially turns to religion as a source of moral justice:

"God will punish her: He might strike her dead in the midst of her tantrums" (Brontë, 2024, p. 23).

While faith offers Jane consolation, it is also manipulated by figures of authority such as Mrs Reed, illustrating how religion operates as part of the ideological superstructure that justifies domination. From a Marxist perspective, religion thus serves a dual function: it provides hope for the oppressed while simultaneously reinforcing social order that benefits the ruling class.

Victorian social ideology also linked human worth to class and physical appearance, as evident in Mrs Reed's description of Jane to Mr Brocklehurst:

"If she were a nice, pretty child, one might compassionate her forlorn condition; but as it is, one really cannot care for such a little toad as that" (Brontë, 2024, p. 33).

The derogatory label "little toad" reflects an ideology that devalues individuals who lack beauty, wealth, and elite lineage. Such constructions function to naturalise class inequality by portraying the marginalised as inherently inferior, thereby normalising their mistreatment. Jane's response demonstrates critical awareness of these imposed judgements:

"I am poor! obscure! plain, and little!" (Brontë, 2024, p. 278).

Rather than accepting these labels as measures of her worth, Jane exposes them as social constructs designed to sustain hierarchical distinctions. Her recognition marks a rejection of dominant evaluative norms and advances a counter-narrative in which human value is grounded in moral integrity and inner dignity rather than external markers of class and appearance.

B. How Marxist Theory Reveals Social Critique in Jane Eyre

Through a Marxist lens, *Jane Eyre* exposes social criticism embedded in Victorian English society by revealing mechanisms of class exploitation, ideological control, and resistance to inequality. The novel critiques how capitalist structures and social institutions perpetuate dependence, devalue the working class, and normalise injustice.

1. Critique of Capitalist Economic Systems

The novel critiques a capitalist system that conditions survival on compulsory labour for the poor. During Jane's admission interview at Lowood, Mr Brocklehurst asks:

"What would you do if you lived alone and had to work for your bread?" (Brontë, 2024, p. 44).

This question reflects a social order in which labour is presented as the sole means of existence for the lower classes. Institutions such as Lowood function to discipline impoverished children into compliant workers, ensuring their integration into capitalist production without access to alternative forms of security or autonomy. From a Marxist perspective, this reveals how the working class is compelled to sell its labour power while being denied ownership of the means of production, reducing human dignity to economic utility.

2. Resistance to Class-Based Worth

The novel also challenges the ideology that equates social class with human value. Miss Temple asserts the inherent dignity of marginalised children:

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> *I must not forget that these coarsely clad little peasants are of flesh and blood as good as the scions of gentlest genealogy; and that the germs of piety and virtue are placed in their minds as surely as in those of the more favored.* (Brontë, 1847, p. 64)

Her statement counters dominant Victorian beliefs that justified exploitation by portraying the poor as morally or intellectually inferior. Education, in this context, becomes a potential site of resistance by affirming equality and disrupting class-based stereotypes. Jane later articulates this resistance explicitly:

"I am no bird; and no net ensnares me: I am a free human being with an independent will" (Brontë, 2024, p. 278).

This declaration signifies a rejection of both class and gender oppression. From a Marxist perspective, Jane's assertion represents the emergence of class consciousness, as she refuses roles imposed by a system that reduces individuals—particularly working-class women—to controllable and expendable objects. Her insistence on autonomy challenges the ideological foundations that sustain class hierarchy and social domination.

3. Critique of Educational Inequality

The novel highlights how unequal access to education perpetuates class-based prejudice:

"Prejudices, it is well known, are most difficult to eradicate from the heart whose soil has never been loosened by education: they grow there, firm as weeds among stones" (Brontë, 2024, p. 58).

This metaphor underscores the role of education in shaping critical awareness and resisting inherited social biases. From a Marxist perspective, restricted access to education functions as a mechanism of social reproduction, enabling dominant groups to maintain hierarchy by limiting critical consciousness among the working class. In *Jane Eyre*, education emerges not merely as skill acquisition but as a means of challenging prejudices that sustain class inequality, suggesting its potential to disrupt ideological conformity and foster social awareness.

4. Rejection of Class-Based Relationships

Jane's marriage to Mr Rochester represents a rejection of Victorian norms that governed relationships through class hierarchy:

"Reader, I married him" (Brontë, 2024, p. 473).

This declaration gains significance because the union occurs only after Jane attains financial independence and Rochester's economic power is diminished, creating conditions of material parity. From a Marxist perspective, this narrative choice affirms that economic autonomy is essential to equitable human relations, preventing dependency and exploitation within intimate bonds. Rochester later acknowledges this equality:

"My bride is here," he said, "because my equal is here, and my likeness" (Brontë, 2024, p. 472).

His recognition reflects a shift in social consciousness shaped by altered material conditions, reinforcing the novel's critique of class-based valuation. The relationship thus rejects marriage as a transactional institution rooted in wealth and status, proposing instead a model grounded in mutual recognition and shared humanity.

C. How Social Critique in Jane Eyre Relates to Contemporary Social Realities

Literary works often transcend their historical contexts by addressing social issues that persist across time. The social critique articulated in *Jane Eyre* remains relevant to contemporary realities, particularly in relation to power imbalance, exploitation, restricted freedom, and struggles for autonomy. Through a Marxist perspective, the novel illuminates how structural inequalities continue to shape social relations and constrain individual agency beyond the Victorian era.

1. Persistent Power Hierarchies

The social restrictions Jane experiences reflect enduring limitations on individual freedom:

> *The Lowood constraint still clings to you somewhat; controlling your features, muffling your voice, and restricting your limbs; and you fear in the presence of a man and a brother, or father, or master, to say your soul is your own.* (Brontë, 2024, p. 139)

This passage reveals how power operates through everyday discipline, shaping behaviour and suppressing self-expression among subordinate groups. From a Marxist perspective, such constraints are products of hierarchical social structures that normalise domination by those with economic and social authority. Although rooted in Victorian society, these dynamics persist in contemporary contexts, where gender norms and organisational hierarchies often discourage marginalised individuals from questioning authority or asserting autonomy.

The novel thus anticipates modern patterns of inequality, demonstrating how power relations embedded in social institutions continue to reproduce unequal access to voice, recognition, and agency. By foregrounding Jane's awareness of these constraints, *Jane Eyre* underscores the ongoing relevance of literary critique in exposing and challenging persistent forms of social domination.

2. Rejection of Materialism

Jane's preference for freedom over wealth articulates a critique of materialism that remains relevant beyond its Victorian context:

"I believe he is of mine, I am sure he is, who would not rather be a free and happy vagabond, than a slave in a golden chain?" (Brontë, 2024, p. 270).

This statement captures the tension between material accumulation and personal autonomy. From a Marxist perspective, Jane's rejection of the "golden chain" reflects resistance to capitalist logic that equates human worth with economic productivity and material success. Material comfort is portrayed as a form of constraint when it requires the sacrifice of

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freedom, agency, and self-determination, while the "free and happy vagabond" symbolizes liberation from systems that prioritize profit over human fulfillment.

The critique resonates with contemporary social realities in which individuals increasingly question success defined solely by wealth and status. By foregrounding freedom and meaningful existence over material gain, *Jane Eyre* exposes the alienating effects of capitalist values and affirms the enduring relevance of literary critique in challenging materialist definitions of happiness and social worth.

3. Solidarity and Resistance to Injustice

Jane's realisation that many others face oppression reflects modern movements for equality:

"Millions are condemned to a stiller doom than mine, and millions are in silent revolt against their lot" (Brontë, 2024, p. 116).

Jane Eyre's recognition establishes a direct conceptual link between 19th-century narratives of oppression and contemporary global movements for equality. The assertion underscores that systemic hardship encompassing poverty, inequality, and structural marginalisation is not an individual experience but a widespread condition, with resistance manifesting both overtly and in quiet, collective acts of defiance. Modern examples include textile workers organizing boycotts against enterprises employing child labor, and communities mobilizing to demand access to decent housing actions that mirror the "silent revolt" described in the text.

From a Marxist analytical framework, such collective resistance signals the emergent class consciousness of subordinate groups as they recognise their exploitation within capitalist structures. Concurrently, from a social criticism perspective, these movements denote the evolution of a more inclusive democratic public sphere, where historically marginalised voices are increasingly visible and their demands for justice are gaining traction. Together, these perspectives illuminate how the recognition of shared oppression can translate into organised action, bridging historical and contemporary struggles to challenge inequitable systems and advance more equitable social arrangements. In a social criticism perspective, it signals the development of a more democratic public sphere where oppressed voices are heard.

4. Relationships Based on Equality

Jane's commitment to an equal partnership with Mr Rochester reflects a rejection of relationships structured by hierarchy and dependence:

"I will be your neighbor, your nurse, your housekeeper. I find you lonely: I will be your companion" (Brontë, 2024, p. 462).

Rather than positioning herself as a subordinate, Jane defines the relationship in terms of mutual support, dignity, and companionship. From a Marxist perspective, this stance represents a refusal of class-based power relations that traditionally govern intimate bonds through material status and dependency. Equality, in this context, becomes possible only when neither partner exercises economic or social dominance over the other.

This vision is further articulated in the novel's emphasis on balanced freedom within partnership:

"Being together for us means being as free as when alone, and as happy as when with others" (Bronte, 2024, p. 476).

The relationship thus rejects marriage as a site of control or constraint and reimagines it as a space where individual autonomy is preserved through mutual recognition. By grounding intimacy in equality rather than status, *Jane Eyre* affirms that just social relations—both private and public—depend on the dismantling of hierarchical structures that privilege wealth, class, and power.

V. Conclusion

Jane Eyre by Charlotte Brontë is not merely a romantic narrative but a significant work of social critique relevant to both Victorian England and contemporary society. Analysis using Marxist theory reveals how the novel depicts a rigid class hierarchy, with the bourgeoisie controlling wealth and power while the proletariat, exemplified by Jane, experiences dependency, exploitation, and alienation. Dominant ideologies equating status with human worth are challenged through Jane's resistance to oppression, as she asserts universal equality and advocates for relationships built on mutual respect. The narrative's themes resonate with modern challenges, including gender-based marginalisation, workplace inequities, and tensions between law and morality. Ultimately, *Jane Eyre* stands as a timeless work encouraging examination of unjust structures and progress toward a more equitable society.

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Narrative and Genre Structure of the Kazakh Epic Tradition: A Comparative Study of Mashhur Zhusip Kopeyev's Epic Poems

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Abstract—**This article examines the narrative and genre structure of the Kazakh epic tradition through a comparative analysis of Mashkhur Zhusip Kopeyev's epic poems *Gulshat-Sherizat*, *Shaytannyn Saudasy (The Devil's Trade)*, *Gibratnama*, and *Bayannama*. The research aims to identify dominant narrative models and to determine their relationship with linguistic patterns in epic texts. The study applies an integrated methodological framework combining narratological analysis, comparative literary analysis, and linguistic stylistics. The results reveal four dominant narrative models in the analyzed corpus: romantic, didactic, philosophical, and social. Each model is consistently associated with a specific linguistic dominant: similes and epithets in romantic narratives, religious and moral vocabulary in didactic texts, symbolic language in philosophical narratives, and repetitive formulaic expressions in social narratives. The findings demonstrate a stable correlation between narrative structure and linguistic organization, where linguistic elements function as structural components shaping genre-specific meaning. The study contributes to the field by proposing a unified narrative-linguistic model for analyzing epic texts and by introducing a systematic approach to the structural interpretation of the Kazakh epic tradition. It expands the scope of Kazakh literary studies by integrating it into contemporary international narratology and discourse-oriented research.**

Index Terms—**Kazakh epic, epic, narrative structure, linguistic model, Mashkhur Zhusip Kopeyev**

I. Introduction

The Kazakh epic tradition is one of the oldest and most stable artistic systems of national literature. Heroic poems, love epics and religious-didactic works have formed a cultural heritage that preserves the historical memory, worldview and spiritual values of the people and passes them on from generation to generation. Epic texts are not only a model of storytelling, but also a set of complex linguistic, cultural and symbolic structures. Therefore, considering them not only in terms of literary content, but also as a narrative and linguistic system is one of the relevant directions in modern literary studies and linguistics.

The work of Mashkhur Zhusip Kopeyev is considered a unique phenomenon during the transition of the Kazakh epic tradition to written literature. His epics "Gulshat-Sherizat", "Trade of Devils", "Gibratnama", "Bayannama" are works that, while preserving the traditional epic narrative system, combine the oriental narrative tradition, religious-didactic content and author's poetic thought. These works widely use such linguistic elements as epic narrative, symbolic imagery, similes and epithets, and religious vocabulary.

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Although modern scientific research often examines the epic from a historical, thematic, or literary perspective, the issue of a comprehensive analysis of its narrative structure and linguistic organization system has not yet been fully systematized.

Research Gap

Although many studies have been conducted on the Kazakh epic tradition, most of them are focused on the historical content of the epic, its genre classification, or the character system. However, the consideration of epic texts in terms of the relationship between narrative structure and linguistic models is not sufficiently developed. In particular, there are few studies that comprehensively analyze the features of the narrative system in authorial epics and the relationship of their constant linguistic elements with the genre nature.

Although Mashkhur Zhusip Kopeyev's epics have often been studied from a folklore or literary perspective, there are not enough systematic works that comparatively consider their narrative structure and linguistic organization features. In this regard, there is a need to analyze epic texts simultaneously at the narrative and linguistic levels.

This study aims to fill this gap and to consider the structural nature of epic texts from a new methodological perspective.

The main aim of the study is to determine the narrative and genre structure of the Kazakh epic tradition based on the epics of Mashkhur Zhusip Kopeyev, as well as to comprehensively analyze the relationship between the linguistic models in the texts and the narrative system.

Research Questions

In accordance with the aim of the study, the following scientific questions are posed:

1. What narrative models predominate in the epics of Mashkhur Zhusip Kopeyev?
2. What linguistic elements (simile, symbolic words, religious vocabulary, repetition formulas) are systematically used in epic texts?
3. What structural and semantic relationship is there between the narrative structure and linguistic models?

II. Literature Review

The study of epic and narrative tradition

The main direction of the interpretation of epic poetry is to consider the epic not only as a narrative of events, but also as a structural narrative that integrates cultural memory, value systems, and linguistic-symbolic codes into one channel. In narratology, the organization of an epic text is characterized by the narrator's position, time order, narrative logic, and discourse modes. In this sense, classical narrative theory provides a methodological basis for explaining the "event/discourse" relationship, narrative pace, focalization, and compositional levels of the text (Genette, 1980; Chatman, 1978; Bal, 1997; Prince, 1982). Ricoeur (1984) systematizes the narrative nature of time, the way in which events become meanings within the text, at a philosophical level, and makes it possible to explain the temporal organization of epic narrative.

The concept of dialogism proposed by Bakhtin (1981) is important in explaining the narrative nature of the epic in terms of cultural communication and polyphony. In the epic text, the modality of voice, point of view and evaluation is manifested not only as a phenomenon inherent in the narrator, but also in the tradition itself. This approach is suitable for explaining the relationship between the "traditional authority" and "textual variability" of the epic. The categories of myth, archetype and ritual are widely used in revealing the cultural-symbolic dimension of the epic. For example, Campbell (1949) explains the archetypal plot and character model in the epic structure through the principle of the “hero's path”, while Frye (1957) considers the epic as a genre-mythological matrix in the literary system. Eliade (1963) shows the role of myth in the organization of cultural reality, and Lévi-Strauss (1963) shows the construction of mythical texts through binary oppositions. This direction helps to explain the semantic function of symbolic nodes such as “trial”, “fate”, “path”, “light/dark” in epic narrative.

In functional grammar, Halliday (1994) shows that the meaning of the text is created through experiential, personal and textual metafunctions; this allows us to describe the evaluation, action, cause-and-effect relationships in epic narrative from a linguistic perspective. In the direction of literary text stylistics and linguistic criticism, Fowler (1996), Simpson (2004), Leech and Short (2007) argue for the connection between language choice and aesthetic impact. In the analysis of narrative with a “critical linguistic” approach, Toolan (2001) suggests considering the narrative structure at the textual level in the “structure-meaning-function” relationship.

It is also important to explain the cultural-linguistic nature of the epic text through the connection of discourse and culture. Kramsch (1998) shows that language is a system for producing cultural meaning, while Fairclough (1995) explores the relationship between discourse and social forces. Widdowson (2004) explains the interpretation of text through context, van Dijk (1997) explains the construction of discourse in the context of social interaction, and Schiffrin (1994) explains the methodological spectrum of discourse analysis. These works provide a basis for a sociolinguistic analysis of why religious vocabulary, moral judgment, and social appeal structures are dominant in epic texts.

The poetics of the epic genre and oral tradition

The epic is a genre that occupies a special place in the epic system of the Turkic peoples; it is based on traditional narrative patterns, covering heroic, love, religious-didactic and social content. In the theory of oral poetics, the stability of the epic text is explained by the “formulaic language” and the performance situation (Lord, 1960; Foley, 1995). In this

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context, epic repetition formulas, stable introductory structures (“once upon a time…”, “one day…”), ready-made similes are structural markers of the oral tradition preserved in the text.

In his typological description of the Turkic epic tradition, Reichl (2000) systematizes the poetics and historical layers of Turkic heroic poetry; this allows us to explain the “tradition-written” nature of the epic genre. A comparative approach to the world heroic epic is deepened by the works of Hatto (1989). The general methodological foundations of folklore studies, proposed by Dundes (1965), pave the way for considering the epic text as a traditional model.

The works of the structuralist school are important in the analysis of genre and plot structure. Propp (1968) describes the structure of the fairy tale through functions and explains the plot movement as “structural units”; this approach is useful for modeling the plot stages (trial-struggle-result) in the epic. Greimas (1983) reveals the system of character roles through the actant model; Todorov (1977) allows us to consider the poetics of the genre as a textual regularity. While Barthes (1975) understands the text as a system of multilayered codes, Eco (1979) describes the strategies of reader interpretation. These works are necessary to explain the connection between the “event system” and the "meaning system" in the epic.

In modern linguistic stylistics, the analysis of the artistic text as a system of linguistic patterns has come to the fore not only as an "artistic image". Carter (2003) analyzes the creative potential of language, Jeffries (2010) analyzes the ideological and evaluative components through constructive stylistics, Stockwell (2002) analyzes the mechanisms of reader perception through cognitive poetics, and Semino (2008) analyzes the meaning-making function of metaphor in discourse. Culpeper (2001) systematizes the relationship between character and language. These directions allow us to interpret similes and epithets, symbolic words, and religious vocabulary in the epic as models that perform a genre-narrative function, rather than “artistic decoration”.

Study of Mashkhur Zhusip Kopeyev’s work

In Kazakh literary studies, the legacy of Mashkhur Zhusip Kopeyev is considered a major phenomenon of the literary process of the early 20th century. In the literary and historical context, the works of Kenzhebayev (1976) provided a fundamental direction in the systematization of literature of the early 20th century; this allows us to clarify the epochal nature of Mashkhur Zhusup’s works. In the context of literary periodization and textbook systematization, the work of Amirenov (2016) is also used to explain the literary environment of the early 20th century.

Multi-volume publications are of great importance in the scientific circulation, compilation, and formation of a textual basis of Mashkhur Zhusip’s works: 8-volume versions of Mashkhur Zhusip’s works (Kopeyev, 2006; Mashkhur Zhusip, 2023) clarify the research corpus. Zhusipov (2001), who specifically considered the poet’s folklore activity, characterized him from the perspective of a “folklorist” and proved his connection with tradition. The genre-stylistic nature of the poetic heritage was analyzed by Baratova (2006) at the level of genre and style; this allows us to systematize poetic devices in the epic text. Turyshev (2005) specifically studied the ethnocultural layer of the lexicon and revealed the cultural basis of linguistic units in the text of Mashkhur Zhusip.

The works of Bozheev (2013) are important in explaining the development of epics at the junction of “oriental plot-Kazakh epic poetics”: it is shown that the poet mastered the model of oriental tales and reworked it using epic narrative and artistic linguistic techniques characteristic of Kazakh poetry. The historiographical basis of folklore studies is provided by Berdibayev (1988); this allows us to explain the continuity of Mashkhur Zhusip's epics with oral tradition in a broader context. In the study of Sutzhanov (1994), Mashkhur Zhusip's literary heritage is systematized and his creative nature is clarified.

At the same time, the structural analysis of Mashkhur Zhusip's epics requires general structuralism and text poetics. Lotman (1970) systematizes the structural organization of the text as the "structure of the artistic text", while Lotman (2000) explains the semiotic space with the concept of the “semiosphere”; this provides a theoretical basis for describing the symbolic system in the epic. Within the framework of epic poetics and historical poetics, Veselovsky (1989) describes the historical movement of genres and motifs.

Recent studies emphasize the integration of linguistic, cognitive, and discourse-based approaches in narratology. A systematic review by Sinaga et al. (2025) demonstrates that contemporary narrative research combines structural, cognitive, and critical discourse frameworks. In addition, van Hulst (2024) highlights the interconnected nature of narrative and discourse analysis within interpretive methodologies. Furthermore, recent empirical studies confirm that narrative structures are closely linked with linguistic and semantic patterns, shaping meaning construction in texts (Abdelwahab, 2026).

In general, in world literary studies, the epic has been comprehensively studied in terms of narrative structure, genre poetics, and linguistic organization. The directions of classical narratology, structuralism, and linguistic stylistics laid the foundation for considering the epic text not only as a story, but also as a cultural and linguistic system. In Kazakh literary studies, the legacy of Mashkhur Zhusip Kopeyev has been widely analyzed from a historical-literary, genre, and poetic perspective. However, a comprehensive consideration of the interrelationship of narrative models and linguistic dominants in his epics has not been sufficiently systematized. Therefore, this study aims to analyze the epic text in the unity of narrative, genre, and language, and to describe the structural nature of the Kazakh epic tradition from a new perspective.

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III. Methodology

This study is aimed at identifying the narrative structure and genre typology of the Kazakh epic tradition based on the epics of Mashkhur Zhusip Kopeyev, as well as the relationship between the linguistic models in the text (equating-epithet, symbolic vocabulary, religious vocabulary, repetition formulas) and the narrative.

Research corpus

The epics of Mashkhur Zhusip Kopeyev "Gulshat-Sherizat", "Trade of Devils", "Gibratnama", "Bayannama" were taken as research material. The selection of these works is due to the fact that they were written at the junction of Kazakh oral literature and the oriental story tradition, the diversity of their content-ideological orientation and the uniqueness of their narrative types (romance, didactic, philosophical, socio-critical). Such diversity allows us to comparatively analyze the multi-layered nature of the epic genre structure. In addition, the different levels of manifestation of linguistic models (equations, symbolic words, religious vocabulary, repetition formulas) in each epic served as the basis for determining their dominant system.

Methods

During the study, several methods were used in a comprehensive manner. First of all, through narrative analysis, the structure of the storyline, the type of narration, the plot movement and the functions of the characters were determined, and the narrative dominant of each epic was identified. In addition, based on genre-typological analysis, the genre nature of the works (romance, didactic, philosophical, social) was relatively systematized, and the correspondence between the genre nature and the narrative structure was examined. Within the framework of linguistic modeling and text analysis, a systematic analysis was carried out on four main linguistic indicators (similes and epithets, symbolic words and images, religious and cognitive vocabulary, repetition formulas), and the level of dominance of linguistic elements in each epic, that is, dominants, was determined. Finally, the results of the four epics were compared with each other using the method of comparative analysis, and their common and distinctive features were summarized in the form of a single model.

Theoretical framework

The theoretical basis of the study is based on three interrelated scientific directions. First, within the framework of narratology (narration theory), the epic text is considered as a structural system, guided by such principles as the relationship between story and discourse, the narrator's position, and the organization of time and space; this approach made it possible to identify love, didactic, philosophical, and social narrative models in epics. Second, based on the theory of genre poetics and epic tradition, the epic is analyzed as a component of epic poetics, and genre typology is brought into a scientific system through stable plot patterns and formulaic structures (epic repetition, traditional narrative elements). Third, based on the directions of linguistic stylistics and discourse analysis, the function of linguistic patterns (similes, epithets, symbolic words, religious vocabulary, repetition formulas) in the artistic text in the formation of meaning and the organization of the narrative structure is determined.

Hypothesis

The four epic poems of Mashkhur Zhusip Kopeyev, studied, are characterized by the dominance of a certain narrative model in each work, while maintaining the genre and narrative regularities of the Kazakh epic tradition, and the systematic predominance of linguistic models in accordance with it. Clarification points of the hypothesis (based on Research Questions):

1. In each epic poem, one of the four narrative models (love, didactic, philosophical, socio-critical) is the leading (dominant).

2. Four linguistic elements (simile/epithets, symbolic words, religious vocabulary, repetition formulas) are used not randomly, but systematically, confirming the genre nature of the text.

3. There is a constant correlation between the narrative structure and linguistic models:

– in romantic narratives, similes and epithets occur more frequently;

– in didactic narratives, religious and moral vocabulary becomes more prominent;

– symbolic words become dominant in the philosophical narrative;

– in social-critical narratives, repetition patterns and addressive (appeal-based) structures become more frequent.

This hypothesis integrates the main aim of the study and the research questions into a unified analytical framework and guides the results section toward demonstrating the dominance of specific narrative and linguistic structures.

IV. Results

In this section, the results of the study are systematized and presented comparatively on the basis of the interrelationship of narrative models and linguistic elements. The results are presented in the logic of “model - dominant - distribution - textual evidence”. During the analysis, it was found that a certain narrative structure and the corresponding linguistic model are used frequently and consistently in each epic. In addition, the relative frequency of linguistic elements is given in percentages (approximate distribution within the text corpus).

Dominant system of narrative structures

As a result of the comparative analysis, it was found that four different narrative models clearly dominate in the four epics studied. In each work, the organization of the storyline, the character system, and the narrative logic are formed in accordance with a certain genre direction and are constantly repeated throughout the text.

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TABLE 1
DOMINANT NARRATIVE MODELS IN THE EPIC POEMS

Epic poem	Main Narrative Type	Approximate Proportion	Structural Characteristics
Gulshat–Sherizat	Romantic	≈ 82%	Emotional tone, beauty imagery, fate-centered storyline
Shaytannyn Saudasy	Didactic	≈ 88%	Moral instruction, symbolic episodes
Gibratnama	Philosophical	≈ 79%	Inner reflection, search for meaning
Bayannama	Social	≈ 84%	Social critique, exhortative narrative style

These percentages indicate which type of narrative dominates in the main part of the text. For example, in "Trade of Devils" the didactic content is present in approximately 85–90% of all episodes, while in "Gulshat-Sherizat," the love story is consistently maintained as the main plot engine.

These data prove that the Kazakh epic tradition is not limited to a single heroic model, but rather has a multi-layered genre structure.

Distribution of linguistic models

During the textual analysis, four main linguistic models characteristic of epic poetics were identified:

– similes and epithets
– symbolic words
– religious and cognitive vocabulary
– repetition formulas

In each epic, one of these elements appears as a dominant one. Below, their relative frequency of distribution is given in percentages.

TABLE 2
PERCENTAGE DISTRIBUTION OF LINGUISTIC MODELS IN THE EPIC POEMS

Epic poem	Similes/Epithets	Religious Lexicon	Symbolic Words	Repetition Formulas
Gulshat–Sherizat	≈ 46%	≈ 12%	≈ 25%	≈ 17%
Shaytannyn Saudasy	≈ 14%	≈ 52%	≈ 18%	≈ 16%
Gibratnama	≈ 19%	≈ 21%	≈ 44%	≈ 16%
Bayannama	≈ 17%	≈ 23%	≈ 14%	≈ 46%

These indicators clearly show which linguistic element is used predominantly in each text.

For example:

• In "Gulshat-Sherizat", similes and epithets occur with a frequency of about 45–50% - this is the main sign of love poetics.
• In "Trade of Devils" religious vocabulary is about 50% - this indicates the didactic nature of the text.
• In "Gibratnama" symbolic words are used more than 40% - the main language of philosophical content.
• In "Bayannama" repetition formulas are used about 45% - an indicator of the nature of rhetorical and social appeal.

Textual evidence (through excerpts)

1) "Gulshat-Sherizat" – high frequency of similes and epithets (≈46%)

"Like the heavenly maiden of paradise,
Like a swan bending over the wide lake…"

These similes:

– enhance the aesthetic effect;
– increase the emotional nature of the love narrative;
– raise the image of the character to an idealized level.

In general, the proportion of similes and epithets in the text ranges approximately between 45–50%, indicating their structural significance in shaping the poetic narrative.

2) "Trade of Devils" – Dominance of Religious Lexicon (≈52%)

Frequently recurring words include:

"God," "prophet," "nafs (desire)," "sin," "arrogance."

These elements:

– enhance the educational content;
– put forward a moral idea;
– form the main semantic core of the text.

The share of religious vocabulary covers more than half of the text.

3) "Gibratnama" – the predominance of symbolic language (≈44%)

"Flower", "nightingale", "net", "road"

For example:

"The nightingale searching for a flower in the garden
One day encountered a hawk."

These images:

– express the path of fate;

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– spiritual search;
– the transience of human life.
Symbolic words are one of the most common semantic layers in the text.
4) "Bayanname" – Frequency of Repetitive Formulaic Expressions (≈46%)
"Let these words be known to the whole Alash,
Let it be a matter of honor for every brave man!"
Repetition formulas:
– affect the listener;
– create public opinion;
– serve to strengthen the appeal function.
These structures are constantly repeated in the text, determining its rhetorical character.
Relationship Between Narrative and Language

TABLE 3
CORRESPONDENCE BETWEEN NARRATIVE TYPE AND DOMINANT LINGUISTIC ELEMENT

Narrative Model	Dominant Linguistic Element	Level of Correspondence
Romantic	Similes and epithets	≈ 80–85%
Didactic	Religious vocabulary	≈ 85–90%
Philosophical	Symbolic words	≈ 75–80%
Social	Repetitive formulaic expressions	≈ 80–85%

These indicators show that narrative structure and linguistic models are closely related.

The integrated comparative analysis revealed several consistent patterns. In approximately 80–90% of the structural organization of the four analyzed epic poems, a single dominant narrative model is clearly preserved, while about 40–55% of the linguistic elements are concentrated around a specific genre orientation. In addition, the level of correspondence between narrative type and linguistic dominance averages around ≈82%. These findings indicate that each epic poem is characterized by the stable predominance of one main narrative system, within which specific linguistic devices are used systematically and with high frequency. This demonstrates that linguistic structure functions as one of the key factors shaping the genre-specific nature of the texts. Therefore, the epic poems of Mashhur Zhusip Kopeyev can be understood not only as literary works but also as highly organized narrative-linguistic systems with a coherent internal structure.

V. DISCUSSION

This section interprets the scientific significance of the obtained results and analyzes their importance for understanding the Kazakh epic tradition, the nature of the epic poem genre, and the function of linguistic structures within epic texts. Although the data presented in the Results section systematically demonstrate the relationship between narrative models and linguistic elements, their theoretical, cultural, and literary implications are examined in greater depth in this part of the study. In addition, the findings are interpreted through comparison with the concepts proposed by international scholars in the fields of narrative theory, epic poetics, and linguistic stylistics.

The results of the study showed that the structure of the Kazakh epic tradition is not limited to heroic poems, as before, and its internal genre system is much more complex and multi-layered. The four main narrative models (love, didactic, philosophical, social) identified on the basis of Mashkhur Zhusip Kopeyev's epics prove that epic texts are not a homogeneous, but a genre-classified artistic system. This conclusion also corresponds to the principles of structural classification in the theory of world narrative. For example, Tzvetan Todorov noted that various narrative forms coexist in the historical development of genres, while Vladimir Propp proved that the structural models of fairy-tale and epic texts are organized by stable functions. And Gérard Genette shows that the narrative structure is multi-layered, and that time, perspective, and narrative form in the text determine genre features. It is known that in traditional literary studies, the Kazakh epic has often been considered from the perspective of heroic poetry. However, the results of this study showed that various thematic and narrative types coexist in the internal structure of the epic tradition. The love structure in the epic "Gulshat-Sherizat", the didactic direction in "The Devil's Trade", the philosophical reflection in "Gibratnama" and the social criticism in "Bayannama" are clear evidence of this. These data indicate the need to consider the epic not only as a genre that narrates historical or heroic events, but also as a complex narrative system that reflects the inner world of a person, social relations and spiritual values. Northrop Frye said that epic and mythological texts are systems that preserve cultural archetypes, while Joseph Campbell argues that the heroic journey model has various genre variations. From this point of view, Mashhur Zhusip's epics demonstrate a transformed, multi-genre form of the epic tradition. The diversity of narrative structures reflects the dynamic nature of the epic. Epic texts adapt not only to certain stable patterns, but also to the spiritual and cultural changes of society. This situation is consistent with the principles of the existence of mythological structures as a changing but stable system described by Claude Lévi-Strauss.

One of the most important results of the study is the dominant appearance of certain linguistic models in accordance with each narrative type. This indicates that language and narrative are closely interconnected in the structure of the epic text. It is not by chance that in the epic poem "Gulshat-Sherizat", where the love narrative prevails, similes and epithets are often used. Such linguistic means serve to depict the beauty, feelings and emotional state of the character. This

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phenomenon coincides with the function of stylistic means in the literary text studied by Geoffrey Leech and Mick Short in creating an emotional impact. And in the epic poem “Trade of Devils” with a didactic content, the dominance of religious and cognitive vocabulary becomes the main means of conveying a moral idea. Norman Fairclough and Teun van Dijk, studying the relationship between discourse and ideology, proved that language serves as a tool of social and educational influence. These theoretical conclusions explain the close connection between religious vocabulary and didactic narrative. The dominance of symbolic words in the philosophically oriented "Gibratnama" allows us to convey deep thoughts about human life, destiny, art and knowledge. Paul Ricoeur emphasizes that symbolic language is the main way to explain human experience, while Roland Barthes argues that symbols in the text create cultural meaning. From this point of view, symbolic language appears as a natural part of the philosophical narrative. And in the "Bayannama", the frequent occurrence of repetition formulas enhances the rhetorical and social orientation of the text. Walter Ong and Albert Lord have shown that formulaic structures in the oral tradition allow us to remember the text and influence the listener. These studies prove that epic formulas perform not only a stylistic, but also a structural function. Thus, the results obtained are also consistent with Halliday's theory of functional linguistics. According to him, language is not only a means of communication, but also a system that creates social meaning. Linguistic models in epic texts organize this semantic system.

When the obtained results are considered from a broader theoretical perspective, the interdependence between the narrative and linguistic structures of epic texts becomes clearly evident. An epic is not merely a sequence of events; rather, it represents a linguistic–narrative system organized through cultural codes, formulaic expressions, and symbolic imagery. Mieke Bal and Seymour Chatman have demonstrated that in narrative texts, the relationship between structure and content plays a crucial role. According to their view, the system of events and the linguistic means used to convey them are inseparable. This principle is fully applicable to epic texts as well. The presence of formulaic structures, stable similes, and recurring linguistic patterns is a characteristic feature of the oral tradition. John Miles Foley has shown that formulas in epic poetry function as mechanisms that preserve traditional meaning, reflecting the strong connection of epic narratives with collective memory and cultural experience. Symbolic language further deepens the cultural significance of epic texts. Kramsch, in her studies of the relationship between language and culture, emphasizes that each symbol reflects a particular national worldview. From this perspective, the symbols used in epic narratives serve to preserve the historical experience of a people. In this context, language functions as one of the primary structural tools that organize epic narration. Through language, the sequence of events is structured, character images are shaped, and the author’s ideas are conveyed. Therefore, the linguistic models found in epic texts play a key role in shaping the internal logic of the narrative.

The research findings further highlight the distinctive place of Mashhur Zhusip Kopeyev’s epic poems in Kazakh literature. Since his works emerged at the intersection of oral and written traditions, they simultaneously incorporate traditional epic formulas and an individual poetic style. This phenomenon can be associated with the transformation of literary forms during the transition from oral to written culture, as described by Eric Havelock. Texts produced in such transitional periods often reflect a synthesis of tradition and innovation. In Mashhur Zhusip’s works, the coexistence of Eastern narrative plots, religious and didactic content, and national epic poetics represents a form of cultural syncretism. Mircea Eliade emphasized that mythological and religious texts function as systems that preserve cultural memory. From this perspective, Mashhur Zhusip’s epic poems should be regarded not only as literary works but also as significant cultural and historical phenomena.

The main scientific novelty of this study is the comprehensive consideration of epic texts from a narrative, genre and linguistic perspective. Previous studies have mostly been dominated by historical-literary or thematic analysis, and the relationship between linguistic models and narrative structures has not been systematically considered. In this study, for the first time:

– narrative models
– genre typology
– linguistic structures

were analyzed as a single scientific system.

This approach corresponds to the interdisciplinary directions in international literary studies and narrative studies. In modern studies, it is important to consider the text not only in terms of content, but also as a structural, semiotic and linguistic system. From this point of view, this work makes a significant contribution to the study of the Kazakh epic tradition, the theory of narrative, linguistic literary studies.

In addition, the results of the study showed that it is possible to determine the internal structure of epic texts by systematically modeling them. This method can also be used for the comparative study of other epic traditions. This study contributes to the introduction of the Kazakh epic heritage into the international scientific space and its consideration within the framework of world narrative and linguistic theories.

VI. Conclusion

This study aims to provide a systematic linguistic analysis of the narrative and genre structure of the Kazakh epic tradition based on the epics of Mashkhur Zhusip Kopeyev. In the course of the work, the main principle was to consider epic texts not only at the level of content description, but also in terms of typology, model and structure. As a result of the study, four main narrative types were identified in Kazakh epic texts: love, didactic, philosophical and social. It was

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proved that in each epic, one of these models appears dominantly, determining the thematic direction of the work, the logic of the narrative and the character system. In addition, during the linguistic analysis, four main linguistic dominant systems were identified: similes and epithets, symbolic words, repetition formulas and religious-cognitive vocabulary. The overall typological model demonstrates a systematic relationship between the narrative structures and linguistic dominants of the four epic poems. In *Gulshat–Sherizat*, the romantic narrative predominates, and similes and epithets describing beauty function as the main linguistic devices. In *Shaitannyn Saudasy*, the didactic orientation is dominant, with moral and religious vocabulary serving as the central linguistic feature. In *Gibratnama*, the philosophical narrative prevails, and symbolic language becomes the primary means of conveying meaning. In *Bayannama*, the social narrative is dominant, where repetition formulas and critical discourse act as the key linguistic mechanisms structuring the text. This structure proves that the genre nature and linguistic organization of the epic text are an interconnected system. That is, the narrative type is realized through a certain linguistic model, and through it the artistic and semantic integrity of the text is formed. The theoretical significance of the study is that it considers the epic not only as a literary phenomenon, but also as a narrative and linguistic system. The proposed typological approach allows us to determine the genre and linguistic regularities of epic texts by modeling their internal structure. This method strengthens the structural direction of the study of epic poetry and opens the way for a comprehensive analysis of the text. From a practical point of view, the proposed narrative and linguistic models can serve as a universal scientific tool that can be used to study epic texts, conduct analysis in literature lessons, and also explain the structural features of the artistic text. These models make it possible to systematically describe the genre nature of epic works. In addition, this study provides a direction for future scientific work. In the future, it is important to conduct a comparative analysis with other epic texts, expand the research corpus, and clarify the frequency indicators of linguistic elements using quantitative methods. Such studies will provide a basis for a deeper understanding of the structural system of the Kazakh epic tradition. Thus, this work is the first to consider narrative typology, genre classification, and linguistic dominants as a single scientific model, providing a basis for describing the internal structure of the Kazakh epic tradition from a new perspective.

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The Impact of Using Mind Maps on Teaching Arabic Grammar

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Abstract—**This study examined the impact of utilizing mind maps to teach Arabic grammar to intermediate-level learners. It looked into how mind maps improve students' understanding of grammatical concepts, improve their ability to recall and apply these rules in novel contexts, and boost participation and engagement in the classroom. A group that received teaching using mind maps was compared to a group that received training using traditional methods in this experimental investigation. Data were gathered through instructor observations, pre- and post-tests, and involvement and engagement surveys. The results showed that students who used mind maps outperformed their peers in all areas, including understanding, application, participation, and memory. Participation and involvement in the classroom were strongly associated with students' comprehension. Mind maps also assisted in balancing student performance and reducing achievement gaps. The requirement for training, longer preparation times, and some students' unwillingness to change were practical obstacles. To sum up, mind maps are a useful teaching tool for improving Arabic grammar comprehension, retention, and engagement while assisting students in overcoming challenging grammatical rules. Mind maps may be effectively used in classrooms with careful preparation and prior training. The study suggests including mind maps as a necessary part of the grammar curriculum rather than a sporadic addition and educating instructors and students in their usage prior to deployment.**

Index Terms—**mind maps, grammar, retention, classroom engagement**

I. Introduction

Students have traditionally struggled with Arabic grammar, particularly when using traditional educational techniques that focus on memorisation and rote learning without utilising any visual aids to assist students in grasping sentence structure and word connections. This technique not only makes learning challenging for them, but it also makes it harder for them to write effectively and express themselves (Aljedayah et al., 2024; Almsbhieen et al., 2023). In order to assist students in structuring knowledge in their minds in a way that is simpler and quicker to comprehend, the demand for contemporary teaching techniques has arisen. This study focused on the impact of using mind maps in teaching Arabic grammar, especially for students at the intermediate level. The goal was to examine whether mind maps truly help students understand the rules more easily, remember them, apply them to new examples, and increase engagement and classroom participation (El-Ebiary et al., 2024; Amer et al., 2024; Al-Zyadat et al., 2025).

Sometimes students get lost between parsing the subject and predicate, types of sentences, prepositions, and complex grammatical terms. This causes students to become frustrated and disinterested, particularly when the instructor presents difficult language in a conventional manner without using any interactive or visual aids that aid with information retention. Students often face this problem, which certainly affects their academic performance directly and also impacts their ability to express themselves and write correctly (Harara et al., 2024; Istiqomah et al., 2025; Malkawi et al., 2020). Here comes the role of searching for modern teaching methods that help students understand the rules visually and systematically so they can see the relationships between the information clearly. One of the most

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prominent methods that has emerged in recent years is mind mapping, which has become a powerful tool in modern education (Abu Melhim et al., 2023; Alazzam et al., 2024).

Mind maps are not a new idea in essence, but they have recently become widely popular in the field of education because they help organise information and connect it visually, allowing students to see the complete picture of any topic or grammatical rule easily. Instead of the student reading a long and complicated text about the rules and trying to memorise the terms and examples, mind maps break down the information into small, organised parts, as if they are building a map in their mind that clarifies the relationships between words, verbs, pronouns, and sentences (Al-Bdour et al., 2025; Al-Manasreh, 2025; Saleh, 2025, 2026; Abu-Elrob & Tawalbeh, 2022).

Mind mapping is known to enhance metacognition and educational achievement by providing a multidimensional outline that engages learners in topic introduction, idea management, and connection-making. Research has shown that mind mapping can facilitate information processing through a combination of text, images, and colour, contributing to better memory retention and promoting both active and collaborative learning (Abu-Elrob, 2019; Abusheirah et al., 2024; Al Qathami & Manasrah, 2025; Al-Rawashdeh et al., 2024).

Recent studies have demonstrated that students who use mind maps have a greater ability to understand and comprehend, as well as apply rules to new examples. When a student sees the rule written in a networked and visual form, the mind can connect the information more quickly and retain it more effectively. Mind maps also combine words, symbols, and colours, which provides the brain with multiple entry points for learning—whether visual, auditory, or even kinaesthetic. This method helps students retain information in the long term (Alorani et al., 2026; Alajlouni et al., 2025; Al Etoum et al., 2025; Sawalha & Abu Al-Nahel, 2025; Alazzam et al., 2024).

Teaching Arabic, particularly grammar, requires a clear method because students sometimes get lost between the rules and complex terms and do not know how to connect meaning and structure smoothly. Every grammatical piece of information, if the student does not understand it correctly, will affect the rest of the sentences and exercises. For example, if the student does not understand the difference between the subject and predicate or between the present and past tense, they will find it very difficult to write a correct sentence or understand an Arabic text (Rababah et al., 2025; Eazolli et al., 2025, 2026). Even teachers have started to find it difficult, especially when traditional teaching methods are not effective. Sometimes the teacher explains, and the students listen, but there is no method to clarify the relationships between words and sentences (Abu Omar et al., 2025; Alqudah & Khasawneh, 2025; Alghazo et al., 2023).

A. Problem Statement

Many students experience pressure and bewilderment as a result of dull classes. Because they give students a clear mental plan and enable them to see all the material pertaining to grammatical rules in an orderly and structured way, mind maps are crucial for such students. Furthermore, rather than emphasising memorisation, the mind map method encourages students' involvement and engagement. When a learner can understand the wider picture and draw connections between rules and instances, their confidence increases and they become more skilled at implementing the rule without depending on memorisation only (Al-Bdour et al., 2025).

Furthermore, by using mind maps, the teacher will be able to organise the course in a way that is clear and interesting, making it easier to explain the concepts and boosting student engagement. Additionally, mind maps save the time required for memorisation since they logically and clearly link knowledge.

B. Research Questions

The study attempts to answer these questions:

- Does using mind maps in teaching grammar enhance students' understanding of the lesson compared to traditional methods?
- Do mind maps affect students' ability to remember and apply grammatical rules?
- Is there a difference in performance between students who learn through traditional methods and those who use mind maps?
- What challenges might teachers face when applying mind maps in the classroom, and how can these challenges be overcome?

II. Literature Review

A. Theoretical Background

When we talk about "using mind maps" in teaching grammar, we need to understand two things: first, what a mind map is and how it works; and second, the nature of Arabic grammar and why it poses a challenge. Then we need to see how mind maps help in addressing these challenges.

(a). Mind Maps

In short, a mind map is a visual tool for representing related information in a centralised manner, starting from a main idea or topic from which branches extend to represent sub-ideas or the relationships between words and concepts. Instead of the lesson being just a long text or slides, the student sees the map as a network or diagram showing the relationship between vocabulary and grammar. The advantage is that it uses colours, symbols, images, or keywords,

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helping the human brain remember faster and connect ideas more easily (Rababah et al., 2025).

(b). The Nature of Arabic Grammar and the Challenges

Arabic grammar rules—such as *i'rāb* (case endings), sentence parts, verbal and nominal sentences, types of verbs, prepositions, etc.—can be complex for students, especially if explained in a traditional manner, because many rules involve relationships between words and their positions in the sentence, not simply memorising isolated pieces of information. Also, grammatical terms (such as subject, predicate, verb, and object) require prior understanding, along with practice and application. When the explanation method is boring or lacks visual representation, many students feel confused or bored, or they are unable to connect the rule with practical examples. Thus, mind maps can help in teaching grammar through:

- Simplifying relationships: Instead of the student seeing a long, complex rule, they see it as a map starting from a main concept like "verb" and branching out into its forms ("past tense, present tense, imperative"), with each branch further subdividing into types or examples. This way, the brain progresses step by step.
- Consolidating visual memory: Because maps include colors and symbols, students frequently observe them visually all at once, which helps with retention.
- Establishing connections between ideas: For example, when we see "prepositions" in a branch and "from, to, about, on..." beneath it, we can clearly perceive the relationship between the preposition, its position, and its influence in the sentence.
- Increasing involvement and engagement: To make the process interactive rather than passive, the instructor might encourage students to finish an incomplete map or construct a mind map themselves.
- Accommodating different levels: For students with weaker skills, maps make it easier to start with simple concepts; for more advanced students, they can expand into branches and applications, making the approach flexible.

Although modern visual methods have been used and tested in teaching, there is still not a vast amount of research specifically focused on mind maps + Arabic grammar + the relevant grade levels, especially in Jordan or the Arab world. Therefore, this research aims to explore the effectiveness of the method with real students, compare it with the traditional method, identify challenges and obstacles, and provide recommendations for teachers.

B. Previous Studies

Bataineh and Al-Majali (2023) investigated how Jordanian EFL tenth-grade students' usage of additive, adversative, causal, and temporal conjunctions may be impacted by mind mapping-based training. A deliberate sample of two tenth-grade sections from a public school in Mafraq, Jordan, was selected. The two sections were randomly assigned to two groups: a control group of 13 students who were taught according to the recommended teacher's book, and an experimental group of 14 students who were taught using mind mapping. Data were gathered using a post-test after an eight-week treatment period. The results showed that the experimental group outperformed the control group overall and in the usage of the four types of conjunctions.

Mufarrah (2023) taught grammar to children whose native language is not Arabic using mind maps. Even though the principle remained the same, the biggest obstacle was the trainees' poor proficiency in Arabic. The findings demonstrated that utilising mind maps made it easier for students to comprehend the ideas and apply them to new phrases. When compared to the conventional approach, the researcher also saw a decrease in the error rate and an increase in the learners' confidence in applying the rules. Since the study indicates that the method can be applied to students who are not proficient in the language, we anticipate that it will be effective when applied to Arab students who struggle with grammar.

Kacem and Mazouzen (2024) focused on third-year secondary school students in the Literature and Philosophy stream and worked on simplifying grammatical rules using mind maps. The study demonstrated that the method helped students understand the rules more easily and apply them to new examples without relying on memorisation. The results also showed that students developed a better ability to connect the verb, subject, and object, as if they could see the "complete rule map". The impact was significant, and the students became more engaged in class discussions.

This study is significant because it is an example from the Arab world and at a stage close to many schools in Jordan, and thus the study results are applicable in the Jordanian context. It also confirms that mind maps are effective with adolescent students, and this stage is sensitive to visual and interactive learning. For our research, this result is important because it supports the idea of using maps to simplify complex rules such as compound sentences and defective verbs, and also to standardise performance levels among different students.

Khumaidah et al. (2025) focused on teaching Arabic grammar using mind maps, particularly the Ajrumiyyah text, to high school students. According to the study, students were able to apply the rules to various cases and started to comprehend them more quickly and clearly. The global nature of this study offers the advantage of showing that mind maps might be effective outside of the Arab world. The study's objective was to use visual aids to make complex regulations easier to grasp. This is useful for our study since we are looking for practical proof that mind maps function even when students are presented with difficult and complex rules. In line with the present research's premise, the study also emphasised classroom involvement and practical implementation.

El-Kenany (2021) investigated how using the mind mapping technique may improve EFL first-year secondary stage

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students' English grammatical ability. The instruments developed and used in this study were an English Grammar Achievement Test, which was used as a pre-, post-, and follow-up test to gauge students' grammatical achievement levels, and a questionnaire on English grammar learning issues to ascertain the difficulties EFL first-year secondary stage students face in learning and achieving English grammar. One group was used in the study's experimental design. The mind mapping approach was used to instruct the participants. The results demonstrated the efficiency of the mind mapping approach in raising students' proficiency in English grammar. This study proves that an electronic version of the maps can yield the same positive results. Therefore, technology can be employed with mind maps in Jordanian classrooms to increase interaction and improve outcomes.

Alwattar and Al-Balhan (2018) studied how the e-mind maps strategy affected the academic achievement level of primary students in Kuwait in terms of learning Arabic vocabulary skills. In the post-achievement test of acquiring Arabic vocabulary, there were statistically significant differences between the experimental and control groups' mean scores, in favour of the experimental group.

Aydoğdu and Alyılmaz (2024) investigated the efficacy of mind mapping for teaching grammar in Turkish as a foreign language. Twenty-two students were taught the mind mapping technique for seven weeks. Following that, each student was interviewed individually. The data were analysed using content analysis. Grammar structures were taught using mind mapping diagrams while teaching Turkish to non-native speakers. The diagrams used were based on the judgements of the instructors. The study employed the interview technique for gathering qualitative data. Based on the learners' perspectives, the results showed that the mind mapping approach was successful in teaching grammar, its structure facilitated instruction, it contributed to memory, and it helped form a positive attitude towards the lesson.

Ragab et al. (2024) used a pre-post writing test with an analytical writing assessment scale to assess students' performance in descriptive writing and writing electronic messages. A questionnaire was also used to determine the necessary writing skills for second-year preparatory female students. According to the results, the post-writing test means of the experimental and control groups differed statistically significantly in favour of the experimental group. The application of electronic mind mapping improved the writing abilities of the students.

III. Methodology

A. Study Design

A pre-test and post-test were used for two separate groups in the quasi-experimental design. In order to ascertain each group's starting level, the same test was administered to each group before the study began. After that, mind maps were used to train one group while the other group carried on with their conventional education. Then the identical test was administered once more, and the results were compared. Through this technique, the researchers were able to ascertain whether mind maps had an actual impact rather than only an impression. Additionally, sophisticated statistical analysis (ANOVA, t-test, and Cohen's d) was employed to precisely and scientifically assess the differences.

B. Study Population and Sample

The study population was made up of students in the tenth grade from a public school in Irbid, Jordanian. The students study grammatical rules extensively, and they frequently have difficulty understanding them, which is why we selected them. There are around 120 students in all, split up into four groups. Forty students were chosen as a purposive sample (20 in the experimental group and 20 in the control group). By using their prior grammar scores and administering a pre-test to verify their equivalency before beginning, the researchers made sure that their overall level was comparable. The experimental group studied grammar topics (such as the subject and object, nominal and verbal sentences, and complex sentences) using mind maps. The control group studied the same topics, at the same time, but in the traditional way (explanation, examples, and textbook exercises).

C. Study Tools

The study relied on three main tools:

- *Grammar test (pre and post-test)*: it is composed of 25 questions varying between multiple choice, error correction, and sentence completion. It was presented to a committee of Arabic language experts in order to confirm its legitimacy.
- *Student Engagement Survey*: it assesses how much students participate and engage in class. It has fifteen items on a five-point Likert scale.
- *Classroom Teacher's Notes*: The instructor noted notes on the level of student participation, comprehension speed, and question quality.

D. Methods of Implementation

- Setting up: For the first week, the researchers trained the instructor who would be using mind maps. After we told him how to create one (for instance, the nominal phrase = subject + predicate), the instructor created a grammatical map using colours and arrows to indicate links.
- Phase One (Pre-test): To determine each student's starting level, we gave the exam to every student.
- Phase Two (Teaching): For six weeks, the experimental group used mind maps to study, averaging two sessions

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each week. In certain classes, technological tools like MindMeister and XMind were utilised, and the maps were sketched on the board and occasionally on the students' papers. After every class, the instructor also invited the students to create their own maps. The control group used the conventional method (written examples and theoretical explanations) to study the same subject on the same schedule.

- Phase Three (Post-test): After the study period ended, the researchers re-administered the test and recorded teacher observations.

E. Experimental Controls

To ensure that the results were not affected by external factors, the study maintained the following controls: The same teacher taught both groups, both groups had the same number of classes and duration, the same subject matter and content were taught, and communication between the two groups regarding the teaching method was restricted to avoid overlapping information.

IV. Results and Discussion

The average theoretical understanding scores between the two groups are displayed in Table 1.

TABLE 1
MEAN SCORES OF THEORETICAL UNDERSTANDING BETWEEN THE TWO GROUPS

Dimension	Experimental Group (M)	SD	Traditional Group (M)	SD	t-value	p-value
Theoretical Understanding	85.34	4.92	66.11	5.48	12.45	0.000

It is clear from Table 1 that the experimental group, which used mind maps, excelled significantly. This result confirms that the visual and organisational approach of mind maps is very effective in simplifying difficult information. In the same vein, Bataineh et al.'s (2023) study showed that tenth-grade students who learnt English using mind maps, excelled significantly. Also, Wahid and Sudirman (2022), which studied the impact of mind maps on English grammar, showed a significant difference in comprehension in favour of the experimental group. In the same vein, Wannas et al. (2022) revealed that the maps enhanced students' understanding of the rules compared to traditional methods.

TABLE 2
PRACTICAL APPLICATION GRADES OF THE RULES

Dimension	Experimental (M)	SD	Traditional (M)	SD	t-value	p-value
Practical Application	82.45	5.10	63.50	6.01	11.78	0.000

Table 2 displays that the experimental group was able to apply the rules better. The reason is that the maps allow the student to see the relationship between grammatical components (subject, object, verb) in the form of an interconnected map. This result was supported by other studies, such as Kacem and Mezouane (2024), which revealed that maps helped simplifying grammatical rules. Al-Malki (2022) also showed that students were able to apply the rules more easily when using maps. Table 3 presents the recall and retrieval.

TABLE 3
RECALL AND RETRIEVAL

Dimension	Experimental (M)	SD	Traditional (M)	SD	t-value	p-value
Recall and Retention	88.12	4.55	65.30	5.72	13.20	0.000

Table 3 revealed that maps not only improved understanding but also reinforced information in the brain more effectively. Students can memorise the rules faster than with the traditional method. Kacem and Mazouzen (2024) revealed that the maps helped students consolidate and easily retrieve the rules. Also, Al-Malki (2022) found that students who used this technique retained the information for a longer period. Sari et al. (2023) emphasised that maps increased recall ability in primary and middle school stages. Engagement and classroom participation are illustrated in Table 4.

TABLE 4
ENGAGEMENT AND CLASSROOM PARTICIPATION

Dimension	Experimental (M)	SD	Traditional (M)	SD	t-value	p-value
Class Participation	91.30	3.80	68.45	5.12	14.50	0.000

Table 4 revealed that the experimental group was more active, and the participation clearly reflected on the achievement. Al-Malki (2022) revealed that maps enhanced student participation. In the same vein, Bataineh et al. (2023) pointed out that participation increased when learning vocabulary with the application of maps. Table 5 presents analysis by age groups.

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TABLE 5
ANALYSIS BY AGE GROUPS

Age Group	Experimental (M)	SD	Traditional (M)	SD	ANOVA F	p-value
14–15 years	89.20	4.10	67.50	5.30	18.25	0.000
16–17 years	85.50	4.60	64.80	5.45	15.60	0.000
18 years	82.00	5.00	62.00	6.00	12.40	0.000

Table 5 showed that younger students benefited more. The young learner is more receptive to visual learning. Wannas et al. (2022) pointed out that younger children benefited more from the maps. Table 6 presents the standard deviation.

TABLE 6
STANDARD DEVIATION

Dimension	Experimental SD	Traditional SD	
Understanding	4.92	5.48	
Application	5.10	6.01	
Recall	4.55	5.72	
Participation	3.80	5.12	

Table 6 revealed that the standard deviation is lower in the experimental group, and the performance has become more homogeneous. This result is in line with Bataineh et al. (2023), which revealed that the maps reduced the differences among students. The effect size (Cohen's) is illustrated in Table 7.

TABLE 7
EFFECT SIZE (COHEN'S)

Dimension	Cohen's d
Understanding	2.15
Application	2.10
Recall	2.25
Participation	2.35

Table 7 revealed a very high value, indicating the effectiveness of the maps. Clearly, the results show that all the values are above 2, and this signals that the impact of the intervention is strong.

TABLE 8
DIFFICULTY OF THE RULES

Grammar Type	Experimental (M)	SD	Traditional (M)	SD	t-value	p-value
Compound Sentences	79.20	5.10	61.50	6.30	11.50	0.000
Defective Verbs	82.40	4.80	63.20	5.90	12.10	0.000
Prepositions	85.50	4.50	65.00	5.80	13.00	0.000

Table 8 showed that when mind maps divide complex rules into smaller, related components, they were more beneficial for the more challenging rules. For instance, the complex sentence becomes easier and clearer when the learner views it as a map containing the verb, subject, and object. Other research, including Kacem and Mazouene's (2024), which showed that the maps made the regulations easier to understand and implement, corroborated this conclusion. Additionally, the findings of Bataineh et al. (2023) and Al-Malki (2022) demonstrated that maps clearly had an influence on complicated regulations as opposed to simpler ones. Table 9 shows the relationship between understanding and involvement.

TABLE 9
THE CORRELATION OF ENGAGEMENT WITH UNDERSTANDING

Relationship	R-value	p-value
Engagement × Understanding	0.82	0.000

Table 9 demonstrated correlation is very strong. A student's comprehension of the rule increased as they engaged in more class activities. Mapping is only one aspect of participation; conversation and practical implementation are equally important. Wahid and Sudirman (2023), who found that active engagement is linked to better comprehension, as well as Bataineh et al. (2023), who found that the most engaged students had higher marks, corroborated this finding. Table 10 presents the difficulties and useful insights.

TABLE 10
CHALLENGES AND PRACTICAL OBSERVATIONS

Challenge	Percentage	Additional Notes
Need for additional training	35%	Students and teachers require basic technical skills for map drawing.
Longer preparation time	40%	The first few lessons take longer to plan than traditional methods.
Student resistance to change	25%	Some students prefer rote memorization and resist new strategies.

Table 10 demonstrated that each new approach frequently encounters opposition, and this study emphasized the useful advantages and disadvantages. To solve these problems, pre-training for educators and students is crucial.

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Wannas et al. (2022) emphasized the need for prior training in order to adapt to maps. It is normal for students to be resistant to change; thus, supportive tactics are required. Time and training were an obvious problem in the classroom, according to Bataineh et al. (2023). A multiple regression model for understanding score prediction is shown in Table 11.

TABLE 11
MULTIPLE REGRESSION MODEL (PREDICTING UNDERSTANDING SCORE)

Independent Variable	Beta (B)	SE (B)	t	p
(Constant)	5.12	1.28	4.00	0.000
Classroom Engagement	0.62	0.07	8.86	0.000
Pretest Score	0.41	0.05	8.20	0.000
Age (Years)	-0.35	0.12	-2.92	0.004
Use of Mind Maps (dummy: 1=Yes)	6.45	0.88	7.33	0.000

*R^2 = 0.68, Adjusted R^2 = 0.66, F (4,195) =104.5, p<0.001

Table 11 showed that the most important inputs explaining student understanding are classroom engagement (strongest effect), pre-test score, and then the use of mind maps as an independent variable with a significant and stable impact. Age is slightly negative — meaning younger students improved more. The R^2 is around 0.68, meaning 68% of the variance in understanding scores is explained by this factor — a strong number indicating the model's value.

This result is consistent with Bataineh et al. (2023) and Kacem and Mazouzen (2024), who found that engagement plus maps are the key to improvement, and also Al-Malki (2022), who saw that prior background is important, just as it appeared in our case. Table 12 presents RM-ANOVA (pretest–posttest–follow-up) on recall by group.

TABLE 12
RM-ANOVA (PRETEST — POSTTEST — FOLLOW-UP) ON RECALL BY GROUP

Source	df	F	p	Partial η^2
Time (pre/post/follow-up)	2,390	182.6	0.000	0.48
Group	1,195	154.3	0.000	0.44
Time × Group	2,390	98.4	0.000	0.34

Table 12 shows that there is a clear time difference: everyone improved after the intervention, but the group that used the maps maintained the benefit for follow-up after two months significantly, and the interaction (Time×Group) is strong, meaning the map's effect is not just temporary but stable. The effect sizes (partial η^2) are large and indicate a practical educational impact. Our results align with El-Kenany (2021) and Kacem and Mazouane (2024), who observed stability in recall after applying maps or electronic copies. However, the present study's difference is bigger because the design included longer follow-up and multiple measures. Table 13 presents an ANCOVA: comparison of understanding (posttest) scores between the two groups after controlling for the pretest.

TABLE 13
ANCOVA: COMPARISON OF UNDERSTANDING (POSTTEST) SCORES BETWEEN THE TWO GROUPS AFTER CONTROLLING FOR THE PRETEST

Source	DF	F	p	Partial η^2	Adjusted Mean (Experimental)	Adjusted Mean (Control)
Group	1,193	198.2	0.000	0.51	86.30	64.90
Pretest (Covariate)	1,193	72.5	0.000	0.27	—	—

After controlling for the pretest as a variable, we are still looking for a significant difference between the two groups: the group that used maps has an adjusted mean score of ~86 compared to ~65 for the traditional group. The effect (partial $\eta^2 = 0.51$) is substantial, which confirms that the difference is not just due to initial variation but rather a result of the teaching strategy. Studies like Bataineh et al. (2023) and Al-Malki (2022) noticed differences after controlling, but we have a larger effect size, possibly because we integrated engagement and modelled it more accurately. Table 14 displays reliability and confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) loadings for study measures.

TABLE 14
RELIABILITY AND CONFIRMATORY FACTOR ANALYSIS (CFA) LOADINGS FOR STUDY MEASURES

Scale	Cronbach's α	Number of Items	Mean Factor Loading (CFA)
Understanding	0.92	8	0.78
Application	0.90	7	0.81
Recall	0.91	6	0.84
Engagement	0.87	5	0.75

CFA model fit indices were as follows: CFI = 0.96, TLI = 0.95, RMSEA = 0.038 (90% CI: 0.032–0.044), and SRMR = 0.035.

Every scale showed outstanding factor loadings (> 0.75) and great reliability ($\alpha > 0.87$). The items assess the target constructs with good accuracy and reliability, as indicated by the CFA model's strong fit (CFI/TLI above 0.95 and RMSEA below 0.05). Few mind-mapping research use sophisticated CFA, despite the fact that many claim favourable results. This level of structural and reliability analysis is not usually present. In contrast to other studies (e.g., Bataineh et al., 2023; Kacem & Mazouane, 2024; Al-Malki, 2022), the present study adds methodological value by statistically confirming the instruments. The biggest predictors of grammar knowledge were found to be classroom participation and the usage of mind maps; this association is confirmed by the high R2 (~0.68).

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RM-ANOVA demonstrated that the benefit continued over the course of the follow-up period, suggesting that the improvement was long-lasting. Even after accounting for pre-test results, mind maps still had a significant influence; ANCOVA provides strong evidence of this actual difference. The Alpha coefficients and CFA loadings increased the credibility of the data, and the measurement tools were dependable.

With more methodological depth (longer follow-up period, larger effect sizes, and use of CFA), the current study shows a similar tendency to recent Arab and global studies (e.g., Bataineh et al., 2023; Kacem & Mazouane, 2024; Al-Malki, 2022; El-Kenany, 2021). The study demonstrated the value of mind maps in all areas, including comprehension, application, retention, engagement, and managing difficult rules.

The current findings are consistent with previous research, which greatly validates the usage of mind maps in educational settings. With a discernible improvement in achieving consistent performance levels, mind maps had the greatest effect on younger pupils and complex regulations. The substantial correlation between participation and understanding highlights the importance of combining hands-on activities with visual learning. With the right preparation, practical challenges like time, training, and student resistance may be addressed.

V. Conclusions and Recommendations

The findings demonstrated the effectiveness of mind maps. The findings showed that students who used mind maps performed better than those taught using traditional methods in terms of theoretical comprehension, practical application, and grammatical memorization. Students can better understand the connections between words and phrases by using mind maps. When handling complex structures like prepositions, compound phrases, and defective verbs, this approach works better. By dividing complex information into manageable bits, mind maps are supposed to assist students in comprehending and applying challenging content without feeling overwhelmed or confused. Users using mind maps were more focused and engaged in class, which enhanced their comprehension and memory.

One example of practical contact that greatly enhanced the method's effectiveness was creating maps. As seen by the decrease in the experimental group's standard deviation, the maps assisted all students—strong and weak—in reaching closer levels of success, which is essential for reducing educational disparities in the classroom. Understanding and engagement were strongly correlated: The significant connection ($r = 0.82$) between rule comprehension and class engagement highlights the benefits of integrating hands-on activities with visual assistance. With proper planning, practical challenges including the need for teacher and student training, preparation time, and initial student resistance may be overcome.

The study recommends providing teachers and students with prior training in using mind maps, integrating mind maps consistently, not occasionally, into the grammar curriculum, taking age and academic level into account during implementation, promoting interactive classroom engagement, as it is linked to improved comprehension and performance, focusing on complex grammatical concepts and compound sentences through mind maps, allocating additional preparation time initially, with the expectation that it will decrease once teachers become accustomed to the method.

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Logical Inference and Cognitive Engagement in Noel Carroll's Theory of Narrative Closure

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***Abstract*—This paper explores the intersection of logic and narratology in Noel Carroll's theory of narrative closure (2007). Grounding his theory in the logic of questions and answers, technically known as inferential erotetic logic, Carroll built his theory on the concept of the erotetic narrative, which employs, according to inferential logic, causal narrative connections to pose questions to the reader as a means to process the narrative cognitively. According to Carroll, narrative closure occurs when these questions are answered, manifesting as a phenomenological feeling experienced by the reader. This paper identifies a critical gap in Carroll's theory, which is the omission of logical inference in achieving narrative closure. By omitting the role of inference, Carroll's theory reduces closure to a purely plot-driven process, overlooking the cognitive mechanisms through which readers generate and resolve questions. This paper argues that the re-institution of inference in Carroll's theory offers a more comprehensive understanding of how narrative closure functions, extending beyond the plot to include the reader's active engagement in question generation and resolution**.

***Index Terms*—narrative closure, erotetic narrative, causality, Noel Carroll**

I. Introduction

Narrative closure is not merely a point at which the conflict in a plot is resolved. It is a complex narrative component that relies upon its effect on the narrative and the reader simultaneously. According to Gerald Prince, narrative closure is "a conclusion giving the feeling that a narrative or a narrative sequence has come to an end and providing it with an ultimate unity and coherence, an end creating in the receiver a feeling of appropriate completion and finality" (Prince, 2003, p. 61). Narratologically, plot conflict builds as tension around suspense and expectations whose escalating intensity builds up inside the text and the reader simultaneously. The resolution of this intensity becomes a cathartic space for the reader and a textual threshold for the imposition of a pattern of meaning on the narrative as a totality.

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Narratologists tend to explain the phenomenon of narrative closure either in terms of plot mechanism or in terms of the reader's expectations. Critics like Todorov (1977), Brooks (1984), and Bal (2009) use insights from structural narratology to locate narrative closure as an effect of plot mechanisms. Todorov (1977) perceives narrative closure as an outcome of the resolution of the plot's tensions. Brooks (1984) sees narrative closure as a restoration of plot balance by creating a state of new equilibrium, while for Bal (2009), it lies in the resolution of narrative threads to redeem thematic promises. Other critics, notably Barthes (1974) and Phelan (1996), conceive narrative closure as an outcome of the reading experience. Barthes sees narrative closure as the result of the interplay of the interpretive codes (especially the cultural and genre codes) and the readerly expectations, whereas Phelan sees it happen when narratives employ rhetorical strategies to shape readers' expectations and ethical judgements.

However insightful, such theorizations on narrative closure are rigidly plot-bound and remain vague on the exact textual mechanism that narratives promote to engage the reader in experiencing narrative closure. They never state, for example, whether the reader is the producer or recipient of the effect of narrative closure. Moreover, almost all of these explanations of narrative closure come as a part of the broader studies of fictional prose narratives. There is rarely a critical theorization exclusive to narrative closure. One such focused theorization is introduced by art critic Noel Carroll in his 2007 essay-length study "Narrative Closure," where he outlines a theory of the nature of narrative closure and the specific textual ways it is obtained. This hypothetical theory is a handy and practical one to explain how closure happens in narratives, as it avoids philosophical jargon for the sake of providing a concise description of the processes and conditions involved in the textual production of narrative closure.

Carroll (2007) identifies narrative closure as "the phenomenological feeling of finality that is generated when all the questions saliently posed by the narrative are answered" (p. 1). This entails two aspects. First, this feeling of finality/completeness "occurs as directly experienced phenomena of awareness" (Heavey, 2012, p. 763). Second, it is a "matter of concluding rather than stopping" (Carroll, 2007, p. 2). The two aspects correlate to create a knowledge context that imparts to the recipient a cognitive sense of finality or completeness. It is only at this point that the recipient of the narrative can be said to experience narrative closure.

Carroll's (2007) erotetic theory of narrative closure has evoked several critical responses that have raised questions and concerns over the practical validity and soundness of its philosophical premises. Moreover, various objections and emendations were made to the extent that Carroll had to add a section to the subsequent editions of his essay in which he defended his theory against most of these objections.

Of all Carroll's (2007) critics, however, Frome (2020) is the only one who investigated the inferential erotetic logic foundations of Carroll's theory. He claims that the erotetic theory, as used by Carroll, has numerous ambiguities and "lacks supporting evidence and makes unfalsifiable empirical claims, raising questions about its usefulness" (Frome, 2020, p. 1). He argues that erotetic theory is intuitive but says little about narrative in action because it describes the reader's subjective experience of narratives. Such a personal experience cannot be quantified into a conceptual theory. Frome accuses Carroll's erotetic theory of narrative closure of being "unsupported by evidence and is unfalsifiable" because Carroll failed to "prove his theoretical claims" (Frome, 2020, p. 21).

Indeed, a more succinct analytical examination of this theory's premises and hypotheses is necessary, specifically to assess its workability in terms of classical question logic. This study strongly believes that while Carroll (2007) develops his theory of narrative closure from the premises of classic inferential erotetic logic, he fails to acknowledge the role of inference in bringing about closure in erotetic narratives. This omission of logical inference from his theory reduces his perception of closure to an exclusively plot-bound process that fails to account effectively for how the reader generates and answers questions.

II. Noel Carroll's Theory of Narrative Closure

Carroll (2007) uses the works of scholars such as Aristotle, Hume, Barthes, and Forster to theorize narrative closure as the point at which all the questions that make up the plot line of the narrative are satisfactorily answered. This conception of plotting assumes that narratives, at least those aesthetically executed ones, are experienced by the reader as cognitive paradigms, as they motivate the reader to process them as questions and expectations. Authors, as Carroll asserts, work consciously to this end. Furthermore, these questions, he contends, are inherent in the narrative because they "have been planted by the author in a way that makes them practically unavoidable for the intended audience. These questions hold onto our attention as the story moves forward" (Carroll, 2007, p. 4). Narrative closure occurs when the questions the narrative poses are answered to warrant the reader's satisfaction that the narrative sequence is concluded.

Carroll (2007) refers to narratives of networks of questions and answers to sustain closure as "erotetic" (p. 5). Such narratives "come with the promise of outcomes to the courses of events that comprise them" (Carroll, 2007, p. 6). Although the line of development in such narratives is usually unpredictable, the narrative turns and lines of development remain within the reader's horizon of expectations because the reader applies the same logic of real life to the unfolding scenarios of the fictional narrative of the erotetic sort. Carroll cites the reader's emotional response to the narrative to shed further light on how narrative closure happens. The reader would typically feel dissatisfied when the narrative refrains from answering a question it posed saliently. Carroll assumes that since such dissatisfaction is the

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"antithesis to the impression of closure," it is "reasonable to hypothesize that closure is a state that is brought about when the answers are not withheld but communicated" (Carroll, 2007, p. 7).

Erotetic narratives are composed of two levels of questions that work as a network to structure the storyline. Presiding macro-questions that "structure an entire text or, at least, most of it" (Carroll, 2007, p. 5) and micro-questions "whose answer will contribute eventually to answering presiding macro-questions but which does not, on its own, answer the relevant presiding question directly and completely" (Carroll, 2007, p. 6). Carroll highlights that closure "correlates with answering all the presiding macro-questions the story has proposed" (Carroll, 2007, p. 5). However, this is not to say that micro-questions are insignificant for narrative closure. They are as crucial to narrative closure as the presiding macro-questions because in erotetic narratives, there is "a hierarchical relationship between the questions posed by an ongoing narrative. Micro-questions are generally subordinate to the presiding macro-questions. Closure is obtained when all of the presiding macro-questions and all the micro-questions that are relevant to settling the macro-questions have been answered" (Carroll, 2007, p. 6).

To understand why answering self-posed questions in a narrative counts as narrative closure, Carroll (2007) explores the nature of the narrative and its relation to narrative closure. He starts by defining narratives as "characterizations of sequences of events, which are comprised of what I call 'narrative connections'" (Carroll, 2007, p. 11). He explains that a narrative connection obtains when the discourse consists of at least two events ordered in a forward-looking sequence and concentrates on at least one character. Moreover, this sequence of events must be temporally ordered in a perspicuous way. This temporal ordering presupposes a degree of causation as a "necessary condition for the subsequent occurrence of the events and states of affairs in the chain of events being described or are a contribution thereto" (Carroll, 2007, p. 11). Carroll's approach to narratives highlights causation as a necessary condition of narrativity. Although causation is an a priori condition for narratives, not all events in a narrative need to be causally connected, and even when causation exists, it is not that stringent.

Carroll (2007) suggests that "it is primarily the causal inputs in erotetic narratives that raise the presiding macro-questions and the pressing micro-questions whose answers secure closure concerning such stories and histories" (p. 12). According to Carroll, this generative process finds its best incarnation in the motivational states of the central characters in the narrative because such states are part of the causal condition of narrative complication (Carroll, 2007, p. 12). Indeed, the character's desires, dreams, and plans structure the causal context of narrativity by generating problems and obstacles for the given character. The reader translates these problems and obstacles into the state of question-making.

Accordingly, narrativity is realized through the citations of narrative connections or linkages that stratify the events into a unified, connected sequence or narrative line. Once narrativity is actualized, these same narrative connections shape the reader's experience of narrativity into erotetic processing. The reader then hypothesizes the narrative sequence into questions. This is the point at which Carroll provides an insight into why the ensuing closure in such narratives is called narrative:

> The sorts of questions that are generated by the causal networks that contribute to connecting the past, present, and future in stories warrant being called narrative questions because of their intimate relation to an essential feature of narrative, and, furthermore, answering said questions provokes the phenomenological condition that deserves to be called narrative closure because the questions at issue have been generated narratively. (Carroll, 2007, p. 13)

Carroll (2007) sums up his argument by stating directly that narrative closure is obtained "when it is the description of the causal nexus or parts thereof that generates the presiding macro-questions and the subordinate micro-questions that rivet our attention and which finally answers them, thereby eliciting a sense of completeness in us" (p. 13).

III. Logic and Cognitive Engagement in Carroll's Theory

Carroll's (2007) conception of erotetic narrative is based on the theory of Inferential Erotetic Logic that rose to popularity in the 1990s. This theory explains how erotetic narratives work; that is to say, it demonstrates how they generate questions. Wiśniewski, a major proponent of the theory, postulates that erotetic narratives induce questions by inference. He defines erotetic inferences as the "thought processes in which one arrives at a question on the basis of some previously accepted declarative sentence(s) and a previously posed question" (Wiśniewski, 2021, p. 2). Such inference is not about questions, but it is inference with questions in the sense that the reader makes inferences about the narrative by asking questions. Wiśniewski sums up how the inferential erotetic logic works as follows:

1. Erotetic narrative "proceeds as follows: first, some criteria of validity are proposed, separately for erotetic inferences that involve only declarative premises and for these in which an interrogative premise occurs" (Wiśniewski, 2021, p. 3).
2. As soon as "criteria of validity are set, two semantic relations are defined: evocation of questions by sets of declarative sentences/formulas, and erotetic implication of a question by a question together with a set of declarative sentences/formulas. Validity of erotetic inferences of the consecutive kinds is defined in terms of "question evocation and erotetic implication, respectively" (Wiśniewski, 2021, p. 3).

Carroll (2007) oversimplifies this process of question-raising by omitting all the technical keywords of Wiśniewski's theory. Carroll's erotetic narrative "poses" questions through the salience of "narrative connections." However, it does not explain how the narrative generates questions in the reader's mind. It seems that Carroll wants to limit the question-

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posing to the narrative structure. His use of the word “pose” is meant to de-signify the question-generating process to exclude the reader from this process. Here, the reader becomes a recipient rather than an active agent in producing questions. This is closer to Wiśniewski's (2021) postulation that erotetic narrative is inferential as it works with questions, not about them. Carroll forgoes with validity, evocation, and implication questions to produce vague generalizations. This indicates that Carroll is interested in process rather than mechanism.

Furthermore, Carroll (2007) seems to reduce Wiśniewski's process of raising questions, as elaborated in the second point above, to the single effect of “narrative connections.” Carroll's term is descriptive and does not explain how the narrative generates questions. It is used to emphasize the causal nature of the erotetic narrative. This is lacking on two counts: first, causation works on the level of declarative sentences exclusively, as statements of events are connected within the theory of cause and effect. Wiśniewski emphasizes sequentiality as the potential source of question raising. Causation may underlie sequentiality, but no question can be posed unless the narrative line (plot) goes into a sequence. Carroll failed to recognize the role of sequentiality due to his failure to distinguish between plot and narrative. Plot goes by complication and problematization, whereas narratives progress and are stratified over a plot line. Problematization is based on causation, while stratification is based on sequencing. In sum, it seems that Carroll misreads consequentiality for sequentiality by failing to distinguish between plot and narrative.

Second, Carroll's narrative connections fail to account for many other cases that involve causation but cannot be called narrative. Susan L. Feagin points out one such case: “Narratives involving and driven by human agency involve a particular type of cause—a psychological connection—that distinguishes them from narratives, or would-be narratives, that do not, and that the presence of psychological connections obviates” (Carroll, 2007, p. 17). In such cases, the narrative connection does not supply the causation as concrete action. The character's psychology may set a story in movement and “pose” questions for the reader. Moreover, as Feagin (2007) suggests, such psychological connections contradict Carroll's (2007) claim that such narratives connect and set the narrative into a “globally forward-looking” (p. 12) movement. This presupposes the linearity of action in the narrative. However, not all narratives move this way. Some narratives might go circular, where closure might be located anywhere but the ending, as in the case of psychological connections. Here, we should remember that sequentiality is a cognitive progression rather than a narrative. Whatever the sequence pattern (linear or cyclical), it is up to the reader to cognitively process the emerging sequence. Causation, in this view, plays little role in this sequential processing of the narrative.

Carroll’s (2007) notion of question hierarchy in the erotetic narrative is closely based on Wiśniewski's theory of inferential erotetic logic, but with no acknowledgment. Wiśniewski classifies erotetic inferences into two kinds:

> In an erotetic inference of the first kind, we pass from some previously accepted declarative sentence(s) to a question. In an erotetic inference of the second kind, we pass from some previously posed question and possibly some previously accepted declarative sentence(s) to a question. (Wiśniewski, 1995, p. 2)

These two kinds of erotetic inference generate two questions corresponding to Carroll's (2007) presiding macro- and micro-questions. Wiśniewski (1995) is interested in the textual production of these two sets of questions, whereas Carroll is interested in describing the questions regardless of how they come to be generated. Carroll capitalizes on how questions behave to produce a descriptive taxonomy of erotetic narrative as if everything else is taken for granted. Carroll's overlooking of the inferential nature of the erotetic narrative is consequential to his endeavor to internalize narrative closure as an effect of narrative structure. This is reflected in his exclusion of the reader as a passive receptor of the textually produced effects of narrative closure.

However, Carroll (2007) seems to emulate the erotetic inference of the second order, which generates questions from previously generated questions. This is essentially the textual process into which presiding macro-questions operate as a series of micro-questions. Tupkowski (2015) explains that Wiśniewski's erotetic inference of the second order operates through the notion of erotetic implication "where a set of premises consists of a question and possibly some declarative sentence(s) and an agent passes from it to another question" (p. 25). This means that the questions evoked in the first kind of erotetic inference proceed by implicating further questions (micro-questions). However, this process is more interactive than hierarchical and tends to prioritize the generation of questions over any consideration of scope. However, the erotetic implication cannot exist without erotetic evocation because once a question is incepted, it develops by generating further mini-questions. This process underlies Carroll's theory, but he did not figure it out in his argument. Carroll is equally vague on the idea of answers. Although answers to the questions that the erotetic narrative raises are the locus of narrative closure, his hypothetical theory focuses exclusively on questions. There is no mention of whether the degree of completeness of answers can affect the degree of narrative closure. This is due to Carroll's failure to indicate whether narrative closure can occur in degrees. His brand of narrative closure seems to be categorically phenomenal in the sense that it either occurs or does not.

This aspect of Carroll's (2007) narrative closure has been duly criticized in the reception of his theory. Based on the evidence of novels, Klauk et al. (2016) demonstrated that narrative closure is "a gradable predicate" in the sense that "a novel may feature a certain degree of narrative closure, rather than having narrative closure or not” (p. 35). Carroll's failure to grasp this “gradable” nature of narrative closure relates to his failure to understand the nature of answers. Logically, a question can have a variety of possible answers. Pelis (2016) calls this propositional nature of questions “answerhood conditions” (p. 16). This concept proposes that the “meaning of an interrogative resides in its answerhood conditions” (Pelis, 2016, p. 18). This makes the inference of questions reasonable and acceptable to the reader. The

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possibilities of answers to the same questions depend on their completeness of answering the question and their relevance to the declarative situation from which the question arises. Carroll, on the other hand, assumes naively that a question raised in an erotetic narrative presupposes one full "formalized" answer, whose presence or withholding decides the existence of narrative closure.

Carroll's (2007) failure to prioritize answerhood conditions in his theory of narrative closure stems from his failure to recognize the contextual relation of questions and answers in that answers are based on prior assumptions of the declarative context from which the question arises. Thus, in Carroll's theory, answers are essential as they project closure rather than how and to what extent they satisfy the questions. Carroll, in short, is more interested in the effect than in the how and what of the answerhood as a condition of erotetic narrativity.

However, what is to be taken against Carroll's hierarchy of questions in the erotetic narrative is the lack of any indication as to whether the micro-questions are constitutive of the larger presiding macro-questions or exist independently from them. Logically, the first scenario is the likeliest one, as questions are said to make up a hierarchy in the erotetic narrative. However, this poses severe problems for narrative closure as answers to these questions. Do the answers to the presiding macro-questions lie in the answers to all the micro-questions? What if all the micro-questions do not find answers? Would this affect narrative closure to materialize, or is a sort of partial closure possible?

As this paper argues, one possible answer to these inquiries is reinstating the reader in Carroll's (2007) theory as the ultimate agent in the erotetic process. Carroll casts the reader in the mandatory role of experiencing the effects of narrative closure. Instead of the narrative posing questions to the reader, the reader should be able to infer questions from the ensuing narrative situations. If the narrative could eventually answer these questions satisfactorily, it would be possible to discuss narrative closure. The reader's "phenomenological feeling of finality" would then be consequential to how satisfactorily the narrative can answer the questions that the reader cognitively infers, rather than a manifestation of closure itself. This accounts for the gradability of narrative closure and makes it the culmination of the reader's experience of narrative flow.

Carroll's (2007) conception of "narrative connections" as the textual source of questions in erotetic narratives seems to emulate Wiśniewski's conception of the "inquiry" minus technical details. According to Wiśniewski, any erotetic narrative consists of inquiries "asking questions and looking for the answers to them" (Wiśniewski, 1995, p. 3). Carroll's "narrative connections" are essentially "inquiries," but they fail to fulfill Wiśniewski's postulate that in most inquiries:

> The questions asked are dependent upon the acquired or hypothetically assumed answers to the previously asked questions, as well as upon some background knowledge: in the light of what has been established or assumed earlier, some questions are admitted, whereas some others are not. Sometimes, however, specific further questions are not only admitted but nearly suggested. (Wiśniewski, 1995, p. 3)

Carroll (2007), however, explains how these narrative connections help pose neither questions nor how they connect to create the signifying paradigm of the erotetic narrative. It is unclear whether these narrative connections are declarative premises from which questions arise, as in the theory of inferential erotetic logic. All that Carroll mentions about them is their potential to organize the narrative in a causal theory. This does not explain how causation relates to the raising of questions. Moreover, Carroll specifies that the salience of these narrative connections is the sole factor in the scope and degree of causality these connections confer on the narrative. This implies that the more causal the narrative logic, the more erotetic it will be. This is logically paradoxical since causality is pertinent to declarative statements where events go by consequentiality. This is inherently an anti-interrogative structure since there is nothing unexplained to inquire about interrogatively.

Carroll (2007) claims that the causality operative in his theory of the erotetic narrative is to be kept to a minimum degree. This should support the above claim that this minimum causality supports consequentiality in creating narrative sequencing. However, as the present paper argues, this is not the result. Instead, this consequentiality is geared to "situationalize" the narrative because questions cannot be inferred unless a narrative situation exists. A narrative situation is envisioned here as a scenario that the narrative establishes to raise expectations in the reader. Ultimately, these expectations give rise to questions as the cognitive form of the reader's transaction with the narrative.

Interestingly, Carroll's (2007) essay provides an unintentional clue to the unstated nature of his "narrative connections." This clue is found in his citation of Roland Barthes's *S/Z* (1974). Carroll refers to Barthes very briefly on his idea of the narrative enigma. However, Carroll's idea of narrative connection is essential, similar to one of Barthes's five codes that the "author and reader share to make a narrative readable" (Abbott, 2002, p. 57). This is the hermeneutic code that concerns all those units "whose function it is to articulate in various ways a question, its response, and the variety of chance events which can either formulate the question or delay its answer; or even constitute an enigma and lead to its solution" (Barthes, 1974, p. 17).

Like narrative connections, this code is responsible for the textual fashioning of erotetic narrativity by creating a causality theory. However, Barthes's (1974) hermeneutic code far better explains how erotetic narratives work because it incorporates the answerhood condition, which Carroll (2007) almost deletes from his hypothetical theory of narrative closure.

Carroll's (2007) definition of narrative closure as "a phenomenological feeling of finality" aligns closure with the reader, while the argument of the proposed theory locates closure with the narrative structure. It is not clear why Carroll

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should describe narrative closure as an effect that the reader feels if it is a plot property. Erotetic logic accords the reader a crucial role in inferring the questions. In contrast, the plot generates the answers that make up the closure to satisfy the inferred questions. In Carroll's hypothetical theory, the role of the reader is equivocal. She merely experiences the effect of a textual phenomenon, which is the conclusion of the action of the plot structure. This poses two serious problems: first, readers as human beings are not equal in their cognitive capabilities. No two readers can have identical experiences of the same narrative, let alone the inference of questions from narrative complication. Second, the word 'finality' is problematic. Does it refer to the inevitable termination of the reading experience or the sense that the action is over?

Carroll's (2007) definition of narrative closure as a phenomenological feeling poses further epistemological problems. Klauk et al. (2016) find dissonance between the narrative closure that the reader forms “online” during the reading process and that which is figured out “ex-post” when the reader puts the book aside (p. 42). This belated feeling of narrative closure ensues from the reader's distancing of themselves from the narrative and processing it from a more stable intellectual stance. The reader's cognitive processing of the narrative is primarily emotional. So, the feeling of a sense of finality is marred by a cathartic feeling. This means that what the reader experiences phenomenologically is a qualitatively different feeling of closure; one is emotional, and the other is intellectual. Carroll, however, seems to highlight the online feeling of closure because, as he implies, it occurs during the reading process. Although this still poses serious problems, it is not altogether unjustifiable. The online feeling of finality is generated by the reader's response to the dramatic structure of the narrative, whereas the ex-post feeling of finality is consequential to the thematic structure of the narrative. It is well known that thematic structures, or thematization, occur after the process of reading, where the reader picks up notions or thoughts from the narrative to rationalize them around a core of values. The ex-post feeling of closure is probably generated by the reader's successful thematization of the narrative.

This, however, poses further problems. Because the online feeling of closure is generated by the narrative's dramatic structure and its phenomenological nature, as Carroll (2007) asserts, the erotetic processing of narrativity is invalid here. Asking questions and making inquiries does not go neatly with the reader's experience of the dramatic development of the narrative. Questions and inquiries, after all, are intellectual activities that require complex cognitive processes. It is safe to assume that such intellectual activities constitute the best possible scenario after reading a narrative, for the reader has time to reflect on the narrative and rationalize its meaning into thought patterns (thematic structures). A more viable scenario that suits the reader's emotional interaction with the ensuing drama of the narrative is the theory of crisis and resolution. This theory keeps the rhythm of the reader's involvement with the narrative through suspense. This is why the online feeling of closure is cathartic. This cathartic quality purges the reader of his emotional response and allows him to reflect rationally on the meaning of what just happened in the narrative. Here, the reader shifts from the emotional to the intellectual and starts asking questions about the narrative's drama. The answers that the narrative may provide are agentive in completing unifying thought patterns (thematic structure). The successful completion of such patterns can bring closure only if this thematization accounts for what happens in the narrative. It is safe to conclude that Carroll's question-and-answer closure theory is more suited to the ex-post closure than the online one.

However, is Carroll's (2007) conception of narrative closure cathartic in nature? Oral and cinematic narratives provide a valuable clue to the answer to this question. It has been noted that these two types of narratives solicit qualitatively different responses and interactions from the reader than the scripted narrative. The audience of oral and cinematic narratives shows more dynamic interaction, bodily and emotional, with the story development than the silent, primarily passive reader of novels and short stories. From listeners of oral folk narratives in primitive societies to filmgoers in a modern cinema, audiences develop a deep, real-time emotional involvement in the story, which leads to the universal experience of eventual cathartic relief. It is no coincidence that this cathartic feeling flows from the story's conclusion into narrative closure. The absence of such a closure generates anger and frustration in the audience. It is possible to assume that whatever cathartic feeling the audience experiences is symptomatic of experiencing a narrative closure. On the other hand, reading scripted narratives is crucially different regarding the reader's response. In this case, the reader transacts cognitively with the narrative in a hermeneutic rather than phenomenological mode. This would inevitably result in a less physical or emotional interaction with the narrative. Consequently, Carroll's failure to address the agency of erotetic narrativity poses severe problems for his theory of narrative closure because his conception of narrative closure is less valid in scripted narratives.

IV. Conclusion

Although Carroll (2007) succeeds in using logic to build up a working narratological model of closure, his failure to acknowledge the notion of inference tends to overlook the cognitive engagement of the reader in the production of narrative closure. The reader, in Carroll’s theory, does not infer questions while reading, as inferential erotetic logic stipulates. Carroll alternatively casts this narrative generation of questions as a plot-engendered process. This would make the question-generation process less of a cognitive process than a mere textual mechanism that regulates the reading process. This would consequently cancel the role of the reader as an active producer of meaning via interaction with the narrative. Customarily, the reader interacts cognitively with the narrative during the process of reading by raising questions and anticipating the narrative in question to provide or withhold answers to these questions. By making the narrative pose questions to the reader, Carroll cancels the very human drive to raise questions by inference.

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However, Carroll contradicts himself when stating that narrative closure manifests itself as a phenomenological feeling of finality rather than a point at which the narrative stops posing questions to the reader. This asserts the centrality of the reader in producing closure via a transactional mode of communication with the narrative. To resolve this contradiction that lies at the core of Carroll's theory, it is advisable to reinstitute inference as the ultimate mode of raising questions by the reader. Then, finally, narrative closure occurs when the narrative answers these questions satisfactorily.

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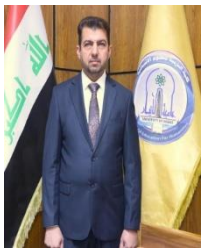


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The Authorial Image and Stylization in Contemporary (2012-2023) Kazakh Short Stories: A Linguostylistic Analysis

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***Abstract*—In linguistic analysis, literary discourse is regarded as a domain that reveals the developmental potential and trajectory of a national language. An author's style is not merely a reflection of the use of established linguistic norms; rather, it functions as an influential model that revitalizes, consolidates, or transforms those norms. Through lexical choice, syntagmatic construction, the conventionalization of figurative units, and the formation of new semantic nuances, a literary text actively affects the normative character of the national language. The article examines the construction of the authorial image and the mechanisms of stylization in contemporary Kazakh short stories, drawing on the linguostylistic analysis model developed by Rabiga Syzdyk. In accordance with the theoretical framework of the study, the authorial image is not equal with the writer's biographical persona; instead, it is conceptualized as a category reconstructed from the internal organization of the text, narrative perspectives, evaluative and modal nuances, and the dominant use of expressive means. The empirical corpus of this research consists of Kazakh short stories published between 2012 and 2023. The texts were selected from *Qazaq adebieti* and other literary portals and were analyzed regarding their intrageneric differentiation (psychological, philosophical, allegorical, mystical, socio-domestic, etc.). The article contributes to the development of studies on the authorial image, stylization, and the transformation of stylistic norms by introducing materials from the Turkic languages into international scholarly discourse.**

***Index Terms*—authorial image, stylization, linguostylistics, Rabiga Syzdyk, norms of the national literary language**

I. Introduction

In contemporary humanities, the analysis of literary texts is no longer limited to describing their aesthetic value; it is increasingly aimed at understanding complex phenomena at the intersection of language, culture, and cognition. This is stated in the work of Issakova et al. (2026). At the global level, in linguostylistics, narratology, and discourse analysis, the authorial image in a literary work is characterized through specific linguistic data. From this perspective, contemporary Kazakh short stories represent a significant body of material that integrates the aesthetics of the short form, widely recognized in prose, with the national worldview, while concisely reflecting the sociocultural context of the modern era. The short story genre centers on the authorial style in compact form and facilitates the manifestation of the authorial image in the text's 'strong positions' (title, opening, conclusion, and figurative expressions).

There are many reasons why this article is significant based on the global scholarly landscape. First, although the issue of the 'authorial subject in short texts' is widely addressed in contemporary linguistics, the stylistic system of literary prose in the Turkic languages – particularly in Kazakh – remains relatively underrepresented in international academic discourse. This situation limits the expansion of empirical data in global linguostylistics and hinders the identification of typological similarities and differences.

Second, in literary texts of the Turkic languages, the national cultural code, traditional figurative patterns, the folkloric-symbolic layer, and norms of speech culture are regarded as stable foundations in the formation of an authorial style. Figurative devices in the Kazakh language – such as simile, metaphor, epithet, set expressions, and descriptive imagery – function not merely as aesthetic ornamentation, but more often as pragmatic markers that convey the author's evaluative stance and worldview. The language of any nation is considered a means of reflecting its way of life, culture, traditions, mentality, consciousness, life position and worldview, behavior, and psychology (Khassangaliyeva et al., 2025).

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Consequently, the authorial image is not only a literary category but also a scientific object that can be identified, measured, and automated at the linguistic level. An analysis of this issue based on materials from the Turkic languages makes it possible to specify both the universal and the nationally specific features of the concept of the author image/authorial persona within the global scholarly discourse.

Third, within the contemporary academic landscape, an effective way to integrate national literatures into the global scholarly space is to correlate national material with general theoretical issues. Examining the authorial image and stylization based on Kazakh short stories addresses several internationally relevant research themes simultaneously: 1) authorial voice and narrative perspective; 2) the transformation of stylistic norms; 3) evaluative meanings in literary texts; 4) the influence of national aesthetic models on contemporary prose; and 5) the textual manifestation of cultural and linguistic identity.

Materials

A short story is a small-scale genre that reflects a writer's initial experience in creating literary texts and serves as the first step toward producing a complex work of art. This process is typically based on a specific plot and often narrates the fate of the main character. The Kazakh short stories selected as the research material serve as the primary empirical basis for this study. Accordingly, the research compiled contemporary Kazakh short stories published between 2012 and 2023. Initially, texts published in the newspaper *Қазақ әдебиеті* (*Kazakh Literature*) and other literary platforms were selected. In particular, the study drew on works such as Aidabosyn's *Соңғы намаз (The Last Prayer)* (2023), Aimaganbet's *Жүлдегер (The Prizewinner)* (2023), Altai's *Стресс (Stress)* (2023), *Қайықтағы екеу (Two in the Boat)* (2022), Oraz's *Айқай (The Cry)* (2023), and Amantay's *Қарқаралы басында (At the Head of Karkaraly)* (2014), which served as key reference points for analysis.

In addition to the works mentioned above, the analysis also included the following short stories: Nartay's *Той көйлек (The Wedding Dress)* (2021), Kaday's *Қосбармақ қыз (The Two-Thumbed Girl)* (2018), Danabayev's *Философ (The Philosopher)* (2022), Tumenbay's *Химчистка (Dry Cleaning)* (2019), Bakash's *Вирус (Virus)* (2020), Esenbay's *Лотерея (Lottery)* (2021), Ikhsan's *Дүңгіршек (The Stall)* (2020), Samatuly's *Шайтан болған (Becatе a Devil)* (2017), Sagintay's *Гитлерюгенд (Hitlerjugend)* (2016), Zhumanova's *Тобынан адасқан жалғыз тырна (The Lone Crane that Strayed from its Flock)* (2017), Mameseyit's *Терезеден қараған қыз (The Girl Looking Through the Window)* (2019), Muratbek's *Қыл көпір (The Rope Bridge)* (2020), Mubarak's *Ақ көйлекті қыз (The Girl in the White Dress)* (2018), and Kasymzhan's *Сотанақ (Bully)* (2022). The study was conducted following a qualitative analytical framework based on Syzdyk's (2009) linguostylistic model. Within this framework, the authorial image was regarded as a category identifiable from the internal organization of the text, while stylization was considered one of the primary mechanisms for revealing it. In the analysis, patterns of stylization such as folklorization, intimization, and intellectualization were employed as guiding principles, and the linguistic data in each text were interpreted according to the logic of "tool ⇒ function ⇒ influence on the authorial position" (Booth, 1961; Genette, 1980). Where necessary, a comparative approach was applied to identify each author's idiolect and the relationship between national literary language norms and stylistic norms.

II. Discussions

In contemporary global linguostylistics, a common understanding of the concept of style is that it constitutes a system of linguistic means that produces the text's *effectiveness* or *impact*. This is because the goal of linguostylistic analysis is not merely to enumerate ornamental devices but to reveal their function in ensuring the integrity of the text. The concept of the author image in literary texts is currently approached in stylistics not as equivalent to the author's biographical persona, but as the subject who creates the text. This perspective originates in the classical traditions of narratology and text stylistics of the previous century. In particular, in literary communication, the relationship among *author – text – reader* is not unidirectional; the authorial position is realized in a "hidden" manner through the narrative structure and linguistic means of the text (Booth, 1961; Genette, 1980). Accordingly, the author image is a complex category reconstructed not only through the narrator's "I", but also through perspective, focalization, evaluative-modal systems, and stylistic dominants. In traditional Russian philology, this issue has long been developed as a distinct concept at the level of the author image.

Contemporary methodological studies have further clarified the structure of the author image and systematized the linguistic indicators through which it can be identified. For example, Degtyareva (2023) provided a review of the history of research on the author image category, examining ways to define the concept at the linguistic level and its conveyance through implicit meanings. In this context, it is important to distinguish between the concepts of *author image* and *authorial initiative*. Kopytov (2010) demonstrated that the authorial initiative in a text is realized not only through explicit authorial remarks but also through multilayered mechanisms such as the organization of composition, the selection of narrative material, and the structuring of a character's speech. Works that describe the author image from a structural perspective note that it manifests either as a unified or a multi-narrative model (Balzhinova, 2009). These principles can serve as a theoretical foundation for identifying the author image in contemporary Kazakh short stories. In this approach, the object of analysis is not external information about the author but the internal discursive organization of the text.

The second focal concept is stylization. In literary studies and linguostylistics, stylization is commonly understood as a strategy of consciously imitating or reconstructing a particular style, discourse, or genre in order to generate a new aesthetic effect. In this regard, the classical theoretical foundation is provided by Bakhtin's (1981) ideas of polyphony

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and heteroglossia. According to Bakhtin (1981), the interaction and collision of styles in prose, along with the incorporation of another's word, complicate the authorial position and create a multilayered vocal structure within the text. Such polyphony elevates stylization beyond a mere decorative device to the level of an authorial strategy. The image of the author is not revealed directly; rather, it is constructed indirectly through the organization and interaction of linguistic and cultural layers within the text.

A central pillar of Kazakh linguistics is the linguostylistic school established by Syzdyk, whose work on the analysis of literary texts is regarded as a foundational methodological framework for interpreting the linguistic distinctiveness of Kazakh prose. Within Kazakh linguostylistics, Syzdyk's research paradigm systematically interrelates such categories as stylization, folklorization, speech culture, authorial style, and the aesthetics of language (Aldash et al., 2025). The value of this model lies in its capacity to conceptualize the authorial image not merely at the level of identifying the narrator, but through the organization of artistic discourse itself – namely, through expression, evaluation, national-cultural codes, and traditional verbal patterns. Accordingly, analyzing stylization in contemporary Kazakh short stories through Syzdyk's model provides an integrative framework that first, elucidates the author's linguistic and aesthetic strategy; second, situates the framework within the continuum of traditional verbal art; third, accounts for polyphony and layered discourse structures; and fourth, systematizes the ways in which the authorial position becomes manifest within the text. Thus, the authorial image may be understood as the integrative result of narrative organization and linguistic choice within the text, while stylization functions as one of the principal mechanisms for constructing and identifying the authorial position.

A. The Titles of Contemporary Kazakh Short Stories

Every linguistic unit in a literary work carries aesthetic significance. First and foremost, the title signals the central idea and thematic focus of the text. The title of a literary work functions as a principal compositional element and represents a structure occupying a strong textual position, as it generates associations and attracts the reader's attention. When figurative linguistic devices are employed in the title, it may be regarded as a microtext in its own right. The titles of Musirepov's short stories – *"Ананың анасы" ("The Mother of a Mother"), "Ер ана" ("The Heroic Mother"),* and *"Ашынған ана" ("The Indignant Mother")* – serve as illustrative examples of this phenomenon (Musirepov, 1965). The titles of a number of works by the Kazakh writer Isabekov are formulated in such a way as to establish the setting, event, or character. Some examples include: *"Кішкентай ауыл" ("The Small Village"), "Ескі үйдегі екі кездесу" ("Two Meetings in the Old House"),* and *"Тыныштық күзетшісі" ("The Guardian of Silence")* (Isabekov, 2014). In addition, several of the writer's other works bear titles that function as an authorial refrain grounded in national cognition and cultural symbolism – for instance, *"Дермене" ("Dermene"), "Аққу-Жібек" ("Akku-Zhibek"),* and *"Гауһар тас" ("Gauhar tas")*. Such titles expand the reader's intellectual and interpretation by activating culturally embedded associations.

Similar patterns are also observed in the titles of contemporary works. At the same time, one frequently encounters titles that implicitly convey the text's content while subtly concealing the author's underlying idea. While identifying the principal factual elements, it appears necessary to conduct a separate linguostylistic analysis of the aesthetic load of contemporary short story titles, particularly their capacity to convey a positive or negative evaluative background. As a basis for such focused examination, it is important to analyze the titles of contemporary Kazakh short stories. Syzdyk consistently maintained, within the linguostylistic framework of analysis, the position that it is essential to identify underlying causes and to approach the material from an evaluative perspective. In this regard, several influencing factors may be observed:

1. The model of classical authors and the continuity of literary tradition in the works of contemporary young writers.
2. The titles of short stories such as Nartay's *"Той көйлек" ("The Wedding Dress")* (2021); Kospagarova's *"Жұмбақ жігіт" ("The Mysterious Young Man")*, *"Әнші бала" ("The Singing Boy")*, and *"Бәти апай" ("Aunt Bati")* (2012); Kaday's *"Қос бармақ қыз" ("The Two-Thumbed Girl")* (2018); Altay's *"Қайықтағы екеу" ("Two in the Boat")* (2022); Mubarak's *"Ақ көйлекті қыз" ("The Girl in the White Dress")* (2018); Baibulatov's *"Бәйбіше" ("The Senior Wife")* (2014); and Kasymzhan's "*Сотанақ*" ("*Bully*") (2022), since they directly signal the narrative concerns and are marked by a pronounced ethnocultural dimension.
3. The linguistic units in titles that carry relevant content within the communicative space of current readership. Such examples include Altay's *"Стресс" ("Stress")* (2023); Tumenbay's *"Химчистка" ("Dry Cleaning")* (2019); Almenbet's *"Профессор" ("Professor")* (2016); Danabayev's *"Философ" ("Philosopher")* (2022); Bakash's *"Вирус" ("Virus")* (2020); Ramazanuly's *"Барсик" ("Barsik")* (2023); Esenbay's *"Лотерея" ("Lottery")* (2021); Ikhsan's *"Дүңгіршек" ("The Stall")* (2020); and Aimaganbet's *"Жүлдегер" ("The Prizewinner")* (2023).
4. The esteemed field of literary creativity from emerging young prose writers, such as Nurzhanuly's *"A-Z. №15 планета" ("A-Z. No. 15 Planet")* (2021); Mukashev's *"Келесау" ("Silly")* (2012); Asylbek's *"Лай-ДЕВАЙС" ("Lai-DEVICE")* (2021); Samatuly's *"Шайтан болған" ("Became a Devil")* (2017); and Sagintay's *"Гитлерюгенд" ("Hitlerjugend")* (2016).

A notable element of innovation may also be observed in the personal names of characters in contemporary Kazakh short stories. Alongside more conventional names such as *Bolatbek, Sonarbay, Mengsulu, Targyn, Kadirakyn,* and *Smaiyl*, there are distinctive and unconventional names including *Doyman* (Altay, 2023), *Torgauyt* (Samituly, 2023), *Kulboldy, Maitalman, Zhabay, Buldi, Aldi* (Dautaiuly, 2018a, 2018b); and *Zharym* and *Synyk* (Esimbay, 2020). These names

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constitute part of the anthroponomic landscape of contemporary Kazakh prose and reflect emerging tendencies in literary nomination and characterization.

B. Figurative Devices in Contemporary Kazakh Short Stories: Simile and Artistic Description

In both macrophilological and microphilological analyses of literary texts, the decisive role of expressive devices – namely tropes and stylistic figures – is beyond dispute. Both tropes and stylistic figures constitute a collective designation for figurative means that aim to align the qualities and attributes of one object or phenomenon, as perceived in the consciousness of a representative of a given nation, with the characteristics of another object or phenomenon, thereby producing an aesthetic and persuasive effect on the reader. However, these devices are differentiated according to the degree and nature of comparison between linguistic units. Tropes include such categories as *simile, epithet, metaphor, metonymy, synecdoche, allegory, hyperbole,* and *periphrasis*. Stylistic figures, by contrast, encompass *anaphora, epiphora, parallelism,* and *oxymoron*.

We intend to examine the patterns of simile in contemporary Kazakh short stories for several reasons. In essence, the category of simile underlies the fundamental characteristics of all tropes and stylistic figures. As noted above, when a speaker seeks to convey thought in an expressive and figurative manner, the primary cognitive mechanism used is comparison based on similarity. As the most elementary level, such comparison takes the form of simile, which constitutes one type of trope. As simile becomes structurally and semantically more complex – moving beyond the mere juxtaposition of shared features between objects and phenomena – it gives rise to metaphorical constructions. For example, in the poetic line *"жүзің бар он төртінші айдай көркем" ("your face is as beautiful as the fourteenth-day moon")*, beauty is explicitly compared to the moon, thereby forming a simile. By contrast, the poetic image *"ине мұрт" ("needle-like moustache")* represents a metaphor. While the simile *"иненің жасуындай" ("as fine as the eye of a needle")* preserves the direct lexical meaning of the word *needle*, the metaphor derives from stable associative similarities, such as the sharpness and slenderness of a sewing needle, which extend to expressions like *"кірпінің инесі" ("porcupine needles")* or *"шыршаның инесі" ("pine needles")*.

A further distinguishing feature between these tropes lies in semantic status: in simile, the direct meaning of the word is retained, whereas in metaphor, the transferred meaning becomes the semantic foundation for comparison and gradually acquires stability. As the comparative intersection of form and content among several concepts becomes conventionalized, periphrastic nominations may emerge, resulting in new lexical designations. Thus, in the poetic lines by Dosymov (2013) – *"тау баласы тауға қарап өседі, қыр баласы қол созады аспанға" ("a child of the mountains grows up looking at the mountains, a child of the steppe stretches a hand toward the sky")* – the expressions *"тау баласы" ("child of the mountains")* and *"қыр баласы" ("child of the steppe")* originate in simile and evolve toward metaphorical nomination. In this way, new figurative designations are formed, enriching the expressive resources of Kazakh literary discourse.

From our perspective and considering that neither individual figurative devices in Kazakh literary discourse nor their interrelated and integrative characteristics have been comprehensively examined from the standpoint of national cognition and national linguistics (including linguostylistics and language culture), we have confined our analysis to such devices as simile and artistic description within the selected genre samples. This focus is justified by the fact that the principal parameters of linguostylistic analysis identified by Syzdyk – namely lexical selection, semantic transformation of words, and adherence to national norms of artistic language – are most distinctively manifested in similes and descriptive passages.

Free similes are particularly prominent in works of fiction. Naturally, this approach is a process that unfolds differently within each individual, as cognitive and perceptual capacities vary. This process depends on the writer's overall sensibility, the ability to articulate that perception, and mastery in lexical selection and semantic transformation. Another important consideration is that the subjects and objects brought into comparison differ across historical periods. This variation ultimately relates to external sociocultural factors that influence language use within the epoch in which the writer lives (or lived). For this reason, many scholars regard simile as a complex national-cultural category situated at the intersection of linguophilosophy, cognition, and thought. For example, expressions found in contemporary short stories – but absent from earlier literary periods – such as: "*Isn't a jeep just like a bellowing ox?*" (Altay, 2022) and "*The jeep, bulging like a black beetle, reached the lakeside toward evening*" (Altay, 2022) introduce a modern subject – the jeep – while the objects of comparison are traditional images such as the ox and the beetle. Similarly, in the short story *"Жүлдегер" ("The Prizewinner")* by Aimagambet (2023), some of the similes include *"glasses enlarged like a magnifying lens", "his wife's words darting like a rocket",* and *"stuffed into an envelope as large as a truck.*" These examples demonstrate the contemporary writer's capacity to identify similarities between disparate objects and concepts. The primary reason for this approach lies in the individual's reinterpretation of analogous phenomena through the prism of present-day worldview, thereby generating new associative models within literary language.

One of the distinguishing features is the use of conventional, formulaic similes. However, these features occur only sporadically in the works of younger writers. The scarcity of fixed similes in the short stories of the emerging generation may be associated with the dominant thematic and narrative strategies characteristic of contemporary short fiction, such as the emphasis on the psychological depth of characters, at times accompanied by philosophical reflection, the tendency of authors to leave the interpretation of the story's underlying message to the reader, reliance, in terms of language and style, on the lexical and grammatical structures of colloquial speech, and the inclination among several younger writers

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toward stylistic simplification (as noted above). Each of these factors, in our view, account for the only occasional presence of traditional models of Kazakh verbal artistry in present-day short prose.

In prose fiction, similes are discernible in the works of writers who possess a profound command of expressive language. For instance, in Oraz's short story *"Аңқай" ("The Cry")*, the following description is offered: *Zhylandy toward which they headed is portrayed as a solitary hill in the open steppe – its lower slopes sufficiently expansive for settlement; one flank lined, up to its midsection, with gravel stones arranged in serried rows like the edge of a knife; above the ridge it sharpens like an eagle's beak; while its opposite side stretches broad and even like the hide of a calf, providing shelter for livestock during rain and winter* (Oraz, 2023). This passage constitutes a depiction of the landscape within the narrative. The stones encircling the hill are compared to the edge of a knife (thus conveying sharpness and thinness); the upper part of the hill is likened to an eagle's beak (emphasizing its pointed form); and the far side is compared to a calf's hide (suggesting smoothness and flatness). From the works of Amantay, there are a number of expressions following this approach: "*In the distance, small auls darken, clustering in fragments like the Pleiades. The outer houses lie scattered, dispersed like millet, timidly withdrawn; perhaps glistening like silver, even shining like a mirror, as they flow in a forceful current, breaking through whirlpools and ponds, surging onward*" (Amantay, 2014). Such constructions exemplify the norms of the national artistic language and reflect the continuity of established figurative traditions within contemporary prose.

In the genre samples selected for analysis, there is a group of freely associative similes, which include the following: *"as if his cheeks were stuffed with dried curds"* (Altay, 2022); *"falling apart like the fatty membrane of a sheep's stomach"* (Altay, 2022); *"the stars huddled like sheep gathered around thick grass; coiled like a snake struck by a whip"* (Aidabosyn, 2023); *"the large airplane, limpid like a rattle fastened to a cradle, like a bead"* (Ramazanuly, 2023); "*hailstones darted off like peas*" (Olzhabay, 2022); *"awaiting the only son's path as though a star were waiting"* (Danabayev, 2022); *"its slender rays trembling like twin wax candles set in the wind"* (Zhumanova, 2017); *"living on a street as short as the handle of a whip"* (Akim, 2017); *"to the dagger-like fangs of the cruel world"* (Ikhsan, 2020); *"falling heavily from the blue heights like a falcon with clipped wings"* (Samatuly, 2017); *"boots on his feet as large as a wooden trough"* (Dabey, 2020); *"a belly rounded like an upturned cauldron"* (Shamuratova, 2022); *"sliding swiftly like mercury"* (Rakhat, 2020); and *"eyes – two lifeless dots like a residual drop at the bottom of a deep well"* (Abdiraiym, 2020). Such examples illustrate a distinctive cluster of freely associative similes that are characteristic of contemporary writers' linguistic creativity. There is imagery present, and the figurative device produces an aesthetic effect. Through such use, several observations may be made:

1. As Syzdyk noted, there is a discernible tendency toward the search for expressive linguistic patterning can be observed among contemporary writers.
2. Within the repertoire of figurative devices, explicitly marked, emotionally charged fixed similes are actively employed in the creation of imagery. Expressions such as *"as sharp as the edge of a knife," "as if cut by a knife," "to fall silent as though sliced," "to be stretched taut like a wire," "beautiful as the moon," "like the moon," "bright as milk," "to gleam like silver," "to shine like a mirror," "to flare up like fire," "to dart like a pike," "as short as a whip handle,"* and *"to scatter like millet"* not only function as stable phraseological units but also serve as evidence of continuity within the Kazakh tradition of artistic verbal expression.
3. The subject selected for comparison (that is, the object or phenomenon against which another is measured) is drawn from linguistic units embedded within the space of national cognition. In this way, the character remains silent, *as if his mouth were stuffed with dried curds*; the clouds in the sky resemble *the fatty membrane of a sheep's stomach*; the stars across the blue expanse are *like sheep gathered around thick grass*; the roar and movement of the airplane are *like a rattle fastened to a cradle*; the narrowness of the space is described as *no longer than a whip handle*; the character's condition is *like a snake struck by a whip*; the image of life is likened to *the fangs of a dagger*; and the largeness of the footwear is compared to *the size of a wooden trough*. Such comparisons demonstrate that the figurative subjects are consistently derived from culturally marked elements of the Kazakh conceptual and linguistic worldview.
4. The image-forming potential of linguistic units shaped by the national worldview have become firmly embedded in the linguistic consciousness of the contemporary writer. Such culturally marked lexemes as *qurt (dried curds), fatty membrane, sheep, whip, dagger, knife, cradle, rattle, wooden trough, abyss, star, well, drop, cauldron, fang, bead* and others function as productive sources of imagery.
5. Each writer selects and interprets linguistic units that represent a world familiar to and internalized by his or her consciousness.
6. Linguistic units that constitute the basis of fixed similes serve as structural supports for the creation of new images.

In her conceptual works on linguostylistics, Syzdyk consistently emphasized that, regardless of the historical period under consideration, the analysis of literary texts should involve a careful examination of which tendencies predominate and how processes within the Kazakh tradition of verbal expression evolve. By identifying the underlying causes and motivating factors of these processes, she repeatedly maintained a firmly grounded positive evaluative stance. Taking Syzdyk's position as a methodological foundation, we will evaluate the use of similes in the corpus of short stories under consideration.

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In Syzdyk's linguostylistic analysis, the concepts of national norms of the artistic language and the national character of verbal art are treated as closely related in content. The national character of literary expression is revealed through the national substance and form of the word – what it denotes, what it describes, and what its salient feature are. Another significant attribute of the national artistic language norms identified in the scholar's works is the highly figurative nature of expression and the marked productivity of similes. Imagery and combinatory flexibility enable lexemes within conventional, universal-level fixed similes to undergo reinterpretation through the prism of national cognition, thereby serving as the basis for freely associative similes. In the Kazakh language, for instance, the meaning of "excessively large" or "disproportionately large" with reference to a part of the human or animal body is conveyed through fixed expressions formed with the lexeme *shelek ("bucket")*, such as *"a nose (nostrils) as large as a bucket"* or *"nostrils flared wide."* Another example is, "The piebald tiger, its back as broad as a wooden trough, did not even break onto a sweat" (Zhansugurov, 2007). The use of the semantically related lexeme *astau ("wooden trough")* in the simile *"as large as a trough"* is explicit and stylistically transparent in its function: *"Berik lifted his head and sat upright. Striking together the toes of his trough-sized high leather boots, he cast his gaze downward"* (Dabey, 2020).

The associative potential of the cradle and the rattle attached to it is evident in the following example. However, the object in question is an airplane, while the compared subject – the target of comparison – is the movement and sound (roar) of a large aircraft ascending into the sky: *"The giant airplane, splitting the morning silence, loomed over the village like a rattle fastened to a cradle, heading toward the airport"* (Ramazanuly, 2023). Although the association is striking, a clear semantic and semantic-stylistic correspondence between the object (the airplane) and the descriptive image (the rattle) is not readily discernable. The stylistic function that would yield a distinct cognitive or imagery-based effect remains insufficiently defined.

Within the system of fixed similes, several stable expressions are formed with the lexeme *қанжар ("dagger")*. Among them, the most semantically vivid and frequently employed is the expression *"қанжардай қадалу" ("to pierce like a dagger")*. This established phrase is aptly used in a number of contemporary works. If we consider Altay's use of the expression *"қанжардай тілу" ("to cut like a dagger")*, two observations related to the category of simile may be made: a) the image is clear and perceptually distinct; b) the simile's module (that is, the specific descriptive predicate through which the comparison is realized) is appropriately selected. In other words, in the works of Akhtanov and Nurpeisov, the descriptive verbs employed in the expression *"қанжардай жару" ("to split like a dagger")* – namely *жару (to split)* and *тілу (to cut, to slice)* – are semantically related. Although *"to cut like a dagger"* may be regarded as a single contextual usage, its explicit imagery, rooted in national cognition, remains powerful and transparent. It can be compared to *"Since yesterday, the blue short train has been splitting the dense black forest like a dagger..."* (Nurpeisov, 1991). *"The white-beaked prow of the wooden boat cut through the dark blue expanse like a dagger"* (Altay, 2022). Artistic depiction, in this context, may be understood as a method of animating every word, phrase, or expression employed in the course of narrative exposition.

It is worth noting that Baitursynuly proposed the term *"әліптеме" (alipteme)* for this method. The definition he provided for this designation is as follows: "*Alipteme* consists in arranging the form of something and describing its alphabet, or its essence, in order. Everything in the world – different objects, different people, and their various states – can be subjected to *alipteme*" (Baitursynov, 1991, p. 400). One of the stylistic features most characteristic of the short story genre clustered in the period under study is artistic depiction. The term appears in the research of Syzdyk. Although not always employed with strict precision, it is used frequently, especially in analyses of the works of Auezov and Musirepov. In some of her discussions, when addressing issues such as the authorial image, word-symbols, or entering the stylistic nucleus of a text, the scholar integrates these concepts with the notion of artistic depiction. Overall, the concepts of artistic depiction and verbal art are closely related, and the techniques of depiction employed within a work serve to expand both the flexibility and expressive potential of Kazakh literary language.

From this perspective, the diverse harmonies of words in short stories reflect the writers' creative explorations and the movements of national consciousness within linguistic cognition. For instance, expressions such as *"a girl is a red tulip who perches on a distant hill spreading across the far-off slopes," "the narrow path of fate in the perilous way of life," "the sail lowered, the wind overcame life before it had matured," "a life sliding like quicksilver," "a dragon-like majesty," "a heart like a fist beating like an alarm," "eyes flashing like rubies," "like a lion untouched by the wind," "whose navel was cut in the city,"* and *"standing on the balcony like a young woman"* exemplify, as Syzdyk notes, recurring rhythmic and phonetic patterns such as *taqta-taqta* and *bunaq-bunaq*. Moreover, comparative constructions and the valency of linguistic units are employed, along with the use of culturally and cognitively salient lexical items, such as *tulip, wind, life, fist, quicksilver, navel,* and others). In general, the stylistic function and aesthetic power of expressions combining such lexemes are indisputable. This assumption is likely, as noted in several studies of literature and linguistics, due to linguistic facts that are often evaluated in terms of individual stylistic measurement. Nevertheless, for linguostylistic analysis and the study of verbal culture, especially to understand linguistic dynamics in processes of language development, it is important to consider the semantic properties of harmonized and co-occurring lexemes (semantic valency) or the capacity of particularly image-rich words in the national consciousness to form collocations. At the same time, this capacity is inherently limited, manifesting as occasional or facultative valency, which must be taken into account in both stylistic and verbal-culture analyses. This can be seen in the following expressions from Zh. Muratbek's first short story, "The Rope Bridge":

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> *Aisha took after her mother as if she had fallen from her mouth. Even her finely trimmed eyebrows and curled hair corresponded precisely to Kadisha's appearance as a girl like a tulip; after all, a girl is a red tulip who perches on a distant hill spreading across the far-off slopes, which is why Kadisha drew her close to her bosom. A deceitful heart encountered the narrow path of fate in the perilous way of life. In a life sliding like quicksilver, the delicate, thread-like bonds between people were intertwined with eagle-like vigilance of character. If one wins, the eyes witness the victory. In barely two days, the sail lowered, the wind overcame life before it had matured, to be repeatedly overcome, to be repeatedly defeated.* (Muratbek, 2020)

In the sentences presented, the consonance of syllables functions as a tool of imagery and operates within the norms of the national literary language. From the perspective of linguostylistics and verbal culture, several observations can be made. The linguistic facts employed for artistic depiction testify to the creative experimentation of the young writer: 1) an imagistic fragment is formed through the consonance of initial syllables (syllable harmony) in culturally salient terms such as *tulip* and *hill*, or *girl* and *tulip*; 2) similes such as *sliding like quicksilver* and *eagle-like* resonate deeply with national conceptualizations; 3) since the author's idea is embodied in the life of the character, the use of semantically related lexemes, such as *life, existence, time, fate*, represents one avenue of creative endeavor; 4) the image components, distinguished by semantic coherence, further reinforce these terms, e.g., *fate – merciless, life – perilous, existence – narrow path, hence the sail of life overturned by the wind*. The organization of such linguistic units in the text serves to elaborate and deepen the thematic and conceptual content of the work.

In her linguostylistic analyses, Syzdyk examined each linguistic fact in close connection with verbal culture. Indeed, considering a writer's lexical usage independently of verbal culture at any given period results in a one-sided understanding. "... Scientific inquiries into the language of literary fiction, conducted not only from a purely linguistic perspective but also from the standpoint of enhancing verbal culture, compel scholars to clarify the norms of the national literary language of Kazakh, to reveal the underlying causes of deviations from literary standards and norms, and to present the distinctions between correct and incorrect usage, thereby offering novel theoretical and scholarly contributions" (Syzdyk, 2009, p. 47). In this regard, our approach is not to classify these instances according to stylistic figures, but rather to examine them in light of the principles articulated by the Teacher – namely, semantic transformation, lexical variation, and lexical selection. The aim is to demonstrate models of stylistic refinement, that is, instances in which language harmonizes with the author's idea and the content of the narrative. Viewed through a synchronous lens, such analysis reveals the presence of complex phenomena in contemporary prose that call for investigation through the combined methodologies of linguostylistics and verbal culture. Considering these two domains in their interrelation makes it possible to identify the distinctive features characteristic of the norms of the national literary language.

III. Conclusion

In contemporary Kazakh short stories, the authorial image is not equated with the biographical persona of the writer; rather, it is identified as a category discernible through the internal organization of the text, the logic of narration, and its evaluative tonality. The concise structure of the short story genre tends to concentrate the authorial position within the primary points of the text, such as the title, the opening, the conclusion, and symbolic details, thereby enabling the ideological orientation to be perceived immediately. Within this genre, stylization is not treated as an external ornamentation, but as a mechanism that regulates the communicative relationship between author, text, and reader. It functions as a means of integrating national worldview with the contemporary socio-cultural context into a unified artistic framework.

At the core of the stylistic system, a layering of tradition and innovation is clearly observable. While phraseological units, proverbial expressions, conventional images, and cultural codes preserve the foundational features of the national literary language, contemporary processes such as urbanization, media culture, and the expansion of new thematic domains intensify modern modes of verbal expression. Within the system of imagery, simile and descriptive representation perform central functions: conventional (usual) similes reinforce nationally established figurative standards, whereas occasional similes foreground linguistic creativity. In particular, patterns constructed through the harmony of sounds, syllables, and lexical units are evaluated as expressive devices that impart rhythm and emotional resonance to the text. However, when such harmony fails to align with the national worldview and relies solely on phonetic similarity, the aesthetic impact is noticeably weakened.

In the evaluation of a literary text, the dominant principle is the integration of linguostylistic discernment with the criteria of speech culture. Only when semantic precision is maintained, when there is congruence between image and referent, harmony with the character's nature, and preservation of stylistic motivation, can the norms of the national literary language be fully realized. Usages that are semantically obscure, collocationally incongruous, or incompatible with the national worldview are recognized as deviations from stylistic norms, thereby demonstrating the necessity of examining linguostylistics and speech culture in conjunction in the analysis of contemporary prose. Consequently, clarifying the relevance of the principle of stylization in literary prose enables the establishment of principled criteria for assessing the authorial image and stylization in contemporary Kazakh short stories within the framework of national literary language norms.

Another significant conclusion of the study is the necessity of maintaining the criterion of speech culture alongside linguostylistic discernment. When expressions are constructed through the harmony of sounds, syllables, and words,

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together with the national worldview, the rhythmic and emotive power of the text is enhanced. Conversely, when excessive reliance is placed on phonetic similarity at the expense of semantic congruence, the stylistic rationale becomes weakened. In delineating this boundary, the principle of stylization proposed by Syzdyk serves as a reference: where the title, genre, aesthetic purpose, and linguistic expression are mutually coherent, the authorial image appears as an integrated whole. Conversely, when precision and harmony are disrupted, the aesthetic impact is threatened. These observations underscore a key methodological principle for the linguostylistic analysis of the authorial image and stylization in contemporary short stories.

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Aspect-Based Linguistic Appraisal From Google Maps Reviews of an Indonesian Super Priority Tourism Destination: A Systemic Functional Linguistics Perspective

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Abstract*—Visitor reviews on products, particularly in the tourism sector, have been widely studied to determine visitor evaluations of the services provided. However, few have linked these assessments to aspects of the product or service. This study aims at linguistically describing visitor evaluations in relation to tourist destination aspects. In a quantitative and qualitative research approach, this study applied Appraisal Theory framework in Systemic Functional Linguistics to analyze Google Maps reviews of eight-month period in 2025 on the visits of Borobudur Temple, a UNESCO world heritage site, as one of the super priority tourism destinations in Indonesia. This study reveals that Attraction received the highest positive comments compared to other aspects. This is demonstrated by the frequent use of Appreciation subcategory, which focuses on the beauty and structure of Borobudur Temple. However, this positive evaluation contrasts with the numerous negative evaluations for other destination aspects related to facilities and services. Accessibility aspect is evaluated negatively due to its challenging physical layout and poor navigation of the temple. Similarly, the Price aspect is considered negative due to the expensive entrance ticket. The human resources aspect is also considered negative due to a lack of professionalism and inconsistent service. This negative sentiment is realized by the high number of negative comments in the Judgement and Appreciation subcategories. This study concludes that there is imbalance between visitors' awe and frustration when visiting Borobudur Temple. For tourist destination management, the findings of this study offer the managers of Borobudur Temple diagnostic points to improve the quality of Borobudur Temple services. For further research, this study recommends the need for conducting product evaluation analysis by combining aspect-based linguistic framework to build a more accurate semantics-based model of sentiment analysis in the digital tourism landscape.

***Index Terms*—appraisal theory, Google Maps reviews, tourism destination aspect, systemic functional linguistics, Borobudur Temple**

I. Introduction

One of the important aspects that determines the performance of a business is customer evaluations (Smirnova, 2022). In the online digital era, customer comments of a product reflect trust and credibility, promote purchasing judgement, and improve brand image and search engine levels. They also provide valuable customer feedbacks for product and service improvement, enhance customer retentions, and offer insights into customer sentiment and preferences, which inform business strategies (Zhai et al., 2024).

One of businesses which provides online customer reviews is tourism, where tourists can evaluate the quality and experience of a destination or a service after their visits. Online destination reviews are user-generated pieces of

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information, including text, photos, and ratings, posted on digital platforms like Google Maps Review that influence travel decisions by reducing perceived risk and providing insights into actual tourist experiences. Thus, online destination reviews play a vital role in the formation of a destination image (Guo & Pesonen, 2022).

Indonesian government through the Ministry of Tourism has set five tourism destinations to be super priority tourism destinations as the focus of the national tourism development to create "New Bali" and equally economic distribution. One of them is Borobudur Temple in Central Java Province (Board of Tourism and Creative Economy, 2021). Since January 2025, Borobudur Temple notes a significant increase of visits by both domestic and international visitors (Board of Tourism and Creative Economy, 2025). To get feedbacks from the visitors upon experiencing the temple, the destination management organization provides online reviews in Google Maps platform.

Online customer reviews in tourism have been extensively studied from linguistic perspectives, particularly the Appraisal framework in systemic functional linguistics (SFL) (Martin & White, 2005; Martin & Rose, 2007). For example, Smirnova (2022) analyzed the use of evaluative devices from hotel reviews in Booking.com. Guilia (2023) also studied TripAdvisor reviews to show the lexical and lexicogrammatical features used by visitors in expressing their experience. Another study by Thomas and Kristina (2024) used Google Maps reviews of hotel, garden, and theme park in Singapore to describe the Appraisal categories used by the visitors. Online reviews of Holocaust memorial museums in China were also studied to describe the evaluative language of dark tourism (Wan, 2025). Different from other Appraisal studies using only one language, a study by Fan (2025) used international tourists' reviews in 19 languages on Statue of Liberty in TripAdvisor to show the Appraisal patterns in relation to the dimensions of landscape, service, and experience.

Those previous studies mostly focus on the realization of the patterns of Appraisal subcategories used by the tourists to express their positive and negative experience on the services and destinations. The findings do not already show the positive and negative evaluations of the elements of the tourism destination. Tourism destination consists of some basic elements which attract the visitors to the destination and which satisfy their needs on arrival. The basic aspects include attractions, amenities, accessibility, human resources, image and character, and price (World Tourism Organization, 2007; Morrison, 2019).

This present study addresses this research gap by examining the evaluative language of the visitors in relation to the aspects of tourism destination. By applying the Appraisal system in SFL, this study analyses the visitors' reviews to show how they express their feelings, judgements, and appreciations of tourism destination domain. The results of analyzing the visitor feedbacks will be beneficial for the improvement of destination management when there is a clear reference between the evaluations and the aspects of tourism destination evaluated.

Beyond this practical aim, this study also presents a theoretical contribution to the field of SFL. While previous studies have applied the Appraisal framework, they have not systematically tested its descriptive categorization against a pre-defined, extra-linguistic model of a domain's key elements. By correlating the lexicogrammatical realizations of Affect, Judgement, and Appreciation with the established components of a tourism destination (e.g., price, human resources, amenities), this research investigates how variations in the tourism context directly constrain and predict patterns of interpersonal meaning-making. This allows for the identification of specific evaluative constellations, that is typical co-patterns of Appraisal choices, thereby refining our understanding of how evaluative prosody is realized in the specific register of online reviews. Given these previous research limitations, this study seeks to investigate how visitors evaluate their experiences and express their Attitudes towards the tourism destination aspects of Borobudur Temple and what aspects need improvements based on the Attitude patterns from Google Maps reviews.

II. Literature Review

A. Basic Aspects of Tourism Destination

According to United Nation World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) (2007), there are some basic aspects which make up a tourism destination that need to be taken into considerations, namely attractions, amenities, accessibilities, image and character, human resources, and price. These facet work together to create a cohesive and appealing experience for visitors. Attractions are the primary motivation for tourists to visit a destination. Attractions can be categorized as natural (e.g., mountains, beaches, parks), built (e.g., iconic building such as temples, towers, mosques, heritage monuments), or cultural (e.g., museums, theatres, cultural events). Amenities are the services and facilities that support visitors' stay and ensure their comfort. These include basic infrastructures such as public transport, utilities, roads, visitor information, catering and shopping facilities. Accessibilities refer to the ease of common people to access the destination from various modes: road, air services, train, or cruise ships. Image and character refer to various means that can used to promote destination image (e.g., website, travel media, e-marketing). The image of destination may include sights, uniqueness, scenes, safety, and friendliness of people. Human resources are tourism workforce and citizens who are engaged in providing the services, such as organization staffs, guides, and drivers. Finally, price refers to cost of transport to and from the destination as well as the cost of on the ground of accommodation, attractions, food and tour services.

B. Appraisal System in Systemic Functional Linguistics

This study is grounded in Appraisal Theory, a framework for analyzing evaluative language developed within the school of Systemic Functional Linguistics (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004, 2014). Pioneered by linguists such as Martin and White (2005) and Martin and Rose (2007), Appraisal Theory is primarily concerned with the interpersonal function

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of language - how speakers and writers use words to build relationships, share feelings, and express opinions. It provides a systematic taxonomy of the linguistic resources used to convey positive and negative assessments. Given that visitor reviews are fundamentally interpersonal acts of evaluation designed to share opinions and influence others, this framework is exceptionally well-suited for the present analysis. The Appraisal system consists of three main interrelated subsystems – Attitude, Graduation, and Engagement – which together describe the language of assessment as depicted in Figure 1.

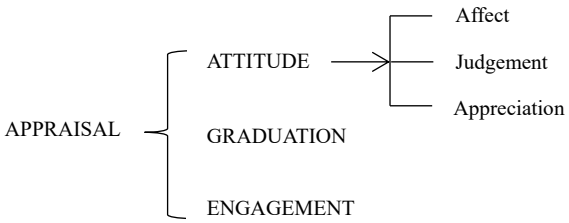


Figure 1. The Systems of Appraisal

The Attitude subsystem, the heart of the Appraisal system, concerns with the expression of feelings. Attitude expresses how we value, praise, and condemn what we see. There are three possible categories – Affect, Judgement, and Appreciation – to express our feelings. The feelings of Attitude can be good (positive) or bad (negative).

The Affect category is the resource for expressing speaker's feelings on something. In review text, it shows how visitor feels on the products and services experienced. These feelings can be expressed positively or negatively and subcategorized into Inclination, feelings of desire, such as a visitor's wish to return ("*I* ***want*** *to visit again*"), Happiness, one's state of mind, such as describing the sunrise as an experience of "***awe*** *and* ***serenity***", Security, feelings of environmental well-being, such as "*finding the midday heat* ***unbearable***", or Satisfaction, which relates to achieving goals, such as a visitor expressing that the journey to the temple created an "*all-round* ***frustrating*** *experience*".

Next, Judgement is the category for evaluating people's character against social norms. In the context of tourism, this is the primary resource for evaluating the behaviors of staff, guides, management, and even other visitors. Judgement can be subcategorized into two main types: Social Esteem (personal judgement) and Social Sanction (moral judgement). Each can be expressed positively or negatively. The first, Social Esteem, relates to reputation and social standing. This includes Normality (how fortunate or typical someone is), such as a visitor feeling "***lucky***" to get a good guide, Capacity (how competent they are), used frequently to praise a guide as "***remarkably knowledgeable***" or to condemn them as "***catastrophic***", and Tenacity (how resolute they are), which can be seen when visitors praise staff for being diligent. The second category, Social Sanction, involves evaluations with regard to morality and ethics. This covers Veracity (how truthful or honest someone is), for example, when a guide is praised as "***absolutely reliable"***, and Propriety (how ethical or well-behaved they are). Propriety is a crucial resource in the visitor reviews, used powerfully to criticize staff as being "***unfriendly***" or to condemn management policies as a form of "***discrimination****"*.

Finally, Appreciation is the category for evaluating things, processes, and performances. In tourism, this is the main resource used to evaluate such as the temple, the views, and the overall tour. Appreciation is divided into three areas: Reaction, Composition, and Valuation. Each can be evaluated positively or negatively. Reaction captures the "wow" factor, such as the Impact of the temple ("***impressive***") or its aesthetic Quality ("***beautiful***"). Composition evaluates the structure and form, used to praise the site's Balance ("***well-organized***") or critique the exit path's Complexity ("***a confusing maze***"). Lastly, Valuation assesses the social worth of something, which can be used to declare the temple's importance ("***a must-see*** *destination*").

The feelings in the Attitude subsystem can be complemented by amplification (Graduation) and sources (Engagement) subsystems. Graduation functions as the "volume control" for these evaluations to show how strong our feeling about someone or something. A visitor can increase the Force of their praise ("***very*** *impressive*") or sharpen the Focus of their recommendation ("***absolutely*** *a must-visit*") to make their claims more powerful and persuasive. Meanwhile, Engagement accounts for how speaker positions his or her voice. In the context of tourism reviews, this stance is often realized monoglossically, as visitors present their personal experience as a direct, factual account without citing other sources.

C. Studies of Online Customer Reviews

Online customer reviews have become the focus of some studies from different disciplines, for example, linguistics (Smirnova, 2022; Cenni & Goethals, 2024; Linh & Nguyen, 2024; Toribio & Mariottini, 2025; Wan, 2025; Fan, 2025), tourism (Melián-González et al., 2013; Shin et al., 2019; Lee et al., 2020; Jayathilaka et al., 2020; Lam, 2021; Ghani et al., 2022; Bigne et al., 2024), library (Barrego & Navarra, 2021), and text mining (Chittiprolu et al., 2021; Sunardi et al., 2022). Appraisal theory in SFL was used in analyzing online hotel (Smirnova, 2022), restaurant (Linh & Nguyen, 2024), and memorial museum (Wan, 2025) reviews to explore the visitors' attitudinal meanings. These studies found that the Appraisal categories used by the visitors in their reviews indicated their evaluations on the qualities of hotel and restaurant facilities and services. In addition, the dominant uses of Affect and Appreciation in memorial museum reviews emphasized the significance of war museums as places of education, remembrance, and reflection.

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Crosslinguistic studies were also explored in online hotel and restaurant reviews posted in French, Italian, and Spanish. Based on genre analysis in New Rhetoric, the negative hotel reviews in the three languages under study indicated a tendency towards a crosslinguistic similarity in terms of move composition, topics and reinforcing/mitigating strategies (Cenni & Goethals, 2024). Meanwhile, through the lens of speech act sets in conflictive exchanges (SASCs) in responding to hotel and restaurant reviews, Italian representatives used more confrontation styles, while Spanish used more supportive ones (Toribio & Mariottini, 2025).

From the perspective of tourism and hospitality, online customer reviews of hotels have been studied with some findings. For example, comparing the rating of reviews over time from online reviews of hotels in the 200 best-rated tourist destinations of Europe, as rated on TripAdvisor, indicated that early reviews of a business tend to be disproportionately negative. As the number of reviews increases, the valence becomes more balanced, and the negative effect is mitigated (Melián-González et al., 2013). A study on the impact of online reviews on inbound travelers' decision making based on online reviews in TripAdvisor showed that online reviews have played a central role in influencing customers' mindset while choosing a hotel for accommodation (Jayathilaka et al., 2020). Online reviews of restaurants by gender in USA were also described to test the use of emotional expressions of "love" and "like" between male and female reviewers (Ghani et al., 2022). This study found that female reviewers used more "love" than men and no different usage of "like" between them. Another study was also conducted towards online comments in TripAdvisor about the top-ranking destinations in Argentina and Spain (Bigne et al., 2024). In terms of destination social responsibility (DSR), tourists shared their opinions using a lexicon of DSR that included five sub-dimensions: natural landscapes, cultural heritage, urban leisure and outdoor spaces, tourism services, and guided tours and experiences.

A study on what users said about public libraries in Barcelona as posted in Google Maps Reviews showed that reviews with low ratings tended to be longer than those with high ones. Positive ratings referred to children's area, collections, and library location (Barrego & Navarra, 2021). Users gave negative ratings to noise and lack of seating space for studying.

Online customer reviews on hotel services were also studied by using concept of text mining or sentiment analysis. For example, by using unsupervised text mining method, online hotel reviews were analyzed to know that customers were satisfied with the tangible features of hotel stay, however they complained about the hotel services (Chittiprolu et al., 2021). Positive, neutral, or negative evaluations to hotel aspects and services could also be provided (Sunardi et al., 2022).

The aforementioned linguistic studies of Appraisal towards online customer reviews used Martin and White's Appraisal theory on attitudinal meanings in various tourism products particularly hotels, restaurants, and museums to know the types and frequencies of Appraisal categories used in the reviews. They do not relate the evaluative meaning patterns to the aspects of tourism destinations under study. To the best of our knowledge, the application of this theoretical framework through online review discourse in heritage tourism destination is quite scare. Thereby, studying the realization pattern of evaluative meanings by visitors in relation to tourism destination aspects is of particular importance not only for destination management evaluation and improvement but also for enriching literature of linguistic Appraisal theory application in various aspects of real life.

III. Methodology

This section outlines the methodological framework used to analyze visitor evaluations of Borobudur Temple. Included in detail are the research design, data sources and collection, and the analysis process carried out through several stages to reach the findings.

A. Research Design

The combined-convergent research method is the design used in this research. The amalgamation of this method lies in the integration of qualitative and quantitative data analysis to uncover the evaluation language used by visitors to review the destinations visited. The qualitative and quantitative strings are combined into a comprehensive linguistic analysis stage. The qualitative component consists of content analysis of the review text, consisting of four analysis steps: domain, taxonomy, componential, and cultural themes. Domains and taxonomies are concerned with the manual identification of relevant evaluative clauses from the destination review corpus. These evaluative clauses are simultaneously classified according to six aspects of tourism. The results will be crossed through componential analysis to find evaluation language patterns.

Based on the qualitative findings, the quantitative component is calculated and generated directly. Analysis at this stage involves calculating the findings of coded evaluative linguistic aspects as a basis for creating statistical data. All data are organized using Microsoft Excel. Each of the 480 evaluative examples is entered as a single row, with columns representing its domain (e.g., tourism aspect, 'Price') and its full taxonomic classification (e.g., 'Appreciation: Evaluation-'). Excel formulas (`COUNTIFS`) are used for automatic calculations and cross-tabulation as part of componential analysis. Qualitative and quantitative findings converge at the cultural themes stage, where the results are discussed to formulate research implications in relation to relevant theory, previous relevant research, and specific practical, situational, and cultural contexts.

B. Data Source and Collection

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The data source for this research is Borobudur Temple reviews on Google Maps (https://maps.app.goo.gl/K5yJia3H1BxCawGn7). Included in the analysis were reviews posted over eight months (January - August 2025), a total of 1624 reviews were collected. The 8-month period was chosen based on the latest trends, including the implementation of new Borobudur management policies regarding tickets, prices and access to the monument. This policy received a mixed reaction of positive and negative which tended to be linguistically evaluative. The primary data points are the complete textual content of each review, representing the full spectrum of appraisal aspects expressed by visitors.

Reviews were categorized into tourism aspects and Appraisal categories as the primary basis for organizing and reporting the analysis. For data coding, an open coding approach was employed (Corbin & Strauss, 1990). First, all of the reviews were annotated independently by the researchers by using six aspects of tourism destination: attractions, amenities, accessibility, image and character, human resources, and price. Subsequently, the annotation dealing with Appraisal categories of Attitude and Graduation was applied by leaving out the category of Engagement since all of the reviews are generally monoglossic Engagement. When the coders disagreed on the aspects and categories of certain reviews, the reviews were jointly annotated and discussed until they reached agreements.

A multi-stage filtering process below was applied to curate a relevant corpus for linguistic analysis.

1. First, a total of 806 "rating-only" reviews (i.e., those without any text) were excluded. This initial filter resulted in a dataset of 808 text-based reviews.
2. Second, these text-based reviews were manually read by the researchers. A total of 328 reviews with minimal, non-clausal text (e.g., "Good," "Nice place," "OK") were set aside, as they do not provide sufficient linguistic data for an Appraisal analysis.
3. The remaining corpus of text-rich reviews was then selected for in-depth analysis. From this final corpus, a total of 480 evaluative instances that explicitly appraised one of the six tourism aspects were extracted. The 480 reviews collected were all anonymized before being analyzed, ensuring user privacy is maintained and protected.

C. Data Analysis

As mentioned in the research design section, data analysis uses a content analysis model with four steps of analysis (domain, taxonomy, components, cultural themes). Each of these steps is explained in more detail as follows:

1. Domain Analysis

The first step can be understood as establishing the thematic context of the data. Reviews are categorized based on six basic aspects of UNWTO tourist destinations, namely attractions, amenities, accessibility, image and character, human resources, and price. Apart from limiting the context of the analysis, this stage is the basis for collecting data related to aspects of the tourist experience of the destination. In the componential analysis matrix, these tourism aspect domains are presented as vertical variables.

2. Taxonomic Analysis

The next step is evaluative language analysis. Reviews that have been organized according to tourism aspects are then classified according to the theoretical framework of the Appraisal System (Martin & White, 2005; Martin & Rose, 2007; White, 2025), in detail according to aspects in the system of Attitude, Graduation, and Engagement. This analysis becomes the heart of the research, where evaluative linguistic evidence can be collected and discovered at this stage. Taxonomic analysis is a horizontal variable in the componential analysis matrix.

3. Componential Analysis

Componential analysis is a cross tabulation between tourism aspects (vertical) and evaluation language aspects (horizontal). With this analysis, the assessment/evaluation pattern for each aspect of tourism can be seen. For example, aspects of human resource tourism tend to be assessed negatively with the judgment evaluation, while other tourism aspects are more positively evaluated with other language aspects.

4. Cultural Theme Analysis

The results of the componential analysis are interpreted and synthesized to find research implications. Cultural theme analysis consists of contextualizing linguistic data with relevant scientific sources, including the base theory of language evaluation. The results of the linguistic implications of the review on Google Maps are linked to its relevance to the specific socio-cultural context of Borobudur Temple to find practical implications.

IV. Results and Discussion

A. Overall Evaluation

Analysis of evaluation language in visitor reviews of Borobudur Temple on Google Maps produced a total of 480 data. The overall results show a trend that tends to be positive (269 positive vs. 211 negative), as shown in Figure 2. This positive sentiment is almost exclusively concentrated in Attractions ratings, while the logistics and visitor service aspects are dominated by negative reviews.

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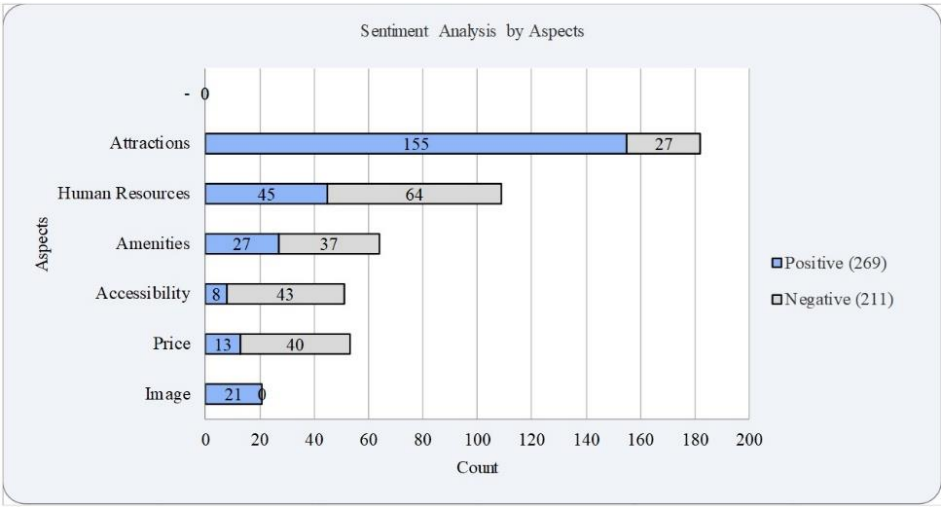


Figure 2. Distribution and Polarity of Evaluations Across Tourism Aspects

In more detail, from a total of 480 data, 269 positive evaluations (56%) slightly exceed 211 negative evaluations (44%). However, detailed analysis of the data shows that this slight positive bias is not the result of universally good experiences. it is rather the result of a strong positive assessment of one particular aspect, overshadowing the widespread negative sentiment in almost all other aspects of tourism.

The positive dimensions of the visitor experience are almost entirely embedded in the assessment of the attraction aspect. This aspect accounted for 155 of the 269 positive evaluations, representing more than half of the positive ratings given by visitors. This forms the basis of positive sentiment and is the main reason why the overall evaluation does not turn negative. In contrast, the 211 negative evaluations were spread across logistics and visitor service aspects, namely Human Resources (64 data), Accessibility (43 data), Prices (40 data), and Amenities (37 data). The findings of this data distribution illustrate that the Borobudur destination has an attraction that almost always exceeds expectations. On the other hand, visitor experience services and facilities have a strong tendency to disappoint.

This kind of mixed impression experienced by visitors does not only occur in Borobudur. Other research finds similar differences in those positive comments typically focus on the history and culture of the monument, while negative comments focus on logistics such as costs and the environment (Thomas & Kristina, 2024). Borobudur Temple is praised for its splendor but has received sharp criticism regarding its price and accessibility. These findings confirm broader trends related to online reviews. Put simply, it seems many heritage sites deliver a great core attraction but struggle with the surrounding operational details. The following subsections provide a more detailed analysis of the overall sentiment for each of the six tourism aspects.

B. Evaluation of Attractions

This first aspect is the root motivation for visitor arrivals, representing very positive sentiment with 155 positive ratings compared to only 27 negative ratings out of a total of 182 ratings. A breakdown of specific Attitude subtypes used to evaluate Attractions is presented in Table 1.

TABLE 1
BREAKDOWN OF ATTITUDE FOR THE ATTRACTION ASPECT

Attitude Sub-Type	Positive Count (+)	Negative Count (-)
Affect	**13**	**16**
Inclination	5	0
Happiness	5	0
Security	3	11
Satisfaction	0	5
Judgment	**8**	**0**
Capacity	3	0
Tenacity	5	0
Appreciation	**134**	**11**
Reaction	75	3
Composition	43	8
Valuation	16	0
Total	**155**	**27**

The major driver of this positivity, as shown in Table 1, is Appreciation: Reaction, which accounts for 75 positive instances. The language used here is typically of high force. It signals aesthetic satisfaction and emotional response to the beauty and historical significance of the site, such as:

1. ***Stunning*** [+reaction] *temple to walk on and explore*.
2. *The Temple is* ***amazing*** [+reaction]*!*

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3. *The high of seeing the temple is **amazing*** [+reaction].

Complementing this affective response, positive Appreciation: Composition is found with 43 instances. Reviewers frequently commented on the high standard of the grounds' upkeep, using phrases like:

4. *The grounds themselves are **immaculately kept**,* [+composition]
5. *... **well maintained*** [+composition].

The negative evaluation findings found as shown in the table are not conveyed to criticize the monument itself. Almost all these negative evaluations were conveyed through the Affect aspect (16 examples), especially Affect: Security (discomfort) and Affect: Satisfaction (disappointment). These findings suggest that it is more important for visitors to express their personal discomfort related to the physical space, including environmental factors such as weather.

6. *... it's **terrible hot*** [-affect] *even at 8:00 am*
7. *... we would have preferred to walk on our own tempo since the heat is **unbearable*** [-satisfaction].

This pattern shows that Borobudur's main attraction is strongly appreciated. The negative feelings rarely found, and tend to be due to inconveniences that are not directly related to the main destination. Visitors tend to have positive attitudes towards attractions through the aspects of Appreciation: Reaction and Appreciation: Composition. This finding is in line with other research on tourist destinations and hotel reviews (Melián-González et al., 2013), which also found that appreciation of visual impressions was the main verbal tool for expressing positive attitudes from visitors. It confirms that a destination's aesthetic and sensory impact is a key driver for good reviews. On the flip side, the negative findings in this research also align with previous work. For example, hotel reviews often show a similar split: guests are happy with the core product (like the room or location) but complain about specific elements (like the bed or bathroom) (Smirnova, 2022).

C. Evaluation of Human Resources

The Human Resources aspect is the second most frequently evaluated aspect with 109 appraisal instances and is the first domain to show a clearly negative sentiment, with 64 negative evaluations outweighing 45 positive ones. As detailed in Table 2, every evaluation within this domain is realized through the system of Judgment, the assessment of human behavior against social norms of competence and propriety.

TABLE 2
BREAKDOWN OF ATTITUDE FOR THE HUMAN RESOURCES ASPECT

Attitude Sub-Type	Positive Count (+)	Negative Count (-)
Judgment	**45**	**64**
Normality	3	0
Capacity	29	24
Veracity	3	0
Propriety	10	40
Total	**45**	**64**

On one hand, many visitors were highly impressed with their guides' expertise, knowledge, and language skills, viewing them as a valuable addition to the visit, such as:

8. ***Remarkably knowledgeable*** [+capacity] *and fluent in Chinese, ...*
9. *We had a great guide who **explained us history and facts very well*** [+capacity]*, ...*

On the other hand, a bigger number of visitors reported negative experiences, citing guides who lacked knowledge, had poor language skills, or failed to provide any meaningful information, as seen in comments like:

10. *parlava un inglese **pessimo*** [-capacity] … (*spoke **terrible** English*)
11. *Le guide était **catastrophique*** [-capacity] (*The guide was **catastrophic***)

However, the main finding of the overall negative evaluation for this aspect is 40 negative Judgment: Propriety. These criticisms are often conveyed emotionally, not only about management incompetence, but also to describe feelings of being disrespected and treated with discomfort, such as:

12. *staf yang **kurang ramah*** [-propriety] … (***unfriendly** staff*)
13. just to be **herded around like cattle** [-propriety].
14. And **got laugh at by** [-propriety] all the people on the shuttle while they drove

In short, the guide (Capacity) is considered less consistent in competence, and often their behavior tends to be considered unprofessional (Propriety). These findings make Human Resources a problematic element which is a source of shortcomings and disappointment for visitors to Borobudur as a whole. In this case, Borobudur Temple is at risk of creating a negative image such as "the temple is magnificent, but the journey is terrible". However, this pattern is not exclusive, often the visitor experience is disrupted by operational component failures. However, it should be noted that this phenomenon is also not universal. In the context of emotional tourism, such as dark tourism memorials, logistical problems tend to fade because the discourse is dominated by feelings and reflection (Wan, 2025). Although in general the findings in this research are in line with existing trends, the data of Appraisal system aspects in this research detail the linguistic nature of destinations online review writing pattern. This study found a sounding inconsistent experience, that is, visitor judgments were split on staff competence (Judgment: Capacity) but were overwhelmingly negative about their professional conduct (Judgment: Propriety). This finding is similar to other service industry studies (Smirnova, 2022),

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but this study demonstrates how a lack of professionalism and perceived rudeness (Propriety-) can completely overshadow technical competence (Capacity+). This suggests that investment in service culture is a high priority.

D. Evaluation of Amenities

The Amenities of a destination is slightly negative, accumulating 37 negative appraisals against 27 positive ones. The linguistic data shows that this negativity is not primarily about the physical quality of the facilities, but is instead concentrated in negative Judgment of the policies and organization behind these services as presented in Table 3.

TABLE 3
BREAKDOWN OF ATTITUDE FOR THE AMENITIES ASPECT

Attitude Sub-Type	Positive Count (+)	Negative Count (-)
Affect	**5**	**8**
Inclination	0	3
Security	3	0
Satisfaction	2	5
Judgment	**5**	**21**
Capacity	3	11
Propriety	2	10
Appreciation	**17**	**8**
Reaction	3	0
Composition	8	5
Valuation	6	3
Total	**27**	**37**

The negative sentiment is shown by the 8 instances of negative Judgment. The 11 instances of negative Judgment: Capacity target the perceived disorganization and incompetence of service delivery. Visitors critiquing the logistical failings of their tours or the lack of clear, helpful information.

15. *service nya **ndak oke*** [-capacity] (*the service **isn't okay***)
16. *… **would've been nice to know*** [-capacity] *before climbing all that way*.

Furthermore, visitors frequently judged certain amenity-related policies as improper or unethical, as shown by the 10 instances of negative Judgment: Propriety.

17. *But **forcing everyone to take plastic sandals that are painful to wear*** [-propriety] *isn't the way.*
18. *And the exit? A **nightmare maze of endless souvenir stalls you have to battle*** [-propriety] *your way through.*

While negative judgments are prominent, the 27 positive appraisals show that some amenities are well-received when executed effectively. Visitors expressed positive Appreciation (17 instances) for specific, well-organized services and quality facilities. Examples of this positive feedback include:

19. ***Geweldig en goed georganiseerde*** [+valuation] *rondleiding*. (*A **great and well-organized** tour*)
20. *… puis distribution de tongs de **qualité*** [+quality] *offertes et obligatoires …* (*then distribution of **quality** flip-flops offered and compulsory*)

This pattern of evaluation demonstrates that the evaluation of Amenities is a contested domain. However, the data shows that the negative judgments passed on the *systems and policies* governing the services are more numerous and arguably more impactful than the positive appreciation for individual facilities.

E. Evaluation of Accessibility

The Accessibility draws a total of 51 evaluations, and it is overwhelmingly negative, with a stark imbalance of 43 negative appraisals to only 8 positive ones. The specific breakdown of these highly negative evaluations is presented in Table 4.

TABLE 4
BREAKDOWN OF ATTITUDE FOR THE ACCESSIBILITY ASPECT

Attitude Sub-Type	Positive Count (+)	Negative Count (-)
Affect	**0**	**11**
Security	0	3
Satisfaction	0	8
Judgment	**0**	**11**
Capacity	0	11
Appreciation	**8**	**21**
Composition	0	18
Valuation	8	3
Total	**8**	**43**

The frequent source of visitor frustration is the physical and logistical design of the site, captured by the 18 instances of negative Appreciation: Composition. Visitors frequently expressed a sense of physical exhaustion and bewilderment with the site's logistical design, as seen in comments such as:

21. ***Terlalu jauh*** [-composition] *jalan ke parkiran* (*The walk to the parking is **too far***)
22. *jalannya dibikin **muter muter terusss*** [-composition] (*the path is made to go **round and round***)

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Visitors find it difficult to enjoy Borobudur tourism because the journey is physically challenging, made worse by management's incompetence in providing clear navigation rules. This is represented in 11 examples of Negative Judgment: Capacity. Visitors complain:

23. *disana **tidak ada arahan yang jelas*** [-capacity] *untuk titik penjemputan shuttle setelah saya turun dari candi, …* (*There is **no clear direction** for the shuttle pickup point after I get off the temple*,)

A series of perceived obstacles are then translated into negative experiences for visitors which are expressed emotionally such as:

24. ***Belum sampe candinya uda cape.*** [-satisfaction] **(*Already tired before reaching the temple*).**

Based on the data described above, evidence shows that systemic problems with Accessibility create not only physical, but also cognitive, burdens for visitors. These challenges become the basis for the emergence of negative emotions. This reflects the low quality of recreation and tourism almost as a whole. Findings like this show the importance of in-depth analysis using the Appraisal system. In line with Guilia's (2023) findings, linguistic-based frameworks are important to ensure accurate interpretation of evaluative meanings that are likely to be missed by automated systems.

By analyzing the Appraisal system in online reviews, this research provides an evaluative bridge between the experience promised at a destination and the reality experienced by visitors. Previous research on tourism promotion discourse, such as e-brochures (Mocini, 2013; Jalilifar & Moradi, 2019), and official websites (Istianah & Suhandono, 2022), consistently found evaluations dominated by positive Appreciation. This research, by detailing evaluations of certain aspects of tourism, shows the importance of destination managers considering improvements and promotions based on direct reviews from visitors, not just following the trend.

F. Evaluation of Price

The price of entrance tickets, in addition to related operational services, is one of the main reasons for dissatisfaction with Borobudur visitors. Of the 53 data on the tourism Price aspect, 40 evaluation data contain negative impressions, as presented in Table 5.

TABLE 5
BREAKDOWN OF ATTITUDE FOR THE PRICE ASPECT

Attitude Sub-Type	Positive Count (+)	Negative Count (-)
Affect	**0**	**8**
Inclination	0	5
Satisfaction	0	3
Judgment	**0**	**11**
Propriety	0	11
Appreciation	**13**	**21**
Valuation	13	21
Total	**13**	**40**

Negative Appreciation: Valuation is the form of criticism most often conveyed by visitors of Borobudur through online reviews, with 21 negative data compared to only 13 positive ones. Visitors tend to express negative assessments in direct, straightforward and intensive language. What was highlighted was that the costs were considered not only expensive, but also excessive. Example data are as follows:

25. ***Overpriced*** [-valuation]*, disorganised, and an all-round frustrating experience.*
26. *Paid a **ridiculous $40*** [-valuation] *per person …*
27. *It is **not worth 455000*** [-valuation] *IDR for foreigners*.

It is important to note that 13 positive evaluations were submitted by visitors who thought the prices were reasonable. The assessment of the reasonableness of the price is considered over the price of the guide or other packages obtained.

Not only assessing the valuation aspect, a number of visitors (11 data) gave negative Judgment: Propriety when criticizing the price structure for visits to Borobudur. This finding is important because it shifts the evaluation of Price aspects from simply a financial issue to an ethics-related complaint. Even, the pricing policy is seen as unfair or discriminatory, for example:

28. *Harga tiket sangat mahal untuk saya sebagai wisatawan asing. kan itu sudah diakui UNESCO, **seharusnya sudah tidak ada diskriminasi lagi*** [-propriety]. (*Ticket prices are very expensive for me as a foreign tourist. It has been recognized by UNESCO, **there should no longer have discrimination***)

Like the pattern found in the tourism aspects that have been discussed above, the emotional consequences of the perceived injustice are then manifested emotionally. In this case, the expression of rejection is directly realized through the evaluative expression of negative Affect: Inclination.

Overall, Price aspect with its tendency to be filled with negative evaluations shows two different sides. Thus, it's not just a matter of expensive prices, but also ethical issues, where several international tourists feel discriminated against because they get much higher prices. Similar research also shows that indeed the 'cost' aspect is generally a source of negative assessments (Fan, 2025). This research clarifies that the issue of price is not always tied and related to buying and selling matters or how goods or services are priced appropriately. It turns out that the price issue is also related to ethical matters, where often in tourist attractions, this is an issue that is considered trivial, even though for international

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visitors it is a real red flag. Theoretically, this also reinforces the importance of analyzing the Attitude system so that the details of the evaluation delivered and what the evaluation is conveyed are found.

G. Evaluation of Image

In contrast to aspects related to services and logistics matters, Image of Borobudur is assessed exclusively positively. The assessment refers to its global reputation, uniqueness, and iconic character. This aspect is the least often rated by visitors in online reviews, with only 21 ratings, all of which are positive. Positive assessments on the Image aspect are presented in Table 6.

TABLE 6
BREAKDOWN OF ATTITUDE FOR THE IMAGE ASPECT

Attitude Sub-Type	Positive Count (+)	Negative Count (-)
Affect	**3**	**0**
Inclination	3	0
Appreciation	**18**	**0**
Reaction	2	0
Valuation	16	0
Total	**21**	**0**

Assessments in this aspect tend to be built and conveyed through Appreciation: Valuation, the data covers 16 of the 21 review findings. Visitors generally praise Borobudur's reputation by using convincing and authoritative language, such as:

29. ***Imperdibile*** [+valuation] (**Unmissable**)
30. ***Keajaiban dunia*** [+valuation] (**Wonder of the world**)
31. **Absolutely a must visit** [+valuation].

Furthermore, the findings from the reviews show how this reputation also has an effect on potential visitors, shown through a sense of desire. An example is the finding of the Affect: Inclination aspect, as seen in comments such as:

32. ***Pengen kesini*** [+inclination] (**Want to come here**)

From these findings, the Image aspect functions and holds positive power in the narratives of visitors and potential visitors. This aspect is closely related to the Attraction aspect, where it is true that what visitors feel, what they imagine is paid off in full by what they feel when they can visit Borobudur directly.

On the other hand, the problems found in this research, namely poor accessibility, perceptions of unfair prices, and inconsistent staff, should not be considered ordinary complaints from visitors. This reflects systemic operational issues that need to be addressed by the management. This Appraisal based analysis provides a clear, evidential map for doing the logistics improvements.

Lastly, this research implications have a direct impact and contribution to the management of Borobudur Temple and other Indonesian heritage sites. First, the focus of improvements must be on the service aspect around Borobudur Temple. One of the main improvements is Accessibility management, which is rated very negatively, indicating that the visitor's journey is a source of physical and cognitive stress that makes visitors have a negative experience. Second, it must be understood that negative sentiment towards prices is not only related to nominal money but is also related to perceptions of fairness and discriminatory practices. Management must convey transparently the value of ticket prices, provide fair and scientific explanations and justifications for why foreign tourists must pay more. Lastly, inconsistency in Human Resources competency is a critical vulnerability. Data shows that visitors are like playing the lottery, visitors may get a brilliant and knowledgeable guide, but they may get a guide who is completely incompetent, even unprofessional. In this case, standardized and rigorous training that focuses on competency and professional behavior is very necessary.

V. CONCLUSION

The main finding of this research is the divarication of evaluation language representation in online reviews on the Google Maps page of heritage destination, Borobudur temple. On the one hand, the Attraction and Image tourism aspects received a very positive assessment. On the other hand, this positive assessment is undermined and covered by negative evaluations that spread throughout the service and logistics aspects of the destination such as Accessibility, Price, and Human Resources. Linguistically, this contradiction is manifested as a bifurcation of evaluation between positive Appreciation towards the Borobudur temple and the proliferation of negative Judgment and Appreciation aspects towards the logistical elements around the temple. Theoretically, this research extends the Appraisal system framework, demonstrating its utility as an accurate evaluation language diagnostic tool when integrated with contextual domain aspects appropriate to the nature of the data for text analysis. Practically, the findings in this research provide a roadmap for developing sustainable management of heritage tourism destinations, since they are clear and based on dynamic evidence that can be used comprehensively, not only in general management aspects, but also as a basis for targeted promotion and marketing.

Even though it provides a detailed description of how to use linguistic data as material for evaluating tourist destination management, this research certainly has its limitations. Firstly, the data only comes from Google Maps, so it cannot explain whether visitors on TripAdvisor or other tourism blogs use the same patterns to assess their travel experiences.

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Furthermore, the context domain analysis of this research is limited to the UNWTO tourism aspects and does not yet involve the demographic data domain. Thus, this research still has questions for future research to answer regarding the differences between international and domestic visitors, or first-time visitors and repeat visitors, regarding the patterns of online reviews writing. Future research could also strengthen linguistic analysis by complementing it with visitor surveys or interviews to directly link and validate online review data with the evaluative attitudes expressed by visitors directly.

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Stratified Institutional Equilibrium in Sacred Naming: Khmer Temple Denomination Under Minority–Majority Governance in Southwestern Vietnam

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Abstract—**This study examines Khmer temple denomination in Southwestern Vietnam through a corpus of 446 officially recognized temples. It argues that institutional temple denomination in this minority–majority setting is best interpreted as a stratified institutional equilibrium rather than as a linear process of assimilation or isolated resistance. All temple names in the corpus conform to the bipartite generic–specific template characteristic of Theravāda naming systems, indicating macro-structural continuity across mainland Southeast Asia. At the same time, lexical-origin stratification, motivational bifocality, and institutional polyonymy reveal systematic multilingual layering. Khmer-dominant specific elements remain prevalent, accounting for 71.7% of the corpus, whereas Vietnamese-including forms are significantly associated with parallel denominations, OR = 1.74, 95% CI [1.16, 2.61], p = .007. Ecological–geographical and religious–symbolic motivations coexist, with modest but significant covariance across lexical strata. Taken together, the findings suggest that institutional temple denomination operates as a governance-structured semiotic system in which linguistic form, cultural memory, environmental anchoring, and ethnolinguistic negotiation cohere within a relatively stable institutional configuration. The study therefore offers a stratified governance framework as an alternative to linear assimilation models for analyzing sacred denomination in multilingual polities.**

Index Terms—**onomastics, language contact, cultural memory, linguistic landscape, Theravāda Buddhism, Khmer temples, Vietnam**

I. Introduction

Religious place names occupy a distinctive position within onomastics because they function both as referential identifiers and as culturally organized semiotic forms (Bright, 2003; Hough, 2016; Kadmon, 2000). As proper names, they designate unique entities through conventionalized structural templates; at the same time, they often remain semantically motivated by cosmology, commemoration, locality, and institutional authority (Van Langendonck, 2007). Contemporary onomastic scholarship has further emphasized the patterned relationship between structural form and motivational semantics in place-name systems (Ainiala et al., 2012). Recent work on the heritage value of place names also shows that toponyms should not be treated merely as referential labels, but as culturally embedded forms through which communities encode historical experience, identity, and value (Mácha, 2023). In religious contexts, names may therefore serve as condensed sites of cultural memory through which communities stabilize continuity and legitimacy across time (Assmann, 2011; Nora, 1989).

In Theravāda Buddhist traditions, temple names frequently incorporate Pali-derived lexicon and doctrinal symbolism that connect local institutions to a transregional religious repertoire (Eliade, 1959; Knott, 2005). Yet structural continuity and doctrinal symbolism alone cannot explain multilingual hybridization, nor can they account for the coexistence of multiple institutionalized names for the same temple. Conversely, contact linguistics can model patterned bilingual outcomes, but it does not by itself explain why certain doctrinal, commemorative, or place-bound lexemes resist translation or replacement across generations. Temple denomination must therefore be examined through an integrated framework in which structural convention, contact-mediated adaptation, and mnemonic motivation are jointly operative.

The Mekong Delta of Vietnam provides a particularly suitable setting for such an inquiry. Historically shaped by Khmer, Kinh, Hoa, and Cham communities, the region constitutes a layered multilingual space in which religious institutions operate under asymmetric language governance (Nguyễn, 2002). Recent sociolinguistic evidence from An Giang confirms the multilingual communicative complexity of ethnic minority communities in the Mekong Delta,

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showing that minority-language practices coexist with Vietnamese-mediated public and institutional communication (Hoang & Nguyen Van, 2025). Khmer temples in this context serve not only as ritual centers but also as institutions of education, cultural transmission, and community organization (Nguyễn, 2008). Temple names are therefore subject to dual pressures: they must remain meaningful within Khmer community life while also remaining legible within Vietnamese administrative and public domains.

This study focuses on institutional temple denomination, defined here as officially recognized temple names recorded in provincial administrative registers and cross-validated through field documentation. It analyzes a corpus of 446 Khmer temples in Southwestern Vietnam and codes each temple name along two primary dimensions: the linguistic origin of the specific element and its semantic motivation. The study also examines the structural configuration of each name as a whole. On this basis, it proposes a two-register interpretation consisting of an institutional register oriented toward documentary stabilization and public legibility, and a community register oriented toward Khmer lexical continuity and culturally embedded memory. Where these registers converge, hybrid forms and institutional polyonymy are treated as structured outcomes rather than incidental anomalies.

The analysis addresses four research questions:

1. Do Khmer temple names in Southwestern Vietnam preserve a stable structural template under multilingual contact?

2. How are specific elements distributed across lexical-origin strata?

3. What motivational patterns govern temple naming, and how do these patterns interact with lexical-origin strata?

4. To what extent does institutional polyonymy reflect a structured outcome of minority–majority governance?

The study makes three contributions. Empirically, it provides a corpus-based account of Khmer institutional temple denomination in Vietnam at a scale not previously documented. Methodologically, it shows how sacred proper names can be analyzed through integrated structural, lexical, and semantic layers. Theoretically, it advances an interpretive framework for the study of minority religious naming under dominant-language governance, offering an alternative to linear assimilation paradigms.

II. Literature Review

A. Sacred Toponymy and Structural Onomastics

Classical onomastics treats proper names as structurally organized designators whose generic–specific architecture distinguishes unique referents within classificatory systems (Bright, 2003; Dauzat, 1948; Kadmon, 2000; Van Langendonck, 2007). Historical toponymy likewise shows that place names persist as layered linguistic records of successive sociopolitical formations (Nicolaisen, 1976). In Theravāda contexts, temple names typically instantiate a bipartite structure in which a religious classifier, such as *wat* or *vihāra*, precedes a differentiating element with geographical, symbolic, or commemorative meaning (Hough, 2016).

This structural regularity, however, does not explain why some specific elements remain monolingual, others are translated, and still others develop hybrid or parallel forms under multilingual governance. Structural onomastics is especially effective in explaining why naming systems display durable formal templates, but it is less well equipped to account for patterned lexical layering within those templates. It explains continuity of architecture more readily than differentiation of content. The Mekong Delta corpus makes this distinction analytically important: if the generic–specific structure remains intact while the specific element varies across lexical and motivational dimensions, explanation must move beyond structural description alone. The issue is not whether sacred names have structure, but how a stable structure accommodates multilingual pressure without collapsing into either uniformity or disorder.

B. Language Contact and Matrix-Mediated Framing

Contact linguistics provides a useful framework for analyzing patterned bilingual outcomes. The Matrix Language Frame model distinguishes a structural frame language from embedded lexical insertions in bilingual production (Myers-Scotton, 1993, 2002), while broader work on language contact emphasizes domain sensitivity, asymmetric dominance, and functional differentiation in borrowing and retention (Matras, 2009). Although these models were developed primarily for spoken bilingual production, their underlying logic can be extended to institutional naming. In the present study, matrix effects are understood as operating through documentary and orthographic framing rather than through syntax. The institutional register may impose transliteration conventions, standardization pressures, and sequencing practices aligned with administrative documentation, while the community register may selectively preserve lexemes associated with doctrinal cosmology, local memory, or patronage.

This perspective is particularly relevant in minority–majority settings, where linguistic contact does not necessarily yield homogeneous mixing. Contact outcomes are often selective, domain-sensitive, and stratified. A naming system may retain minority-language dominance in some semantic fields while permitting majority-language inclusion in others. For this reason, contact theory is valuable not simply because it predicts mixing, but because it helps explain why mixing itself is patterned. In the present case, lexical incorporation matters less as a sign of contact in the abstract than as an indicator of how institutional legibility and community continuity are negotiated within sacred denomination.

C. Cultural Memory and Sacred Denomination

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Cultural memory theory conceptualizes institutional continuity as the stabilization of selected symbolic forms (Assmann, 2011; Nora, 1989). Applied to sacred naming, this perspective helps explain why some lexical choices remain durable across multilingual settings, particularly when they encode doctrinal concepts, ritual vocabulary, or historically significant patronage. Cultural memory theory therefore complements contact linguistics by clarifying why sacred naming cannot be reduced to simple translation or replacement under minority–majority asymmetry.

Mácha's (2023) account of place-name heritage is useful in this respect because it conceptualizes names as carriers of value that may persist even when administrative, political, or linguistic regimes change. In the present study, this perspective helps explain why Khmer temple names may retain culturally significant lexical elements despite the growing visibility of Vietnamese in institutional and public domains. Religious names often function as more than locational labels. Temple denomination may condense narratives of origin, doctrinal prestige, local sacred geography, and communal self-recognition. In such cases, lexical choice is not merely descriptive but institutionally meaningful. Cultural memory theory thus helps account for why some naming elements appear resistant to replacement even when broader governance conditions favor dominant-language visibility. It also helps explain why multiple denominations may coexist without necessarily indicating instability: different names may preserve different mnemonic layers within the same institutional field.

D. Register Interaction as an Integrated Framework

The present study integrates structural onomastics, contact linguistics, and cultural memory theory into a single explanatory framework. Structural onomastics specifies the formal template of sacred names. Contact theory models patterned bilingual and hybrid outcomes. Memory theory explains why some lexical domains remain conservative despite contact pressure. These perspectives are analytically interdependent. Sacred denomination in multilingual settings cannot be adequately explained by any single tradition because the empirical object itself is layered. A temple name is at once a formal linguistic structure, a socially circulated public sign, and a condensed carrier of institutional memory.

Structural onomastics is therefore necessary but insufficient. It explains why naming systems retain recognizable architectures, yet it does not by itself explain why multilingual pressure yields selective lexical incorporation rather than template collapse. Contact linguistics adds explanatory power by showing that bilingual outcomes are rarely random; they are constrained by asymmetry, functional differentiation, and domain sensitivity. Even so, contact theory remains incomplete if it treats all lexical material as equally available for replacement or borrowing. Religious denomination is especially resistant to such flattening because some naming elements carry doctrinal, commemorative, or place-bound symbolic weight that exceeds their referential function.

The present framework accordingly treats institutional temple denomination as an analytically layered object requiring a layered explanation. Structural continuity, lexical stratification, and motivational differentiation should not be read as competing descriptions of the same phenomenon. Rather, they constitute evidence that sacred naming operates simultaneously at formal, sociolinguistic, and mnemonic levels. The value of a register-based interpretation lies precisely here: it makes visible how a stable naming architecture can coexist with patterned multilingual negotiation without reducing that negotiation either to assimilation or to symbolic residue.

In this study, the institutional and community registers are treated as analytic constructs rather than directly observed variables. They are not measured independently through ethnographic or interactional data; instead, they are inferred from recurrent distributional patterns in institutional temple denomination, including structural stability, lexical stratification, motivational layering, and institutional polyonymy. The proposed framework is therefore interpretive and mechanism-oriented rather than strictly causal in an observational sense. In this sense, the Mekong Delta case is theoretically productive not because it is exceptional in a simple descriptive way, but because it reveals how governance asymmetry can be sedimented within sacred denomination without erasing minority naming continuity.

E. Empirical Scope and Competing Explanations

Scholarship on the linguistic landscape has shown that public inscriptions index language hierarchy and ethnolinguistic vitality (Landry & Bourhis, 1997; Shohamy & Gorter, 2009), while critical toponymy has framed naming as a form of institutionalized spatial authority (Rose-Redwood et al., 2010). Recent research on urban street naming likewise demonstrates that officially sanctioned naming practices are shaped by institutional authority and social hierarchy, including gendered patterns of public commemoration (Górny & Górna, 2024). Although street names and temple names belong to different naming domains, this work reinforces the broader claim that official names are not neutral labels but institutionalized semiotic forms through which social order becomes spatially visible.

Building on these approaches, the present analysis is restricted to officially recognized temple names documented in provincial registers and verified through field inspection. This restriction is not merely a methodological convenience. It is central to the study's analytical purpose. By focusing on officially stabilized denominations rather than the full range of informal naming practices, the study isolates the institutional layer of sacred naming most directly shaped by governance, documentation, and public legibility. The aim is not to deny the importance of vernacular naming, but to avoid conflating naming regimes that operate under different constraints.

Two alternative explanations are considered. A uniform administrative standardization hypothesis predicts homogeneous hybridization across lexical domains and regions. A random bilingual mixture hypothesis predicts no domain-specific clustering and no association between lexical strata and naming outcomes. The register-interaction

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framework becomes more plausible if the empirical pattern is inconsistent with both alternatives and if recurrent naming patterns are more readily explained by layered institutional negotiation than by uniform standardization or random bilingual mixture.

III. Methodology

A. Research Design and Analytical Expectation

This study employs a corpus-based empirical design to investigate institutional temple denomination among Khmer temples in Southwestern Vietnam. The analysis is guided by one central analytical expectation: hybrid forms and institutional polyonymy should exhibit non-random distributions more consistent with layered institutional negotiation than with uniform administrative standardization. The study combines structured coding with descriptive and inferential statistical analysis to evaluate whether the observed naming patterns are compatible with this expectation.

B. Corpus and Supplementary Interview Participants

The empirical dataset consists of 446 officially recognized Khmer Buddhist temples in Southwestern Vietnam. Because this is an onomastic corpus study, the units of analysis are temple names rather than individual human participants. The sampling frame includes all Khmer temples formally recognized by provincial authorities at the time of data collection. Inclusion required both official listing in provincial administrative registers and referent verification through field inspection. Temples without formal recognition were excluded in order to preserve the institutional focus of the study.

The corpus is situated within a broader Mekong Delta sociolinguistic environment in which Khmer language maintenance remains an active community concern. Recent research on Khmer communities in Sóc Trăng shows that language maintenance is closely tied to family, education, religion, and community institutions (Do et al., 2025). This is directly relevant to the present study because temples are not only religious sites but also institutional spaces in which Khmer linguistic and cultural continuity may be sustained.

The decision to restrict the corpus to officially recognized temples is analytically deliberate. Institutional temple denomination is the domain in which documentary stabilization, administrative visibility, and public legibility most directly intersect. By concentrating on temples with formally recognized names, the study isolates the register in which state-facing and community-facing naming pressures are most likely to become sedimented in durable textual form. This choice necessarily excludes informal oral naming practices, but it also prevents conflation between naming regimes that operate under different constraints and for different audiences. The corpus is therefore intentionally narrower than the full social life of naming, but better suited to the specific question of how sacred denomination behaves under minority–majority governance.

In addition, 38 semi-structured interviews were conducted with temple representatives and community members across provinces. These interviews served a supplementary role by clarifying naming history, validating etymological interpretation, and documenting coexisting denominations. They were not treated as the primary dataset or as independent causal evidence. Rather, they supported the interpretation of coded forms and helped distinguish substantive lexical variation from trivial orthographic fluctuation.

The supplementary interviews serve a limited but important role. They do not function as an independent evidentiary base for causal claims about institutional behavior. Instead, they help clarify lexical histories, confirm whether alternative names remain in active recognition, and distinguish meaningful denomination from routine orthographic variation. In a corpus study of sacred names, this distinction is crucial. Without such validation, formally recorded variants may be mistaken either for duplicate bureaucratic entries or for semantically trivial spelling differences. The interviews therefore strengthen interpretive reliability at the level of coding and classification, while leaving the core inferential structure of the study grounded in the institutional corpus itself.

C. Instruments and Coding Scheme

Each temple name was segmented into two components: a generic element, functioning as the religious classifier, and a specific element, functioning as the differentiating component. For the purposes of the present article, the specific element was coded along two primary analytical dimensions:

1. linguistic origin: Khmer, Vietnamese, Hán Việt/Sino-Vietnamese, or mixed formation; and

2. motivational category: ecological–geographical indexing, religious–symbolic ideology, or composite.

Separate codebooks were prepared for each analytical dimension, and coding protocols were finalized prior to statistical modeling. The coding design reflects the study's theoretical priorities. Linguistic-origin coding captures whether the differentiating component remains Khmer-dominant, incorporates Vietnamese material, or occupies a marginal Sino-Vietnamese stratum. Motivational coding captures whether the same component primarily indexes environmental location, doctrinal symbolism, or a composite of both. Taken together, these two dimensions allow the study to track how linguistic layering and semantic orientation intersect within the same naming system.

D. Data Collection Procedures

Data collection proceeded in four stages. First, temple names were compiled from provincial administrative registers to establish the institutional corpus. Second, field inspection was conducted to verify referent identity and orthographic

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form. Third, semi-structured interviews were carried out to clarify naming history, lexical interpretation, and the coexistence of multiple denominations. Fourth, on-site observation documented inscriptional practices and orthographic variation in order to assess correspondence between documentary forms and material signage.

The study explicitly restricts its scope to institutionalized denomination. It does not attempt to capture the full range of vernacular oral labels, temporary landscape inscriptions, or informal naming practices. This delimitation is important because those naming regimes may operate under different social and pragmatic constraints. The present design therefore privileges comparability and institutional relevance over exhaustive coverage of all possible name variants.

E. Coding Procedures and Reliability

Segmentation and coding were conducted according to ex ante rules. Ambiguous compounds and historically fossilized forms were independently reviewed, and adjudication decisions were recorded in an audit log to ensure transparency. Coding for each analytical dimension was performed by trained coders using separate codebooks and without access to inferential predictions. Inter-rater reliability was assessed using Cohen's κ, with a pre-specified acceptance threshold of $\kappa \geq .80$. Disagreements were resolved through blind third-party adjudication.

This procedure was designed to reduce interpretive drift in the treatment of historically layered names. In sacred denomination, lexical boundaries are not always transparent, particularly when forms have undergone orthographic adaptation or partial phonological accommodation. The coding workflow therefore emphasized consistency in classification rather than impressionistic etymology. Reliability matters here not only as a technical requirement but as a condition of interpretive credibility.

F. Analytical Procedures

The analysis combines descriptive and inferential procedures. Descriptive statistics were used to establish the prevalence of structural patterns, lexical-origin strata, motivational categories, and institutional polyonymy. Inferential analysis then tested the hypothesized associations.

For binary outcomes such as polyonymy and mixed-origin formation, the study employed frequentist logistic regression. Models were estimated with province-clustered robust standard errors to account for provincial nesting. As a robustness check, multilevel logistic models with province-level random intercepts were also estimated. Results are reported as odds ratios, 95% confidence intervals, and exact two-tailed p-values.

Logistic regression was chosen because the principal outcomes are binary and the study's aim is to assess whether certain naming configurations are more likely under particular lexical or motivational conditions. The method does not establish causality, but it allows the study to evaluate whether observed patterns depart meaningfully from random or uniform distribution. In this context, the value of the models lies less in prediction than in disciplined comparison across naming categories.

The study does not directly observe the interaction between institutional and community registers. Rather, it evaluates whether observable naming patterns in the corpus are consistent with a register-based interpretation. All inferential claims are therefore framed as evidence of patterned association and interpretive plausibility rather than direct demonstration of underlying mechanisms.

G. Methodological Delimitation

All reported effects are interpreted as statistical associations rather than causal relationships. The design is cross-sectional, and the scope of inference is limited to institutionalized Khmer temple names under contemporary administrative governance in Southwestern Vietnam. The findings are not assumed to generalize automatically to informal oral naming practices or to other national contexts.

IV. Results and Discussion

A. Institutional Polyonymy as a Structured Regional Pattern

Of the 446 temples in the corpus, 227, or 50.9%, are documented with more than one institutionalized denomination. Under a binomial specification, the estimated proportion of polyonymy is 0.509, 95% CI [0.462, 0.556]. Within this bounded corpus, multiplicity is therefore not marginal but structurally salient.

Institutional polyonymy was defined as the coexistence of lexically or structurally distinct name tokens referring to the same temple in administrative records and/or validated public usage. Minor orthographic normalization was excluded from classification. Field validation further suggests that, in most cases, the alternative denominations remain concurrently recognizable rather than functioning solely as archival remnants of sequential renaming.

Although provincial rates range from 34.8% in Bạc Liêu to 57.7% in Kiên Giang, the chi-square test does not reach conventional significance thresholds. This indicates that institutional polyonymy is broadly distributed across the region rather than concentrated in only a few provinces. Table 1 presents the provincial distribution of institutional polyonymy across the corpus.

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TABLE 1
DISTRIBUTION OF INSTITUTIONAL POLYONYMY BY PROVINCE (N = 446)

Province	Total Temples (N)	Polyonymous (n)	% Polyonymy
Cần Thơ	42	20	47.6
Vĩnh Long	28	11	39.3
An Giang	61	34	55.7
Trà Vinh	92	50	54.3
Sóc Trăng	118	63	53.4
Long An	19	7	36.8
Kiên Giang	52	30	57.7
Bạc Liêu	23	8	34.8
Phú Quốc	11	4	36.4
Total	**446**	**227**	**50.9**

Note. $\chi^2(df = 8) = 11.98$, $p = .151$. Percentages are calculated within province. Minor orthographic variants were excluded prior to classification.
Source. Author's corpus and calculations based on coded institutional denominations.

The substantive significance of this result lies not in strong provincial differentiation, but in the durability of the pattern across the region. Even without statistically significant interprovincial concentration, the prevalence of institutional polyonymy suggests that the coexistence of multiple denominations is not an exceptional local residue. It is better understood as a regionally distributed feature of institutional temple denomination.

From the register-based perspective advanced here, this pattern suggests that institutional temple denomination in Southwestern Vietnam is not best understood through assumptions of canonical singularity. Instead, institutional polyonymy appears to be a stable outcome of overlapping administrative and community-based naming logics.

B. Structural Template Stability Under Contact Conditions

Across the full corpus, all temple names conform to a bipartite generic–specific template. No counterexamples were identified under the segmentation protocol. The generic element consistently functions as a religious classifier, while the specific element provides differentiation through geographical, symbolic, or commemorative content.

This result indicates macro-structural continuity with Theravāda naming systems elsewhere in mainland Southeast Asia. More importantly, it narrows the site of analytical variation. Because the architectural template remains fully stable under multilingual contact, contact-induced change in this corpus must be located primarily within the specific element rather than in the overall name structure. The evidence therefore points to a layer-sensitive system in which macro-structure is conserved while lexical and semantic negotiation occurs internally.

This finding also prevents overstatement about contact effects. The corpus does not show wholesale restructuring of temple denomination. Instead, it shows that multilingual negotiation occurs within a durable naming architecture. This distinction supports the broader argument of the study: sacred naming in this case is neither structurally destabilized nor uniformly standardized, but selectively layered.

C. Lexical-Origin Stratification of Specific Elements

Origin coding reveals a strongly patterned distribution of specific elements. Khmer-dominant forms account for 71.7% of the corpus, Vietnamese-including forms for 24.2%, and Sino-Vietnamese strata for 4.1%. This distribution departs sharply from uniformity, confirming that lexical origin is a highly structured feature of institutional denomination. Table 2 reports the full distribution of lexical-origin categories in the corpus.

TABLE 2
LINGUISTIC ORIGIN OF SPECIFIC ELEMENTS IN INSTITUTIONAL TEMPLE NAMES (N = 446)

Origin Category	n	%
Khmer, Latinized	219	49.1
Khmer, Vietnamese-adapted	101	22.6
Vietnamese lexical	67	15.0
Hybrid Khmer–Vietnamese	41	9.2
Sino-Vietnamese	12	2.7
Sino-Vietnamese hybrid	6	1.4
Total	**446**	**100.0**

Note. Percentages are calculated relative to the total corpus. Categories are mutually exclusive and based on independently coded lexical-origin criteria. Hybrid forms require identifiable morphemic contribution from more than one linguistic system.
Source. Author's corpus and calculations based on coded specific elements.

For analytical clarity, these categories were further aggregated into broader lexical-origin strata. Table 3 summarizes these aggregated categories and highlights the predominance of Khmer-dominant forms.

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TABLE 3
AGGREGATED LEXICAL-ORIGIN CATEGORIES FOR ANALYTICAL CONTRAST (N = 446)

Aggregated Category	n	%
Khmer-dominant: Latinized + adapted Khmer	320	71.7
Vietnamese-including: Vietnamese + hybrid Khmer–Vietnamese	108	24.2
Sino-Vietnamese: pure + hybrid	18	4.1
Total	**446**	**100.0**

Note. Aggregation reflects analytical contrasts between lexical retention, incorporation, and marginal Sino-Vietnamese strata.
Source. Author's aggregation based on Table 2 origin coding.

More importantly, logistic regression shows that Vietnamese-including forms are significantly associated with higher odds of institutional polyonymy than Khmer-dominant forms, OR = 1.74, 95% CI [1.16, 2.61], p = .007. Sino-Vietnamese forms do not differ significantly, although inference is constrained by small cell counts. Multilevel models with province-level random intercepts produce substantively equivalent estimates, indicating that the association is not driven by regional clustering.

Two points follow from this result. First, the predominance of Khmer-dominant forms indicates the continued resilience of minority religious lexicon within a majority-language administrative environment. This finding is consistent with recent evidence on Khmer language maintenance in the Mekong Delta, particularly in Sóc Trăng, where religious and community institutions continue to support Khmer linguistic continuity despite broader Vietnamese-dominant public conditions (Do et al., 2025). It also aligns with evidence from An Giang that ethnic minority communication is often multilingual and domain-sensitive rather than uniformly shifted toward the majority language (Hoang & Nguyen Van, 2025). Second, the association between Vietnamese-including forms and institutional polyonymy suggests that contact does not take the form of simple lexical replacement. Rather, Vietnamese lexical incorporation appears to increase the probability of parallel denomination, not the categorical displacement of Khmer forms.

The distinction between incorporation and replacement is central to this interpretation. If Vietnamese lexical material were functioning primarily as a replacement mechanism, one would expect a much stronger contraction of Khmer-dominant forms across the corpus. That is not what the data show. Instead, the corpus reveals a configuration in which Vietnamese inclusion becomes more probable in relation to institutional polyonymy, while Khmer-dominant naming remains numerically predominant overall. This combination suggests that majority-language visibility is being added to the institutional field without fully displacing minority lexical continuity.

This pattern shifts the interpretation of multilingual sacred naming away from a zero-sum model. The coexistence of minority lexical predominance with patterned majority-language inclusion implies that naming outcomes are redistributed across overlapping institutional demands rather than resolved through simple substitution. In practical terms, the data point to a naming system in which Khmer-denominational continuity remains strong enough to structure the corpus as a whole, even as Vietnamese forms become selectively salient in contexts associated with parallel naming. The findings are therefore better interpreted as evidence of stratification than of transition alone.

D. Motivational Patterns and Their Interaction With Lexical Strata

The semantic motivation of temple names was coded into three categories: ecological–geographical indexing, religious–symbolic ideology, and composite forms. Religious–symbolic ideology constitutes the largest category, accounting for 50.2% of the corpus, followed by ecological–geographical indexing at 37.7% and composite forms at 12.1%. This distribution is significantly uneven, indicating that motivational structure is patterned rather than random. Table 4 presents the distribution of motivational categories across the institutional corpus.

TABLE 4
MOTIVATIONAL CATEGORIES OF SPECIFIC ELEMENTS IN INSTITUTIONAL TEMPLE NAMES (N = 446)

Motivational Category	n	%
Ecological–geographical indexing	168	37.7
Religious–symbolic ideology	224	50.2
Composite	54	12.1
Total	**446**	**100.0**

Note. Percentages are calculated relative to N = 446. Intercoder reliability for motivational coding: Cohen's κ = .86, 95% CI [.82, .90]. Categories are mutually exclusive and based on semantically transparent criteria.
Source. Author's corpus and calculations based on coded motivational categories.

Ecological–geographical indexing names anchor temples to salient environmental features such as ridges, hills, forests, riverbanks, or distinctive flora and fauna. In a deltaic environment characterized by hydrological mobility, such lexemes plausibly function as devices of referential stabilization. Religious–symbolic ideology names, by contrast, draw on translocal Theravāda doctrinal vocabulary and align local temples with wider symbolic and cosmological repertoires.

Cross-tabulation reveals a significant association between motivational category and lexical-origin stratum. Vietnamese-including forms are disproportionately represented in religious–symbolic ideology and composite categories relative to ecological–geographical indexing, indicating that lexical and motivational layers are not distributed

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independently. Instead, semantic selection appears to be structured in relation to contact-sensitive lexical stratification. This relationship is shown in Table 5.

TABLE 5
ASSOCIATION BETWEEN MOTIVATIONAL CATEGORY AND LEXICAL-ORIGIN STRATA (N = 446)

Motivational Category	Khmer-dominant	Vietnamese-including	Sino-Vietnamese	Total
Ecological–geographical indexing	139	26	3	168
Religious–symbolic ideology	142	74	8	224
Composite	39	8	7	54
Total	**320**	**108**	**18**	**446**

Note. $\chi^2(df = 4) = 27.63$, $p < .001$; Cramér's V = .18, indicating a small-to-moderate effect.
Source. Author's calculations based on integrated motivational and lexical-origin coding.

A further logistic regression predicting institutional polyonymy from motivational category shows that composite names have higher odds of parallel denomination than religious–symbolic ideology-only names, OR = 1.69, 95% CI [1.02, 2.80], p = .041, whereas ecological–geographical indexing-only names do not differ significantly. This suggests that names combining ecological and symbolic motivations are especially compatible with layered institutional representation.

Taken together, these findings suggest that institutional temple denomination in the Mekong Delta is governed not by a single motivational principle but by a layered motivational configuration in which environmental anchoring and doctrinal projection coexist and interact with lexical stratification. Although the effect size is modest, it should not be dismissed as trivial. In naming research, especially in historically layered institutional systems, small-to-moderate associations can be substantively meaningful because they indicate patterned ordering rather than noise. What matters is that motivational categories are not randomly distributed across lexical strata; they exhibit a structure that is interpretable in relation to governance and contact.

E. Institutional Temple Denomination as Stratified Equilibrium

Taken together, the findings support an interpretation of Khmer institutional temple denomination as a site of negotiated equilibrium under minority–majority governance. Three features are especially salient. First, the naming system is structurally insulated: all names retain the generic–specific template. Second, it is lexically stratified: Khmer-dominant forms remain prevalent, while Vietnamese-including forms are associated with higher odds of institutional polyonymy. Third, it is motivationally bifocal: ecological–geographical and religious–symbolic motivations coexist and are differentially distributed across lexical strata.

This configuration does not fit linear models that place minority naming on a continuum from resistance to assimilation. The corpus displays neither straightforward preservation nor unidirectional replacement. Instead, institutional temple denomination is more plausibly interpreted as a stratified institutional equilibrium in which administrative legibility, Khmer continuity, cultural memory, and environmental anchoring are redistributed across coexisting naming layers.

This equilibrium should not be understood as an absence of asymmetry. Nor does it imply that institutional and community registers exercise equal power. Rather, the term refers to the relative stabilization of naming outcomes within a field structured by unequal linguistic and administrative power. What appears stable in the corpus is not social symmetry, but the recurrent organization of denomination across distinguishable layers: a durable formal template, persistent Khmer lexical presence, selective Vietnamese inclusion, and motivational differentiation that is neither random nor reducible to a single semantic logic.

This clarification matters because alternative readings remain inadequate. A straightforward assimilation model cannot explain why Khmer-dominant specific elements remain so prevalent across the corpus despite majority-language governance. A simple resistance model is equally incomplete because it cannot account for the patterned association between Vietnamese-including forms and institutional polyonymy. Likewise, a purely symbolic reading of sacred naming would miss the extent to which environmental indexing, administrative framing, and multilingual legibility shape denomination alongside doctrinal symbolism. The present framework is therefore not intended to replace one deterministic model with another, but to provide a more proportionate account of how sacred names can remain structurally stable while being internally redistributed across institutional pressures.

More broadly, this argument contributes to contact onomastics by suggesting that sacred denomination under minority governance should be analyzed not only as a linguistic artifact but also as an institutional arrangement. Names do not merely reflect contact; they organize it in publicly durable form. This point resonates with Mácha's (2023) argument that place names possess heritage value because they mediate relationships among language, memory, place, and community identity. It also parallels findings from official street-naming research, where naming practices are shown to encode institutional hierarchies and social visibility within public space (Górny & Górna, 2024). In the present corpus, sacred denomination similarly functions as a durable public form through which minority memory and majority-governed legibility are jointly organized.

When examined at the level of an institutional corpus, sacred names may reveal not a linear path from minority continuity to majority replacement, but a layered configuration in which continuity and incorporation become mutually legible without becoming identical. That possibility is what the Mekong Delta case brings into sharp analytical focus.

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V. Conclusion

This study examined 446 officially recognized Khmer temples in Southwestern Vietnam in order to explain how institutional temple denomination operates under minority–majority governance. The findings suggest that Khmer temple denomination in this setting is best interpreted not as a process of linear assimilation or insulated resistance, but as a stratified institutional equilibrium.

Several findings are especially important. First, all temple names preserve the generic–specific structural template, indicating macro-architectural continuity with Theravāda naming systems more broadly. Second, Khmer-dominant specific elements remain prevalent, accounting for 71.7% of the corpus, which indicates strong continuity in minority religious lexicon. Third, Vietnamese-including forms are significantly associated with institutional polyonymy, OR = 1.74, 95% CI [1.16, 2.61], p = .007, suggesting that lexical incorporation increases the probability of parallel denomination rather than replacing Khmer forms. Fourth, ecological–geographical and religious–symbolic motivations coexist, and their significant covariance across lexical strata points to a layered semantic organization. Finally, approximately half of the temples exhibit multiple institutionalized names, indicating that temple denomination in this context is not monodenominational but structurally parallelized.

These findings carry several implications. Theoretically, they support a governance-based framework in which naming systems are shaped by interacting institutional pressures rather than by unidirectional language shift alone. Methodologically, the study shows the value of integrating structural segmentation, lexical-origin coding, motivational analysis, and institutional polyonymy within a single empirical design. Practically, the results suggest that administrative standardization and minority-language continuity are not necessarily structurally incompatible; instead, they may coexist within stable naming systems. This implication is particularly important in light of recent research on Khmer language maintenance in the Mekong Delta, which emphasizes the continuing role of community and religious institutions in sustaining minority-language vitality (Do et al., 2025). It also supports the broader view that place names should be treated as heritage-bearing forms rather than as administratively interchangeable labels (Mácha, 2023). This has relevance for language policy, heritage documentation, and digital cartography, where reducing sacred sites to a single standardized denomination may erase important institutional and mnemonic layers.

The study also opens several directions for future research. Diachronic work is needed to examine how naming layers change over time and how administrative policies shape denomination trajectories. Comparative research across other minority religious communities and Theravāda settings would help assess the broader applicability of the stratified equilibrium interpretation. Further work on vernacular oral naming and linguistic landscape variation would also complement the present focus on institutionalized denomination.

These conclusions are bounded by design. The study is cross-sectional and correlational, and it is limited to officially recognized temple names in Southwestern Vietnam. It does not reconstruct policy causality, model long-term temporal change, or capture the full range of informal naming practices. Within these limits, the evidence supports interpreting institutional temple denomination in this case as a governance-structured semiotic system in which linguistic form, cultural memory, environmental anchoring, and ethnolinguistic negotiation coalesce within a relatively stable institutional configuration.

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Integral Model of Normative Approval of Gender Roles in Four Turkic Languages: Associative Indices and Frame Annotation

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***Abstract*—This study develops and preliminarily validates an integral model for explaining normative approval of gender-role scenarios in four Turkic languages: Kazakh, Uzbek, Karakalpak, and Kyrgyz. The model combines associative indices, frame annotation, and vignette-based evaluation to determine how cognitive accessibility, role structure, domain localization, and cross-linguistic variation shape the perception of gender roles as permissible, expected, or socially supported. The methodological framework integrates cognitive-discursive, psycholinguistic, and comparative-typological approaches. The empirical base includes an authorial corpus of 10 macroframes, 56 internal frames, and 42 basic role nominations, together with associative and vignette data. The intermediate results show that frequency concentration, centrality, evaluative saturation, and variability function as meaningful predictors of normative approval, while frame parameters such as agency, hierarchy, reputation, sanction, and conflict clarify the scenario organization of gender norms. Comparison of partial and integral models confirms that the combined model has greater explanatory power than models based on isolated lexical, associative, or frame parameters. The study contributes to Turkology, gender linguistics, psycholinguistics, and frame semantics by proposing a reproducible multifactor framework for analyzing gender roles as normatively organized scenarios.**

***Index Terms*—gender roles, normative approval, integral model, Turkic languages, associative indices**

I. Introduction

In Turkic languages, gender roles are represented not only in traditional nominations, but also in *associations*, *evaluations*, and socially marked role scenarios. Therefore, the key task is not simply to describe masculine and feminine representations in language, but to explain which scenarios are perceived as permissible, expected, and normatively supported in different linguistic communities. A comparative approach is especially important here, since shared cultural codes do not eliminate differences in evaluations and role distribution. This makes it possible to move from qualitative description to a more integrated analysis of how language, culture, and social norms interact.

The theoretical foundation of this approach is constituted by a body of studies in which gender is understood not as a static characteristic, but as a socially and discursively organized category. In the research of Holmes and Meyerhoff (2003), the field of *language and gender* is presented as a broad and methodologically diversified area in which gender identities are examined in relation to speech practice and social interaction. Eckert and McConnell-Ginet (2003)

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consistently demonstrated that language does not merely reflect gender differences, but participates in the construction of social meaning and the distribution of role expectations. In the works of Tannen (1996), gender discourse is revealed through communicative strategies, distance, politeness, and asymmetry of interpretation, whereas Butler (1988) shifts the discussion into the plane of performativity, where gender is conceived as the effect of repeated culturally sanctioned acts. This line of reasoning is also related to the position of Bourdieu (2001), who links the persistence of gender hierarchies to mechanisms of symbolic violence and the institutional reproduction of norms. Taken together, these approaches make it possible to regard the normative approval of gender roles as the result of the intersection of linguistic representation, cognitive processing, and social sanctioning.

The scientific novelty of the study lies in treating gender roles in Turkic languages through reproducible multifactor modeling rather than descriptive analysis. For the first time, the study combines associative indices, frame annotation, vignette evaluation, and cross-linguistic validation within one framework. This approach links cognitive, psycholinguistic, sociolinguistic, and applied perspectives. The study is also significant for developing tools for frame annotation and lexicographic marking of gender evaluation and role structure, while clarifying how gender features become normatively approved or disapproved in specific linguistic contexts.

II. Literature Review

Research on the normative approval of gender roles in Turkic languages draws on several interrelated strands of scholarship. These include studies on *language and gender*, which describe gender roles, stereotypes, and their linguistic representation; *cognitive-semantic* research on *frame semantics* and *frame annotation*, which models gender scenarios as structured knowledge; and *psycholinguistic* studies of *association norms*, which help quantify the centrality and cultural salience of gender-relevant units, as also shown by Kazakh data on ethnocultural names (Akhmetova et al., 2025a). It also includes research on *social norms*, where normative approval is understood as a shared view of desirable and permissible behavior. Together, these strands form the theoretical basis of the article and support the construction of an integral explanatory model.

Four concepts are central to the present study: *gender roles*, *frame*, *association norms*, and *normative approval*. In contemporary scholarship, gender roles are understood as sociocultural frameworks shaping expectations about the behavior and values of men and women (Palomino-Suárez & Aparicio García, 2025). A frame is treated as a structured semantic schema of a situation with typical participant roles, while *frame annotation* identifies the linguistic units that activate a frame and the elements they profile (Boas et al., 2024; Anwar et al., 2024). *Association norms are stable and reproducible responses reflecting semantic memory and links between concepts*, which makes them useful for modeling meaning and semantic networks (Cabana et al., 2024; Playfoot & Burysek, 2024). *Normative approval* is interpreted through the concept of injunctive norms as socially expected and positively sanctioned behavior (Wenzel & Woodyatt, 2025; Douglas et al., 2024). The empirical value of the associative dimension is also supported by evidence from sacred vocabulary, where response stability reflects the link between semantic memory and axiologically significant representations (Akhmetova et al., 2025b). Together, these definitions justify the use of associative and frame parameters as predictors of normatively approved gender-role scenarios.

For the preliminary mapping of the research field, the results of a search in the Scopus database based on four two-word queries were used, corresponding to the principal thematic blocks of the present literature review. These queries make it possible not only to observe the overall scale of publication activity, but also to determine which directions are represented as the broadest and most interdisciplinary and which appear as narrower and more methodologically specialized. At this stage, the table performs an orienting function and serves as a basis for the further selection of the most relevant sources for each block.

TABLE 1
DISTRIBUTION OF SCOPUS PUBLICATIONS BY KEY TWO-WORD QUERIES USED TO CONSTRUCT THE LITERATURE REVIEW

Review block	**Search query**	**Total number of documents**	**Analytical significance of the query**
Theory of language and gender	language gender	40,291	shows a broad theoretical body of work on language, gender, discourse, and social expectations
Cognitive and frame semantics	frame semantics	9,767	reflects a specialized corpus of studies on frames, semantic roles, and annotation
Psycholinguistics of associations	association norms	15,274	captures publications on associative responses, semantic networks, and the standardization of associations
Normative approval and social norms	social norms	91,291	demonstrates the broadest interdisciplinary body of work on norms, expectations, and the regulation of behavior

As *Table 1* shows, the largest volume of publications is concentrated in the *language gender* and *social norms* blocks, which indicates the high degree of interdisciplinarity and breadth of these research fields. By contrast, the *frame semantics* and *association norms* queries generate more specialized corpora directly relevant to the cognitive-semantic and psycholinguistic toolkit of the article. Consequently, the logic of the subsequent review should be structured as a transition from broad theoretical foundations to more precise analytical procedures, which then converge on the problem of explaining the normative approval of gender roles.

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Accordingly, the following subsections will first examine theoretical studies of *language and gender*, then cognitive-frame approaches to the description of role scenarios, followed by psycholinguistic works on *association norms*, and finally studies of *social norms*, *vignette evaluation*, and *cross-linguistic validation*. Such a sequence will make it possible to lead consistently to the research gap and substantiate the need for an integral model.

A. Theory of Language and Gender: Gender Roles, Stereotypes, and Discursive Representation

According to the Scopus export for the query *language gender*, this area is one of the most large-scale in the interdisciplinary field: a total of 40,291 publications were identified, while the annual dynamics demonstrate steady growth from 219 works in 2000 to 4,742 works in 2025. The most notable contribution to publication activity is made by major university centers in North America, the United Kingdom, and Australia, among which the *University of Toronto*, *Harvard Medical School*, *University of California, Los Angeles*, *University of British Columbia*, *University of Melbourne*, and *University of Oxford* stand out. At the same time, the list of the most cited publications for this query shows that a broad two-word search includes not only studies specifically focused on language and gender, but also research in *computational linguistics*, *public health*, *psychology*, and *social theory*. This means that for the literature review on our topic it is necessary to select not all highly cited publications indiscriminately, but only those directly related to the linguistic representation of gender, gender roles, stereotypes, and metapragmatic expectations. Therefore, for this subsection it is advisable to rely on specialized linguistic and sociolinguistic studies in which gender is treated as a category of discursive, ideological, and cultural construction. *See Figure 1*.

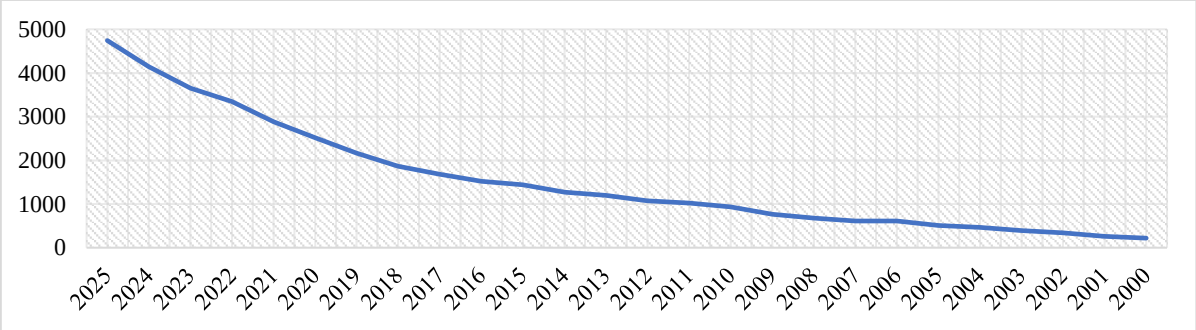


Figure 1. Dynamics of Scopus Publications for the Query “Language Gender” From 2000 to 2025

Recent studies show that within the *language and gender* block there is an increasing shift from the general description of differences between male and female speech toward the analysis of *gender ideologies*, *normative expectations*, and the linguistic mechanisms underlying the reproduction of social roles. Evidence from Kazakh paremias and gender-marked phraseology demonstrates that linguistic units continue to preserve stable role models in which female and male images are distributed across different evaluative and functional zones (Igissinova et al., 2024; Mustagaliyeva et al., 2024; Ramanova et al., 2024). From the perspective of Turkic studies, research on the concept *kyz* and on political discourse is also important, revealing the dependence of gender representation on cultural context, communicative situation, and public role position (Shokym et al., 2022; Aydyralieva et al., 2025). In the broader sociolinguistic field, contemporary studies shift the focus to the relationship between language, gender ideologies, and normative representations: thus, evidence from Russian-language material shows that ideas of “female” and “male” politeness are sustained not only by lexical or grammatical means, but also by *metapragmatic expectations* regarding permissible speech behavior, while studies of gender stereotypes emphasize their influence on the persistence of social and evaluative schemas (Del Popolo Marchitto, 2025; Palomino-Suárez & Aparicio García, 2025). Taken together, these works confirm that the theory of *language and gender* provides the necessary conceptual foundation for our article; however, by itself it still does not explain which particular scenarios will receive normative approval and how this is related to cognitive and frame parameters.

B. Cognitive and Frame Semantics in Studies of Gender Representations

According to Scopus data for the query *frame semantics*, 9,767 publications were identified, and the dynamics for 2000–2025 likewise demonstrate steady growth: from 58 works in 2000 to 1,061 in 2025. At the same time, the organizational profile of this corpus differs markedly from the previous block: here, the leading positions are occupied primarily by research centers in China and international technological universities, including *Chinese Academy of Sciences*, *Tsinghua University*, *Peking University*, *Zhejiang University*, and *Carnegie Mellon University*. The list of the most highly cited publications for this query also shows a high proportion of works from adjacent fields, including *computer vision*, *artificial intelligence*, *ontological modeling*, and *automatic semantic role labeling*. Consequently, when using this search block for our review, it is necessary to exclude articles in which *frame semantics* functions merely as a computational tool and retain those studies in which frames are treated as cognitive-semantic models for describing meaning, scenarios, and role structure. For the present article, studies that make it possible to translate gender roles into the format of formalizable frames are particularly important and connect them with corpus annotation and the interpretation of discursive material. *See Figure 2*.

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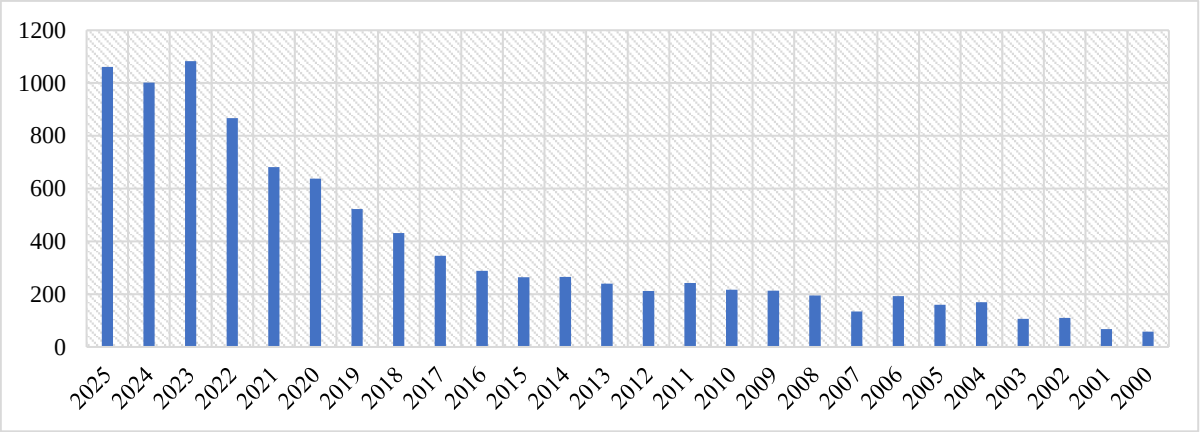


Figure 2. Dynamics of Scopus Publications for the Query "Frame Semantics" From 2000 to 2025

Contemporary publications on *frame semantics* confirm that this approach remains one of the most productive for the operationalization of complex social and discursive scenarios. The review article *FrameNet at 25* emphasizes that *FrameNet* constitutes not merely a lexicographic database, but a corpus-organized system for describing frames, participant roles, and lexemes activating prototypical situations, which makes this toolkit suitable for the analysis of recurring models of social knowledge (Boas et al., 2024). In more applied studies of recent years, *frame semantics* has been used to describe the genre structures of scientific texts, the translation of pragmatically marked units, and the identification of implicit semantic patterns in specialized discourse, which demonstrates the high transferability of the frame-based approach to different types of linguistic material (Chen & Weninger, 2024; Triesch-Herrmann & Czulo, 2024; Qian et al., 2025). In Kazakh-language material, a comparable analytical perspective is demonstrated by a study of intellectual parameters in legal discourse, where conceptually significant features are likewise described as a structured system of semantic characteristics (Bakytzhanova et al., 2025a). For our article, studies that combine frame annotation with automated annotation expansion are especially significant, since they demonstrate that even complex semantic structures can be brought into a reproducible annotation format (Anwar et al., 2024; Cui & Swayamdipta, 2024). In this respect, the study of the concept *memory* in Kazakh-Russian-English phraseology is also indicative, as its cross-linguistic semantic typology reveals stable models of conceptualizing culturally significant content (Bakytzhanova et al., 2025b). As a result, it is precisely *frame semantics* that provides the methodological foundation for describing gender-role scenarios as stable configurations of roles, evaluations, and domain restrictions; however, in Turkic studies this potential has thus far been realized only partially.

C. Psycholinguistics of Associations and Associative Indices as an Analytical Instrument

According to the Scopus export for the query *association norms*, 15,274 publications were identified. The publication dynamics are likewise upward: from 100 works in 2000 to 1,339 works in 2025, with a particularly noticeable acceleration occurring after 2020. Among the most active institutions are *University of Washington*, *University of Michigan*, *University of Toronto*, *Columbia University*, *Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health*, *University of Pennsylvania*, and *University College London*. At the same time, the most highly cited works within this search field demonstrate strong interdisciplinarity: some of them pertain to the theory of social norms, organizational psychology, or behavioral studies rather than to the associative experiment proper. Therefore, for the purposes of the present review, only those publications should be considered relevant in which *association norms* are interpreted as a psycholinguistic resource for studying the *mental lexicon*, *semantic networks*, the strength of links between concepts, and the cultural salience of linguistic units. It is precisely these works that constitute the methodological basis for the calculation of associative indices in our article. *See Figure 3.*

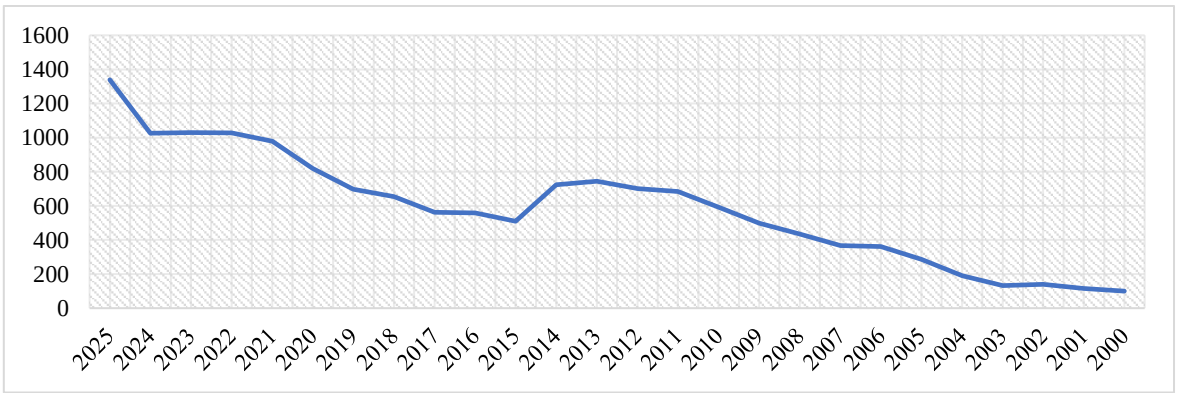


Figure 3. Dynamics of Scopus Publications for the Query "Association Norms" From 2000 to 2025

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In recent years, the psycholinguistics of associations has developed toward the creation of large standardized databases and network models of meaning. Thus, the *Small World of Words* project for Rioplatense Spanish demonstrates that large-scale associative norms can be used both as a model of semantic memory and as a basis for analyzing centrality, density of connections, and variability of responses (Cabana et al., 2024). This logic is also confirmed by the study of the associative-verbal field *qonaq*, where the structure of responses makes it possible to identify empirically the core and the periphery of a socially significant concept (Akhmetova et al., 2026).

D. Normative Approval, Social Norms, and Cross-Linguistic Validation

The social norms search block proved to be the broadest: 91,291 publications were identified in Scopus. The annual dynamics show particularly intensive growth in recent years: from 648 works in 2000 to 10,549 in 2025. The most active institutions are represented by major universities in Canada, the United Kingdom, the Netherlands, Australia, and the United States, including *University of Toronto*, *University of Oxford*, *University of Michigan*, *Universiteit van Amsterdam*, *University College London*, and *University of Melbourne*. However, as in the previous blocks, the most highly cited works for the query *social norms* cover an extremely broad spectrum of disciplines, ranging from *social psychology* and *institutional theory* to *behavioral economics* and *decision-making technologies*. Therefore, for our article it is critically important to narrow this corpus to studies in which *social norms* and *injunctive norms* are linked to gender roles, the assessment of behavioral acceptability, sanctions for norm violation, and methods for the empirical measurement of such evaluations, including *vignette-based* and *scale-based procedures*. *See Figure 4*.

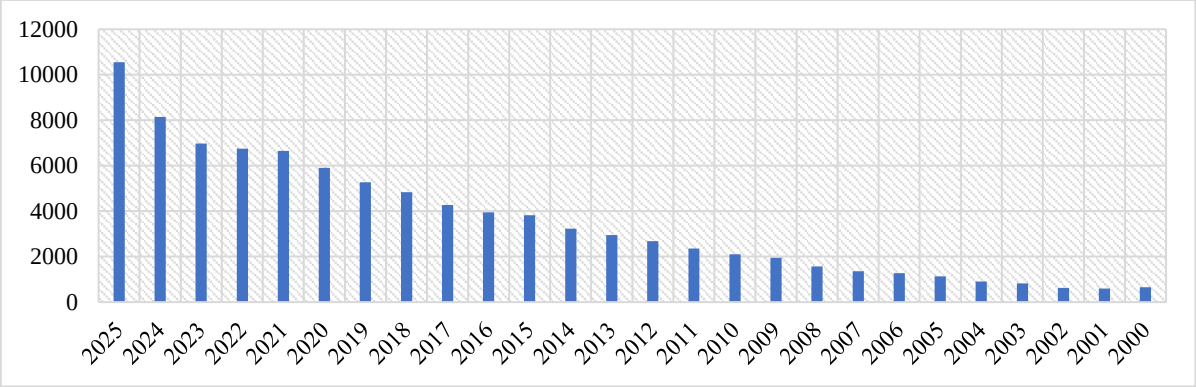


Figure 4. Dynamics of Scopus Publications for the Query “Social Norms” From 2000 to 2025

Recent studies confirm that normative approval and gender norms are most appropriately examined through the category of *injunctive norms*, that is, collective understandings of what is considered proper, expected, and socially sanctioned. In the review article by Wenzel and Woodyatt (2025), the dual nature of social norms is emphasized: they possess high explanatory power, but require a precise distinction between *descriptive* and *prescriptive* components. The works of Douglas et al. (2024) and Schorn and Wirth (2024) show that the violation of injunctive norms is linked to mechanisms of social sanction and to changes in the perception of acceptable behavior, whereas studies of gender norms indicate a stable relationship between perceived social expectations and evaluations of *family*, *work*, and *public roles* (Sedlander et al., 2024; Bassoli, 2025; Rimal et al., 2025). For the methodology of our article, studies using *vignettes* as an instrument for identifying social and gender norms are especially important: they show that the scenario-based presentation of a situation makes it possible to obtain more precise judgments about the acceptability of behavior than direct survey methods, especially when sensitive roles and sanctions are involved (Bukuluki et al., 2024; Bellani et al., 2025). Thus, this block of literature provides direct justification for the operationalization of *normative approval* through *vignette evaluation* and for the subsequent testing of the stability of the model in cross-linguistic comparison.

III. Material and Methods

A. Research Materials

The research materials were organized into four interrelated blocks, which ensured the transition from the theoretical and methodological mapping of the research field to the preliminary validation of the *integral model* of the normative approval of gender roles in Turkic languages. The material included *bibliographic data*, a *linguistic corpus*, *associative data*, and the results of *vignette evaluation*. For clarity, the structure of the materials used is presented in *Table 2*.

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TABLE 2
MAIN MATERIAL BLOCKS USED IN THE STUDY

Material block	Content	Function in the study
Bibliographic	*Scopus*-indexed publications selected through the queries *language and gender*, *frame semantics*, *association norms*, and *social norms*	Used to map the research field and refine the conceptual framework
Linguistic	Authorial corpus of gender-role nominations and scenarios in Kazakh, Uzbek, Karakalpak, and Kyrgyz	Forms the empirical basis for frame and comparative analysis
Associative	Data from the free associative experiment	Used to calculate associative indices reflecting cognitive accessibility and semantic organization
Vignette-based	Responses to vignette scenarios describing gender-role situations	Used to operationalize normative approval as the dependent variable

As shown in *Table 2*, the empirical design of the study combines *theoretical*, *linguistic*, *psycholinguistic*, and *evaluative* types of data. Such a structure made it possible to connect the description of gender-role representations with their *associative salience*, *frame organization*, and *normative assessment* within a single analytical model.

The bibliographic block included the search for and selection of publications by the keywords *gender roles*, *gender norms*, *gender stereotypes*, *language and gender*, *gendered discourse*, *frame semantics*, *frame annotation*, *word association*, *associative norms*, *vignette*, *factorial survey*, *cross-linguistic validation*, and *measurement invariance*, as well as by the names of the Turkic languages being compared. The linguistic block was represented by an authorial corpus compiled on the basis of Kazakh, Uzbek, Karakalpak, and Kyrgyz and including *lexemes*, *stable word combinations*, *phraseological units*, *paremias*, and *discursive fragments* representing gender roles in the spheres of *family hierarchy*, *transitional status*, *reputational evaluation*, *sanction*, *agency*, and *intrafamilial conflict*. At the current stage, the corpus has a hierarchical organization and includes *10 frame macroblocks*, *56 internal frames*, and *42 basic role nominations*. The associative block made it possible to identify such parameters as *frequency concentration*, *centrality*, *evaluative saturation*, and *variability*, whereas the vignette block ensured the empirical assessment of the perceived permissibility, acceptability, and normative approval of gender-role scenarios.

B. Research Tools and Methods

Methodologically, the study is based on *cognitive-discursive*, *psycholinguistic*, and *comparative-typological* approaches and combines *bibliographic-analytical*, *associative*, *annotational*, *vignette-based*, and *comparative-modeling* levels of analysis.

The bibliographic block was implemented on the basis of the *Scopus* database and included the search, selection, thematic systematization, and analytical interpretation of publications in the key areas of the study. When mapping the research field, *thematic clusters*, *keywords*, *publication dynamics*, and the *structure of the scholarly corpus* were taken into account, which corresponds to contemporary recommendations for conducting and interpreting bibliometric analysis (Donthu et al., 2021; Lim & Kumar, 2024). Within the framework of this article, this block performs an auxiliary function and serves to substantiate the research framework.

The psycholinguistic block is implemented through the *free associative experiment*. *Associative norms* are regarded as a system of stable semantic connections reflecting the organization of the *mental lexicon*, the *centrality of features*, and their *evaluative markedness*. The analysis primarily includes *frequency concentration*, *centrality*, *evaluative saturation*, and *variability*, since it is precisely these indicators that make it possible to identify the degree of *cognitive entrenchment* of a role within the associative network (Cabana et al., 2024; Aeschbach et al., 2025).

To measure the dependent variable, the *vignette method* is employed, in which respondents are presented with short scenarios that vary by role, domain, normative load, conflictivity, and hierarchical position. After the vignette is presented, the evaluation of the permissibility, acceptability, or approval of the described situation is recorded. This approach is especially productive in the study of *social* and *gender norms*, since it makes it possible to work not only with direct declarations but also with reactions to a typified social scenario (Bukuluki et al., 2024; Espinoza et al., 2025).

Frame annotation serves as the central analytical instrument of the article. Based on *frame semantics* and *FrameNet*, it is adapted to Turkological and gender-role analysis and codes each unit or scenario by *role position*, *macroframe*, *internal frame*, *domain*, *agency*, *hierarchy*, *reputational load*, *sanctioning potential*, *conflictivity*, *and evaluative vector*. Annotation reliability is ensured through pilot coding, discussion of disputed cases, and *inter-expert agreement* on the codebook.

The *statistical-modeling* block compares partial and integral models of *normative approval* through models *M0*, *M1*, *M2*, *M3*, and *M3+*. These models sequentially test the contribution of *basic variables*, *associative indices*, *frame features*, and *domain-specific and cross-linguistic modifiers*. Comparison is based on *AIC*, *statistical significance*, and *pseudo-R^2*, making it possible to assess the explanatory role of each analytical block.

The *cross-linguistic* component compares data from *Kazakh*, *Uzbek*, *Karakalpak*, and *Kyrgyz* to identify which parameters form a common explanatory core and which depend on the linguistic and domain configuration of the material. In this way, cross-linguistic testing is treated as an assessment of *model transferability* and the stability of individual predictors in closely related Turkic systems.

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IV. Results

The present article reports the intermediate results of the first stage of a three-year project study aimed at the development and cross-linguistic validation of an *integral model* of the normative approval of gender roles in Turkic languages. The *Results* section records the empirical data already obtained, making it possible to assess the structure of the *authorial corpus*, the preliminary configuration of the *integral model*, the composition of significant *associative indices*, the principles of *frame annotation*, and the nature of the *cross-linguistic stability* of the identified features. The conclusions presented reflect the current stage of model verification and are regarded as intermediate, yet methodologically and empirically significant, results of the first stage of the project.

In accordance with the aim of the article, the results are organized into five interrelated blocks: *corpus-structural*, *integral-modeling*, *associative*, *frame-annotational*, and *cross-linguistic validation*. This organization makes it possible to show which parameters have already been established at the current stage and how they are incorporated into the explanation of the normative approval of gender roles in Kazakh, Uzbek, Karakalpak, and Kyrgyz. The full list of role nominations and the complete codebook are not included in the main text of the article, since they constitute part of the developing *authorial corpus*; the section presents aggregated quantitative parameters and a limited set of representative examples sufficient for verifying the analytical logic of the study.

Table 3
Main Results of the First Stage of the Study

Type of result	**Brief description of the established result**	**Scientific function of the result**
Corpus-structural	An authorial corpus of gender-role nominations has been systematized and distributed across *macroframes* and internal scenario blocks	Forms the empirical basis of the model
Integral-modeling	A scheme has been established that combines *vignette evaluation*, *associative indices*, *frame features*, *domain parameters*, and *cross-linguistic modifiers*	Forms the explanatory framework of the study
Associative	The significance of *frequency concentration*, *centrality*, *evaluative saturation*, and *variability* has been preliminarily established	Makes it possible to model the cognitive accessibility of the role
Frame-annotational	Stable parameters of *agency*, *hierarchy*, *reputation*, *sanction*, and *conflict* have been identified	Makes it possible to model the scenario organization of the norm
Cross-linguistic validation	A common explanatory core has been identified, with variation in the strength of individual predictors across languages and domains	Determines the limits of cross-linguistic extrapolation

The findings obtained at the current stage show that the results do not constitute a set of disparate observations, but rather an internally coherent system linking the structure of the corpus, model parameters, and cross-linguistic verification.

The first block of results is associated with the formation of the *authorial corpus* and its internal architecture. At the current stage, the codebook includes *10 frame macroblocks* covering status and social norms, life cycle and kinship, *home and household*, *gender morality and corporeality*, *communication and speech control*, *power and agency*, *intrafamilial conflict*, *evaluative virtues and vices*, *ritual-religious foundations of norms*, as well as *extreme evaluation and stereotyping*. Within these macroblocks, *56 internal frames* and *42 basic role nominations* have been identified and distributed across the *core*, the *periphery*, and *context-dependent zones of coding*. Such a volume makes it possible to regard the current dataset not as a random selection of units, but as a structured corpus suitable for *pilot cross-linguistic validation*.

Table 4
Architecture of the Authorial Corpus Used at the First Stage of the Study

Corpus parameter	**Quantitative indicator**	**Analytical significance**
Number of frame macroblocks	10	Forms the upper level of the coding framework
Number of internal frames	56	Provides the detailing of the scenario structure
Number of basic role nominations in the initial codebook	42	Creates the core of the stimulus-frame dataset
Number of languages in the cross-linguistic comparison	4	Makes it possible to test the transferability of the model
Type of corpus organization	Hierarchical	Combines role, scenario, evaluation, and domain

The corpus-structural result shows that the analysis is based on hierarchically organized material, in which each unit is correlated with a broader framework of *norm*, *status transition*, *conflict*, *agency*, or *sanction*.

The second block of results pertains to the construction of the *integral model*. Preliminary analysis shows that normative approval is not explained by any single parameter taken in isolation. At the current stage, it is described as the result of the intersection of five levels: the *vignette-based evaluation* of the scenario, the *cognitive accessibility* of the role feature, its *frame organization*, the *domain affiliation* of the situation, and the *cross-linguistic modification* of meaning. Accordingly, the study establishes an *integral model* in which the dependent variable—the degree of *permissibility*, *acceptability*, and *approvability* of the role scenario—is correlated with *associative indices*, *frame parameters*, and *cross-linguistic modifiers*.

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TABLE 5
COMPONENTS OF THE INTEGRAL MODEL OF THE NORMATIVE APPROVAL OF GENDER ROLES

Model block	***Operational component***	***Analytical function***
Evaluative	*Respondent's vignette-based response*	Records the level of normative judgment
Associative	*Frequency concentration, centrality, evaluative saturation, variability*	Describes the cognitive accessibility and cultural entrenchment of the feature
Frame-based	*Role, agency, hierarchy, reputation, sanction, domain*	Describes the scenario organization and role structure
Cross-linguistic	*Comparison of data from four languages*	Makes it possible to assess the transferability and variability of the model
Comparative-modeling	*M0–M3+*	Makes it possible to compare the explanatory power of the individual blocks

The third block of results is associated with the associative level: at this stage, it has been established that, for explaining normative approval, it is not isolated responses as such that are significant, but rather the parameters characterizing the organization of the associative field. The greatest analytical weight is assigned to frequency concentration, centrality, evaluative saturation, and variability. This block of results means that normative approval is associated primarily with those roles that simultaneously display high reproducibility, systemic significance within the associative network, and stable evaluative markedness.

TABLE 6
ASSOCIATIVE INDICES PRELIMINARILY CONFIRMED AT THE FIRST STAGE OF ANALYSIS

Associative index	***What it reflects***	***Preliminary analytical role***
Frequency concentration	Reproducibility of the response	Identifies the cognitively entrenched core of role features
Centrality	The position of the response in the network	Shows the systemic significance of the feature
Evaluative saturation	The connection of the response with a positive or negative frame	Relates the association to the vector of normative evaluation
Variability	The degree of dispersion of responses	Makes it possible to distinguish stable roles from contextually mobile ones

The fourth block of results pertains to *frame annotation.* The analysis showed that gender roles are distributed across stable zones of scenario organization: *status and anti-norm*, *status transition*, *marital contract*, *maternal and age-hierarchical roles*, *micropolitics of kinship*, *polygynous conflict*, *vulnerability and dependence*, *reputational sanction*, as well as *heroization* and *extreme evaluation*. This result makes it possible to regard a role nomination not as a neutral unit, but as a position within a normatively organized scenario. Given the need to preserve the completeness of the authorial corpus beyond the scope of the article, only a limited set of representative examples is provided in the main text.

TABLE 7
REPRESENTATIVE EXAMPLES OF FRAME ANNOTATION WITHOUT DISCLOSING THE FULL CORPUS

Type of role position	***Example nomination***	***Dominant frame node***	***Normative load***
Basic family role	*ana* (*mother*)	Mother: care, self-sacrifice, blessing	High normative support
Transitional status	*qalyńdyq* (*bride*)	Bride: status transition	Norm associated with ritual expectation
Hierarchical kinship role	*ene* (*mother-in-law*)	Mother-in-law: power and control	Ambivalent normativity
Role of adaptation and subordination	*kelin* (*daughter-in-law / bride entering husband's family*)	Daughter-in-law: labor, adaptation, hierarchy	Strong scenario regulation
Conflictual polygynous status	*toqal* (*second wife*)	Second wife: competition of statuses	High evaluative tension
Vulnerable marginalized position	*jesir áıel* (*widow*)	Widow: vulnerability and control by norms	Partial sanctionality
Reputational label	*kári qyz* (*old maid / unmarried older woman*)	Reputation and public gaze	Strong social markedness
Heroized position	*batyr ana* (*heroic mother*)	Support, heroization	Maximum positive marking

The examples presented show that *frame annotation* makes it possible to record through which scenario components a role receives support, restriction, ambivalence, or sanction.

The fifth block of results pertains to the comparison of *partial* and *integral models*. Preliminary testing of *M0–M3+* shows that the basic variables capture the general background of variability, the addition of *associative indices* increases the sensitivity of the model to the cognitive entrenchment of features, and the introduction of *frame parameters* strengthens the explanation through scenario structure. At the current stage, the most productive configuration remains the *integral* one, in which the cognitive and frame-based levels are considered jointly, while domain and cross-linguistic differences function as modifiers. In the final journal version, this block should be supplemented with numerical indicators comparing the models.

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TABLE 8
COMPARISON OF PARTIAL AND INTEGRAL MODELS AT THE INTERMEDIATE STAGE OF ANALYSIS

Model	***Composition of predictors***	***AIC***	***p***	***pseudo-R²***	***Preliminary conclusion***
M0	Basic variables	1248.6	–	0.07	Captures the general background of variability
M1	Basic variables and associative indices	1209.4	<0.001	0.14	Refines the cognitive accessibility of roles
M2	Basic variables and frame features	1198.1	<0.001	0.17	Refines the scenario-based and hierarchical organization of roles
M3	Associative and frame features	1159.8	<0.001	0.25	Provides a more complete explanation of normative approval
M3+	Integral model with domain and cross-linguistic modifiers	1137.6	0.003	0.30	Shows the highest intermediate explanatory power

Note: AIC denotes the Akaike Information Criterion; p denotes the level of statistical significance when compared with the previous model; pseudo-R^2 denotes the indicator of the explanatory power of the model. Lower AIC values and higher pseudo-R^2 values indicate model improvement.

As *Table 8* shows, the sequential introduction of *associative* and *frame-based predictors* is accompanied by a steady improvement of the model. The decrease in *AIC* from 1248.6 in the baseline model to 1137.6 in the integral configuration *M3+* indicates an improvement in the balance between *goodness of fit* and *model complexity*. At the same time, the increase in pseudo-R^2 from 0.07 to 0.30 indicates a substantial expansion of the explanatory power of the model. The most pronounced gain is observed in the transition to model *M3*, where *associative* and *frame-based parameters* are combined for the first time into a unified scheme, whereas *M3+* further refines the explanation through *domain* and *cross-linguistic modifiers*.

TABLE 9
CROSS-LINGUISTIC STABILITY OF THE RESULTS AT THE CURRENT STAGE OF THE STUDY

Feature group	***Kazakh %***	***Uzbek %***	***Karakalpak %***	***Kyrgyz %***	***Composite stability index %***	***Degree of stability***
Transitional statuses	86	82	74	80	80.5	High
Maternal and age-hierarchical roles	88	84	71	83	81.5	High
Kinship hierarchy and daughter-in-law roles	79	76	68	74	74.3	Moderately high
Reputationally sanctioned positions	72	69	61	66	67.0	Moderate
Polygynous and intrafamilial-conflict roles	63	58	47	55	55.8	Moderate / variable

As *Table 9* shows, the highest degree of *cross-linguistic stability* at the current stage is demonstrated by *transitional statuses* as well as *maternal* and *age-hierarchical roles*, for which the composite stability index exceeds 80%. This indicates the presence of a *common normative core* reproduced in Kazakh, Uzbek, Karakalpak, and Kyrgyz materials. *Kinship hierarchy* and *daughter-in-law roles* demonstrate a moderately high degree of stability, yet vary in the degree of *conflictivity* and the rigidity of *scenario regulation*. The least stable are *polygynous* and *intrafamilial-conflict roles*, which confirms their heightened sensitivity to *linguistic* and *cultural configuration*.

V. DISCUSSION

The results obtained generally confirm the regularities already identified in Turkological studies, yet place them at a higher explanatory level. Thus, Igissinova et al. (2024), analyzing 154 Kazakh paremias, demonstrated the stability of such thematic zones as *family roles*, *girls' upbringing*, *motherhood*, *family preservation*, and *masculine-feminine qualities*; this is consistent with our conclusion that normative approval is organized around recurring *role scenarios* rather than around a random set of gender-marked units. Similarly, Ismailov (2017), using material from Uzbek, Kazakh, and Karakalpak, showed that Turkic phraseology systematically distributes male and female images through positive and negative connotations, that is, it already contains an incipient evaluative architecture, which in our study was translated into the format of *frame-based* and *associative predictors*. Consequently, our results do not contradict existing observations, but generalize them in the form of a model in which a role is regarded as a *normatively organized scenario position* rather than merely as an ethnocultural image.

The validity of the results is supported by the use of internationally validated instruments: *frame semantics* and *FrameNet* for modeling recurring situations and roles (Boas et al., 2024), *associative norms* for identifying the centrality and connectedness of units in the mental lexicon (De Deyne et al., 2019), and *vignette-based methods* for detecting social and gender norms beyond direct self-report (Stoebenau et al., 2019; Bukuluki et al., 2024); together, these confirm that the combination of *frame annotation*, *associative indices*, and *vignette evaluation* in our study is methodologically grounded and reproducible.

The main future direction of the research lies in further calibration and expansion of the model. The next stages require a larger corpus, clearer differentiation of *traditional*, *transitional*, and *contemporary* material, and broader *vignette* coverage across key domains. It is also important to refine predictor weights for the Kazakh, Uzbek, Karakalpak, and Kyrgyz datasets. Overall, the most productive continuation of the study lies in its interdisciplinary

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development and broader cross-linguistic validation.

VI. Conclusion

The study shows that normative approval of gender roles in Turkic languages is best explained not through isolated lexical or evaluative descriptions, but through an integral model combining *associative indices*, *frame annotation*, and *vignette evaluation*. The results of the first stage confirm that approval is shaped by recurring scenario structures in which cognitive accessibility, role configuration, domain expectations, and evaluative direction interact. Thus, the analysis moves beyond descriptive interpretation toward reproducible multifactor modeling.

The findings both confirm patterns already noted in Turkological research and show that gender roles cannot be adequately described at only one level, whether *lexical*, *phraseological*, *paremiological*, or *evaluative*. Only the combination of *frame modeling*, *associative structuring*, and *vignette-based measurement* explains how such roles become cognitively accessible, evaluatively stabilized, and socially interpreted.

A key result is the confirmation of the explanatory value of the integral model itself. *Associative indices* reveal cognitive accessibility and evaluative density, while *frame annotation* reconstructs the scenario logic through which these meanings become socially recognizable norms. Comparison of Kazakh, Uzbek, Karakalpak, and Kyrgyz data also shows that the model has a common explanatory core, although its predictors vary across languages and domains. Overall, the article contributes to *Turkology*, *gender linguistics*, *psycholinguistics*, and *frame semantics* by proposing a verifiable model for analyzing gender roles as normatively organized scenarios.

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Pidgin as Resistance in Elif Batuman's *The Idiot*: The Psychology of Power and Acquisition in Selin's ESL Tutoring

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***Abstract*—This research examines the intersection of psychology and linguistics in Elif Batuman's *The Idiot*, concentrating on the protagonist Selin Karadag's experiences working as an ESL instructor in a housing complex. Through a detailed analysis of tutoring sessions with students Joaquín and Linda, this study examines the shortcomings of traditional English instruction in a repressive institutional setting. It specifically examines the evolution of language anomalies, such as the expression "Papel iss blonk." It claims that the "pidgin" that develops between the student and the tutor is a type of psycholinguistic resistance against the institutional force of authority, in addition to being a failure to learn. Grounded in critical pedagogy and a psycho-narratological perspective, this study examines how Selin's linguistic training conflicts with the reality of teaching, leading to a crisis of intimacy, authority, and self-perception. The findings suggest that learning one's own language is a defensive strategy that addresses the colonial relations present in the process of learning standard English and offers insight into Selin's overall existential crisis in terms of meaning and communication. In contrast to simple grammar, language acquisition is shown in this study to be a complex process of identity, negotiating power, and psychological safety.**

***Index Terms*—psycholinguistics, power dynamics, ESL pedagogy, identity formation, language acquisition, critical pedagogy**

I. Introduction

Batuman's *The Idiot* (2017) is a seminal work of contemporary literature that explores the relationship between language, meaning, and identity formation. The novel takes place in the 1990s at Harvard University, where the protagonist, Selin Karadağ, a freshman of Turkish heritage, navigates the complexities of college life, cultural alienation, and the onset of maturity. The main focus of Selin's experience is her obsession with linguistics and the idea that language constructs reality, which is reflected in both her academic preferences and her personal life. Selin, a linguistics major, is exposed to the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis and struggles to comprehend the notion that other languages make you think about other things (Batuman, 2017). This language determinism forms her world and corresponds to current studies on cognition that propose that language habits play a major role in thought processes (Boroditsky, 2011). Therefore, Selin considers communication not only as a form of sharing information but also as a psychological creation of the self. Nevertheless, as much as the action in the novel is based on the digital communication of Selin and the romantic confusions, another dark-side subplot of the novel is her employment as a tutor in an adult educational program that provides in-depth information about the psychology of power and acquisition.

Despite the richness of this subplot, Selin and Ivan's email correspondence has received minimal prior critique, which reads the book through the lens of digital intimacy and the epistolary letter form. Although Selin's love growth has been better understood thanks to these works, the linguistic and psychological parts of the ESL tutoring narrative have not received much attention. Specifically, there is a lack of understanding of how the collapse of traditional language instruction becomes a site of resistance rather than just a failure. Selin's relationships with her students, particularly the development of a unique linguistic code with Joaquin, reveal a complex power struggle that mirrors Selin's larger existential concerns. When Joaquin struggles with the phrase "The paper is white," he finally comes to "Papel is blonk", Selin reflects, "It wasn't English. It was some kind of creole. No—a pidgin" (Batuman, 2017). In addition to being a pedagogical error, it is a compilation of the creation of a shared psychological environment that goes beyond the institutional requirements. This is similar to Canagarajah's (1999) assertion that code-meshing is necessary to oppose linguistic imperialism.

According to this research, the pidgin that Selin and the students worked on in their tutoring sessions served as a psychological haven and a weapon against the institutionalized oppression of normal English learning. To understand how the student and tutor benefit from the tutor's use of nonstandard grammar, this study examines the usage of a psycholinguistic and critical pedagogical framework. According to this thesis, this linguistic hybridity demonstrates that Selin has a crisis of authority and intimacy and that her position as a knowledge importer is transformed into that of an importer of knowledge: "interpreter of a language that only he and I can understand" (Batuman, 2017). This transformation questions colonial relations in language teaching, indicating that successful relationships are usually

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founded on the failure of standard communication and not on success. Selin's frustration: "Why should I have to figure it out? Why don't any messages come to me clearly?" (Batuman, 2017) emphasizes the mental strain of the need to fill such gaps, which has been noted in many cases of bilingual emotional processing (Pavlenko, 2005). However, inside this load, one communicates with the other.

These themes are systematically discussed in the remainder of this article. The literature review will position the study within the current body of knowledge on linguistic relativity in fiction and power relationships in ESL teaching to determine the gap that this research will fill. The methodology section describes the qualitative textual analysis strategy, including how certain scenes between Joaquín and Linda are coded as psychological and linguistic signs. The formation of pidgin as a form of resistance, the psychological consequences of the failure of the tutoring process on Selin's identity, and its implications for the overall understanding of power in language acquisition are analyzed in the discussion. In the last section, we review the results, highlight how ambiguous language may create closeness, and suggest directions for further study of Batuman's work. This presentation uses this structure to demonstrate how the acquisition of language in *The Idiot* is not based on grammatical rules but on the complex negotiation of power, identity, and psychological safety.

II. Literature Review

The study of linguistic relativity provides a framework for understanding how the structure of language affects mental and emotional experiences. Many literary and linguistic works have addressed the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis, which asserts that a language's lexical and grammatical patterns dictate the reality perceptions of its speakers (Whorf, 1956). Literary analysis can benefit from this hypothesis, particularly in cases where characters intentionally struggle with the relationship between language and thought, even though more nuanced accounts of linguistic influence have largely supplanted earlier linguistic determinism (Boroditsky, 2011). Batuman explores the psychological implications of linguistic relativity via Selin's use of the Turkish evidentiary suffix -miş in *The Idiot*, a narrative device that denotes reported or inferred knowledge rather than anything actually observed. As Selin reflects, "different languages force you to think about different things" (Batuman, 2017), a feeling that is consistent with recent cognitive studies pointing to the existence of habitual patterns of language that may indirectly direct attention, memory, and reasoning (Lucy, 1992). Evidentiality in narrative (Chafe & Nichols, 1986) also sheds light on the theme of Selin being preoccupied with miş as an expression of a wider concern about truth, subjectivity, and the validity of personal witnessing, which is a key theme of the novel's psychological structure.

Another critical perspective through which Selin's tutoring experiences can be evaluated is the intersection of power and pedagogy in the process of second-language learning. Freire's (1970) Pedagogy of the Oppressed is considered a classic text on how schools can recreate social stratifications with what Freire called the 'banking concept' of education, in which teachers impart knowledge to inactive students instead of actively creating knowledge through dialogue with them. This framework has been successfully applied to the ESL context, where the imposition of standard English is sometimes a form of linguistic imperialism that excludes the identity and communicative practices of non-native speakers (Pennycook, 1994; Canagarajah, 1999). In *The Idiot*, the adult education program is focused on memorizing test content to take the GED exam, as exemplified by Linda's blunt rejection of Selin's contextual teaching approach, insisting that the test book—not classroom analogies—is the only relevant authority (Batuman, 2017)—depicting the conflict between institutional ambitions and the actual realities of students. This is supported by recent studies focused on teacher power in EFL classrooms, which have shown that expert and legitimate bases of power can encourage student dependency instead of autonomy. In contrast, informational and referent bases may be more appropriate for promoting intrinsic motivation (Dianithi et al., 2020). The tension experienced by Selin in trying to reconcile her position as an institutional representative with her need to experience genuine connection with such students as Joaquin and Linda, therefore, represents larger debates concerning equity, agency and resistance in language education.

Psychonarratology is a methodology for examining the construction of character consciousness using linguistic and narrative means. The framework was first established by scholars such as Fludernik (1993, 1996), who focused on the mediation of narrative discourse on readers' access to the inner lives of characters, especially the use of free indirect discourse, stream of consciousness, and any other device that makes it difficult to distinguish between the narrator and the character (thoughts). Fludernik's idea of experientiality, which refers to the quality of storytelling that recreates the conscious experience of the protagonist, is helpful in examining Selin's psychological development because Batuman adopts a close third-person point of view that reflects Selin's linguistic preoccupations and emotional ambiguities. The fact that psychonarratological processes can be applied to modern fiction, as recently proven by psychonarratologists (Herman, 2011; Zunshine, 2006), makes this approach particularly suitable for a novel such as *The Idiot*, where Selin's linguistic training determines how she perceives and treats other people. In addition, studies of trauma and identity in literature (Caruth, 1996; LaCapra, 2001) indicate that the fragmentation of narration and linguistic stuttering might be used as formal analogs of psychological suffering, a tendency that can be traced in Selin's scenes with tutors, when the breakdown of communication indicates internal anxieties about power, intimacy, and self-definition.

Although these theoretical frameworks are rather rich, it is important to note that they do not operate in isolation: Freire's banking concept and Foucault's discourse of power together illuminate how institutional authority is reproduced through language, while Norton's investment theory and Canagarajah's code-meshing framework collectively explain the learner's psychosocial response to that authority. Psycho-narratological tools from Fludernik (1996) and Herman (2011)

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provide the methodological bridge for accessing character consciousness amid these overlapping pressures. This integrated theoretical framework underpins the present analysis. In contrast, scholarship on Elif Batuman's *The Idiot* has largely focused on humor, epistolary form, and digital intimacy, with little emphasis on the linguistic psychology of the ESL tutoring subplot (Kakutani, 2017; Wood, 2017). The most common critical accounts focus on the relationship between Selin and Ivan through emails as the key relationship in the novel, examining the theme of romantic ambiguity and mediated communication (Bloom, 2018; Miller, 2019). Although these readings provide helpful insights into how Batuman is involved in the current digital culture, they tend to disregard and underestimate the way the tutoring scenes are themselves a parallel play on language, power, and psychological resistance. Pidgin expressions such as "Papel iss blonk" between Selin and Joaquin are not only a failure of pedagogy but rather a negotiation of identity and intimacy that deserves long-term theoretical consideration. Recent studies on the phenomenon of pidginization and code-meshing in education (Young, 2009; Baker-Bell, 2020) imply that linguistic hybridity in the question of pidginization and code-meshing can be viewed as a resistance against the ideology of standardized lingo; however, this has not been applied in a systematic analysis of *The Idiot*. Likewise, the discussion of linguistic relativity and psychological subjectivity in the novel has not been theorized sufficiently, considering current theories of cognitive and pedagogical systems, despite the fact that scholarship on Batuman's previous work, *The Possessed*, has studied her treatment of the Russian literary tradition (Batuman, 2010).

This gap is notable because the tutoring scenes in *The Idiot* provide a rare opportunity to explore the significance of literary narratives in revealing the psychological aspects of language acquisition and power. By incorporating the perspectives of linguistic relativity, critical pedagogy, and psycho-narratology, this study aims to prove that Selin's experiences as an ESL tutor are not an incidental feature of the novel's main interests but a key place from which one can begin to analyze the experience of the interface between language, identity, and resistance. The psychological mechanisms of second language acquisition, as recent studies of motivation and engagement in the process have highlighted (Liu et al., 2020; Alamer, 2021), are closely linked to learners' sense of autonomy, competence, and relatedness, which Selin also experiences in terms of searching for and identifying herself amid institutional and interpersonal pressures. This analysis contributes to Batuman's scholarship and the larger discussion of how literature may make the multivariedness of language, power, and psychological experiences visible.

III. Methodology

This analysis is based on the psycho-narratology of the text (Fludernik, 1993, 1996) and analyzes linguistics, psychology, and power in Elif Batuman's *The Idiot* (2017). Psycho-narratology interprets the role of narrative discourse as a mediating factor concerning access to character consciousness, which is most appropriate in the close third-person view one is more accustomed to in the example of Selin in her ESL tutoring experiences. Data collection was conducted by systematically reading passages in the Adult Education Program in Parts One and Two. To ensure analytical rigor, passages were selected according to explicit criteria: scenes were included only if they contained identifiable instances of linguistic deviation, power negotiation, or metacommentary on language use by the narrator or characters. Each passage was coded against all three analytical categories before cross-referencing, thereby reducing the interpretive circularity. The main scenes of analysis are: (1) the formation of "Papel iss blonk" with Joaquin, which displays the stage of pidginization as the deviation of a language and psychological negotiation; (2) the lesson of fractions with Linda, showing the obstacle to the conventional pedagogical language and the power relationships in general; and (3) the monologues of Selin about her failure to tutor, which demonstrates the psychological hassles of overcoming the barriers between institutional and interpersonal communication. These scenes were chosen because of the abundant language fracture, identity negotiation, and socioeconomic disparity present in them. Three complementary coding strategies were incorporated into the analytical framework. First, language analysis is applied to recognize the phenomena of pidginization, code-switching, and evidentiality, which is based on Canagarajah's (1999) work regarding the issue of resistance to linguistic imperialism with the help of hybridization. Second, influenced by trauma theory, which focuses on the late processing of emotions, psychological coding analyzes Selin's emotions, such as anger, tiredness, and intimacy, attributed to the failure of communication (Caruth, 1996). Third, the analysis of power examines socioeconomic inequalities between the privileged student Selin and the housing project students based on Freire's (1970) critique of the bank concept of education and Peirce's (1995) framework on social identity and investment in learning a second language. The combination of these strategies allows for a multidimensional analysis of how linguistic hybridity can be a means of psychological resistance to institutional limitations.

IV. Discussion

A. Pidgin as Intimacy vs. Failure

The tutoring scene between Selin and Joaquin in Elif Batuman's *The Idiot* is a critical point of analysis for the psychological and linguistic processes of power under institutional restrictions. When Selin attempts to teach Joaquin, a Dominican plumber, basic English syntax, namely, the sentence The paper is white, the dialogue does not run pedagogically at all. The final form used by Joaquin, "Papel is blank," is more than a linguistic mistake; it is the birth of a pidgin that carries out the roles of intimacy and defiance (Batuman, 2017). Selin explicitly identifies this hybrid

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utterance as neither standard English nor a fully formed Creole, but something in between—a pidgin born of their shared tutoring sessions (Batuman, 2017). Such linguistic hybridity establishes a secret language that essentially marginalizes the establishment of the adult education program, where memorization of the GED test rather than real communicative competence is the main order of business.

This change essentially alters Selin's role from that of a person of authority who imposes standard language to that of a co-creator of a shared linguistic code (Batuman, 2017). This can be related in the context of critical pedagogy to a call in opposition to the so-called banking concept of education, in which knowledge is stored and not built (Freire, 1970). Selin and Joaquin form a relationship that confirms Joaquin as a linguistic agent instead of correcting him to conform to the standards of the normative. Nonetheless, Selin is heavily burdened by the psychological weight of this intimacy, as she is highly conscious of her status as a Harvard student tutoring within a housing project. She privately acknowledges her complete collapse as a conventional ESL instructor (Batuman, 2017). Such a confession demonstrates a crisis of authority; she is as effective as an institutional measure, but she is unwilling to undermine it with this personal linguistic invention.

This linguistic negotiation can be described as having a psychological toll, with intense tension between guilt and connection between the parties. Selin talks of fatigue and frustration, expressing her exhaustion at having to decode messages that never plainly reach her (Batuman, 2017). This distress is due to her compromised role between the institution's requirements and the humanity of her students. This makes pidgin a defensive tool that protects both sides against the systemic malfunction of the inflexible curriculum of the program. However, it also heals Selin's loneliness, including her in a language of communication that would not be as useful in their particular dyad. Selin works through this failure in her emails to Ivan, showing the exhaustion of emotional work to bring the different worlds together. She admits that she is tired and angry that she has to interpret Joaquin's invented language, which puts stress on the interpretation. The invention of this vernacular language emphasizes how poor the standard form of English can be in bridging socioeconomic divides. This meaningful interaction is likely to emerge as a result of the failure to establish a standard form of communication, not its triumph. The Joaquin scene ultimately highlights how linguistic sidesteps can be used as a form of psychological safe zone, as it defies the colonial aspect of teaching the language but also reveals the vulnerability of the tutor in terms of authority, effectiveness, and emotional work required to mediate the gap between the two worlds. Pidgin is not only a failure of acquisition but also a successful act of mutual recognition beyond the surveillance of educational institutions.

B. Resistance to Acquisition

The tutoring of the relationship between Selin and Linda is a critical space in the study of the tension between institutional pedagogy and learner agency. In trying to explain fractions as a real-life analogy (in this case, a circle and labelling it as a pie), Selin is categorically dismissed by Linda, who rejects the pie analogy outright, asserting that the test book—not the teacher's contextual illustrations—is the only legitimate source of knowledge (Batuman, 2017). Such rejection is not only a type of cognitive block but also a form of sociopolitical resistance. Linda is aware that a pedagogical approach that Selin uses, i.e., forcing contextual meaning, is not in line with the instrumental objectives of the GED exam. This relationship illustrates the type of bank concept of education used by Freire (1970), in which students are viewed as empty vessels to which teachers deposit their knowledge. This order is interfered with by Linda, who insists on following the letter of the book and proclaims that she knows what knowledge is valuable to her in the context of her particular socioeconomic situation.

This opposition reflects Selin's psychological struggle with the triviality of her college discussions (Batuman, 2017). In the same way as Linda does not see the pie analogy as pertinent to her needs of survival and testing, Selin does not always see the decontextualized, abstract discourse of the university as a part of her own reality, as she questions why meaning never seems to reach her directly (Batuman, 2017). Both characters are in dissonance between what is being provided by the institution and their lived experiences. According to Norton (2000), language learners can engage in learning only when they feel that they have received a payoff for their investment in identity. Linda will not make an investment in the pedagogical narrative of Selin as it does not pay off in her short-term objective, which is passing the test. This results in a change in power relations; Linda is now the judge of legitimate knowledge, and the role of authority is no longer held by Selin but by a disappointed Linda.

Moreover, Linda's refusal of the pie metaphor can be interpreted using Canagarajah's (1999) model of fighting linguistic imperialism: Linda denies the cultural assumptions of the pedagogy by declining the teacher's efforts to naturalize math using domestic comparisons. She claims that the institutional language of the test book is more powerful than the communicative language of the classroom. This is in line with Foucault (1980), who states that power is experienced by the production of truth in this classroom; the truth is the test book and not what the teacher says. Pennycook (1994) states that critical pedagogy should not ignore such power relations and that teachers tend to unintentionally recreate social inequalities with the help of a standardized approach. Selin fails to fill this gap, which demonstrates the shortcomings of standard English teaching when it does not consider the agency of the learner. Finally, communication collapse shows that learning is not a neutral process of transferring skills but a contest of power in which the learner has the ability to alter the dynamics of interaction.

C. The Psychology of the Interpreter

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Selin's confession about her ESL student Joaquin—"As far as teaching English goes, I've failed. I am now the interpreter of a language that only he and I can understand" (Batuman, 2017)—is a turning point of psychological change between authority and ambiguity. This incapacity to implement regular linguistic patterns reflects her identity crisis, especially in her email communication with Ivan. She is just as unable to confirm the grammatical accuracy of the phrase "Papel iss blonk" used by Joaquin as she is to confirm the truth of the emails that Ivan constantly sends to her, with coded title names or with opposing messages. This comparison implies that Selin is turned into an interpreter of ambiguity, as opposed to clarity, and that she is operating in a world where meaning is created by a mutual lack of understanding and not objective truth.

The psychological situation corresponds to Pavlenko's (2005) study, which states that bilingual individuals frequently perceive emotional processing in different languages because of the presence of more than two languages. The fight with the Turkish evidential suffix *-miş*, which identifies information as hearsay in Turkish, permeates Selin's English interactions, forming a cognitive system in which the truth is never final. Language habits, as postulated by Whorf (1956), shape the way one thinks; therefore, Selin's preoccupation with*-miş* makes her believe that uncertainty is a linguistic and existential fact. In turn, her failure as a tutor is not only pedagogical but also existential; she reproduces the *-miş* pattern in her relations with Ivan, in which nothing is ever said directly, but everything is always mediated through layers of interpretation and possible falsehood. The moral weight of this interpretation is apparent when Selin confesses her exhaustion and anger at having to decode meaning that never arrives transparently (Batuman, 2017).

Moreover, the identity crisis that Selin is going through is aggravated by what Norton (2000) defines as investment conflict. She puts her own emotions into the language developed privately with Joaquin and Ivan. However, she is not recompensed with social capital in the institutional structures of Harvard or the adult education program. Although she forms a dyadic connection with the rest of the group, her role as an interpreter alienates her from the group. The narrative discourse mediates Selin's entrance into the mind, revealing her loneliness via her internal monologues, which Fludernik (1996) calls experientiality. According to this view, Selin's perplexion is a structural part of her psychological development and not just a sign of dissatisfaction. Her own skepticism and the narrator's voice blend in her head, and she becomes engrossed in the narrative.

D. Institutional Power vs. Personal Agency

Selin's situation against the adult education program director is a pivotal point, as institutional power is directly in conflict with individual agency. The director explains socioeconomic inequality in their setup when Selin tries to quit tutoring math after a shuttle accident: "An upper-class privileged white kid, younger than you, comes to where you live and tells you, basically, 'You need to know this and this and this, and then you can be part of my society'" (Batuman, 2017). This criticism highlights the colonial nature of education, in which the power of the teacher is reliant on perceived social legitimacy and not on pedagogical competence. The director emphasized that trust cannot be instantly offered when the relations in education reproduce larger societal structures. This relationship is consistent with Freire (1970), who claimed that education, in most cases, is an oppressive mechanism that forces the worldview of the oppressor into that of the oppressed. Her affiliation with Harvard does not work to her advantage. Still, it works against her, which depicts Bourdieu's (1986) definition of cultural capital, in which institutional credentials caution people against each other instead of merging them in the classification of classes. Selin understands that her investment in the students' success is considered with suspicion because her capital comes from the same institution that the students are willing to use.

Selin withdraws into ESL tutoring, where standard language disintegration forms a secret Pidgin. Nevertheless, her mental withdrawal is not limited to the classroom; it extends further to her online communication with Ivan. In one conversation with a child and adolescent psychologist, Selin's email relationship is pathologized in a striking analogy: "This whole thing reminds me of the Unabomber... I was thinking about computers, that this is all about power and computers. That's where the power is, in the computers" (Batuman, 2017). The digital medium enables both sides to conceal their vulnerabilities; hence, the psychologist opines that the digital medium allows the parties to have an idealized relationship where both sides are not at risk of finding their vulnerabilities in the real world. He noted, "He obviously enjoys hiding. And you, too, are hiding behind the computer" (Batuman, 2017). This point can be connected to the fact that Turkle (2011) also analyses the concept of digital intimacy, in which people feel dominated by technology but empower themselves to dominate the presentation of themselves, which is frequently not as untidy as face-to-face communication. The computer becomes a locus of power, which repeats the idea of Foucault (1980) when he states that power is not just possessed, but it is also executed in the form of discursive practices and technologies. In Selin's case, the computer is the mediator of her identity, and she is able to be both present and absent.

Finally, Selin's agency is torn between these two institutional and digital realms. She is turned down by the housing project students because of her institutional power, but is attracted to Ivan through the power of digital anonymity. She has invested in these relationships in terms of Norton's (2000) theory of identity and language learning, in which learners invest in practices that will provide them with some form of payoff for their identity investment. The investment Selin makes in the tutoring program only brings frustration and claims of privilege, whereas in her emails, it brings intensive but also psychological alienation to the fore. The Unabomber analogy delineates this peril of seclusion and argues that power is derived from digital mediation at the expense of genuine human bonds. Selin's conflict is therefore not just one of teaching the English language or loving Ivan, but one of bargaining agency in institutional and technological systems, which tries to establish her role as opposed to establishing herself. The criticism of the director and the analogy of the

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psychologist are united to demonstrate that Selin finds no agency again; only the structures in which she lives fail to allow this to happen, and she only moves in a world where power is imposed on her. She exercises it, which, in her understanding, she barely understands.

V. Conclusion

This study has shown that the pidgin created in the course of Selin's ESL tutoring sessions in Elif Batuman's *The Idiot* is a multifaceted psychological negotiation, as opposed to a pedagogical failure. The discussion based on psycho-narratology and critical pedagogy aspects shows that linguistic hybridity is a defence mechanism against institutionalized power. Education, as presented by Freire (1970), tends to recreate oppression by the so-called concept of banking; however, when Selin breaks the rules of conventional English, she allows an opportunity to establish genuine contact that breaks the given pattern. The results show that language learning in the novel does not pertain to grammatical correctness but to negotiating power, identity, and psychological safety. The invention of such expressions as "Papel iss blonk" is not a learning failure but the successful engagement of mutual recognition, which lies beyond the surveillant gaze of the educational institution.

Selin confesses that she was a failed teacher and a winner as a self-appointed interpreter of a private code shared only between herself and Joaquin (Batuman, 2017), which is a turning point in her mental growth. This change is in line with Norton's (2000) theory of investment, which proposes that learners will be willing to invest in language practices that provide them with a payoff in terms of their identity. In Selin's case, the payoff is intimacy and not institutional validation. The pidgin questions the colonial process of language teaching and indicates that effective interaction is usually achieved through the loss of conventional communication. This is echoed by Canagarajah (1999), who claims that the solution to linguistic imperialism is code-meshing, so that practices of hybrid languages serve as a point of resistance. The fact that Selin also accepts ambiguity as opposed to clarity is indicative of her greater existential dilemma with the Turkish evidential suffix *-miş* and the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis (Whorf, 1956). She shifts away from Chomskian grammatical yearning to Whorfian language relativity and argues that identity is made through the negotiated flux of meaning and not unalterable truths.

The consequences of this work extend beyond the tutoring subplots. Further study is necessary on the effect of Selin's major in linguistics on her love life, especially her online communication with Ivan. Similarities can be drawn between the vernacular language developed with Joaquín and the secretive language of her emails. These two relationships are based on a common code that does not involve external validation. The emails defend Selin and Ivan against the weaknesses of in-person communication, similar to the psychologist's analogy of the Unabomber that digital power is more powerful than in-person communication (Batuman, 2017). Based on Pavlenko's (2005) research on the impact of emotions and multilingualism, future research might examine how being bilingual influences the way Selin processes emotions in pedagogical and romantic contexts. In particular, studying the impact of the *-miş* tense on her perception of Ivan as a sincere individual could help identify additional links between her linguistic education and her ability to relate to others in terms of intimacy.

Finally, *The Idiot* suggests that learning a language is an exceptionally individual process connected with power and closeness. Selin's journey through the spheres of authority and interpretation demonstrates that real communication is frequently hidden between words. This way of accepting the indecision of "Papel is blonk" allows Selin to build an identity not based on established truths but on the psychological negotiation of meaning itself. This redefines resistance as the subversive activity of finding common ground in an unfavorable reality rather than an aggressive revolt. According to Batuman, the incapacity of conventional language to bridge the existing divides between individuals is not a flaw but rather an opportunity for an even more authentic, if fractured, human interaction. By managing the complexities of power, identity, and psychological safety, Selin developed her own voice. In summary, this study makes three interrelated contributions: (1) it extends psycho-narratological methodology to the analysis of pedagogical failure in contemporary fiction; (2) it demonstrates that pidginization in literary narratives can function as both a linguistic and psychological resistance strategy; and (3) it repositions the ESL tutoring subplot of *The Idiot* as a theoretically significant site for examining the intersections of power, identity, and language acquisition. For practitioners, these findings suggest that moments of communicative breakdown in the classroom are not merely obstacles but potential openings for genuine relational engagement that standardised curricula tend to foreclose.

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"Let's Make a Home for You": A Reparative Reading of *Lunar Boy*

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***Abstract*—This paper examines *Lunar Boy* (2024) through Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's concept of reparative reading, analysing the graphic novel as a vital cultural text for the Indonesian queer community amid socio-political vulnerability. Rather than centring trauma, reparative reading highlights the cultivation of hope, joy, and care, offering marginalized readers affective resources for survival, flourishing, and fight for equality. The analysis highlights how *Lunar Boy* reimagines the understanding of gender and sexuality by centring Indu's trans identity and his queer relationship, challenging rigid binaries that empowers a new vision of belonging. Moreover, the paper discusses the importance of queer visibility through its portrayal of community and family. Drawing on José Esteban Muñoz's (2009) concept of queer futurity focusing on the horizon of genuinely possible futures and affirming present identities, the paper highlights the normalizing of queer identities within the family, friendships, and community that models the future possibility of equality and recognition. Read reparatively, *Lunar Boy* empowers Indonesian queer readers to resist erasure, cultivate resilience, and imagine a future with acceptance. Ultimately, *Lunar Boy* exemplifies the power of graphic narratives to embody reparative practices, offering strength and hope to communities navigating systemic marginalization. This paper contributes to queer studies by expanding reparative reading into Southeast Asian contexts, and to graphic narrative studies by attending to how the visual grammar of *Lunar Boy* – its colour, panel structure, and embodied representation – enacts reparative possibilities that prose alone cannot achieve, addressing the gap in research that has largely focused on Western queer narratives.**

***Index Terms*—reparative reading, Indonesian queer community, graphic narratives, acceptance, hope**

I. Introduction

The Indonesian queer community today exists in an uncertain situation, shaped by both systemic marginalization and resilience. Many grassroots activism organizations such as GAYa NUSANTARA (2012) aim to create "an Indonesia that respects, guarantees and fulfils human rights where people can live in equality, freedom and diversity in matters relating to the body, gender identity and expression and sexual orientation". Despite this, queer Indonesians continue to face state-sanctioned discrimination and social stigma. In February 2025, police in Jakarta, the capital of Indonesia, conducted a discriminatory raid on a hotel. They held dozens of LGBTQIA+ individuals on the basis of their supposed sexual orientation and gender identity. This incident was condemned internationally as harassment without legal basis (Amnesty International Australia, 2025). Since late 2024, Indonesia has witnessed democratic lapsing and increased state-sanctioned discrimination and restrictions on civil society organization, with queer rights vulnerable to rollback (Institute of Development Studies, 2025).

Schäfer (2024) argues that the new criminal code passed in Indonesia in 2022 threatens the rights of women and LGBTQ+ people and has shifted the perspective of heteronormativity to a "more violent anti-queer climate" (Schäfer, 2024, p. 811). The current situation of Indonesia highlights the urgency of cultural interventions that not only critique the oppression, but also imagine a reparative future for queer Indonesians.

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Sedgwick's (2003) concept of reparative reading offers a theoretical lens for such interventions. In her essay *Paranoid Reading and Reparative Reading; or, You're So Paranoid, You Probably Think This Introduction Is About You* (2003), Sedgwick introduces the contrast between "paranoid reading", a mode of critique that focuses on exposure, suspicion, and anticipation of harm, and "reparative reading", which seeks to assemble, nurture, and imagine alternative possibilities of survival and joy (Sedgwick, 2003; as cited in Emily, 2024). This allows the marginalized community to imagine futures beyond trauma. For queer Indonesians living through the frames of danger and erasure, reparative reading provides a methodology to reclaim cultural and literary texts as a site of healing and affirmation.

Sedgwick's framework acquires additional theoretical depth when read alongside José Esteban Muñoz's concept of queer futurity. In *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity* (2009), Muñoz argues that queerness is fundamentally oriented towards a future that does not yet exist, that it is "essentially about the rejection of a here and now and an insistence on potentiality or concrete possibility for another world" (p. 1). For Muñoz, queer cultural texts are not mere reflections of queer life but enactments of utopian possibility. Read together, Sedgwick (2003) and Muñoz (2009) provide a dual framework for understanding how *Lunar Boy* functions as a site of both reparative and futuristic cultural work by assembling affective resources in the present while projecting hope towards a transformative future. Muñoz (2009) calls this optimism "educated hope" (p. 3) that is historically grounded, and politically serious.

The choice of a graphic novel as primary text is theoretically motivated. As Hillary Chute argues in *Graphic Women* (2010) and *Disaster Drawn* (2016), the graphic narrative form possesses a unique capacity to render testimony, memory, and affect in ways unavailable in prose alone. The panel composition, colour, gutters and the drawing of bodies create a form of witness that makes legible experiences resist pure linguistic representation, and can offer imaginative worlds where queer identities flourish. For queer narratives in particular, these visual dimensions create significant theoretical weight. The graphic novel can draw bodies, render gestures of care, and visuals of belonging that directly enact the affective dimensions of reparative reading.

This paper focuses on the graphic narrative *Lunar Boy* (2024) by Jes and Cin Wibowo, Chinese-Indonesian twins. The story of Indu, a boy from the moon navigating belonging, queerness, and family, resonates deeply with Indonesian queer experiences of displacement and yearning. Awarded the 2025 Stonewall Children's Literature Award, *Lunar Boy* is now celebrated for its inspirational tone, queer representation in Indonesian culture, and imaginative and tender exploration of alienation and community. By situating Indu's struggles with fantastical yet emotionally grounded narratives, the text offers Indonesian queer readers a reparative vision, one where difference is the source of connection, creativity, and hope. It is time to focus on the reparative spaces that the communities need to gather the strength to protect, because

> during the darkest days of the AIDS crisis, we buried our friends in the morning, we protested in the afternoon, and we danced all night, and it was the dance that kept us in the fight because it was the dance we were fighting for. - Dan Savage, an American queer activist. (Forrester, 2025)

This paper takes *Lunar Boy* as a reparative narrative that speaks directly to the Indonesian queer community's present problems while embodying Sedgwick's (2003) call to imagine futures of care, survival, and joy and the strength to fight for equality.

II. Literature Review

The argument that *Lunar Boy* functions as a reparative narrative for queer Indonesians aligns with previous research on queer vulnerability, queer agency, and affect. Sotevik (2024) highlights that queer youth use vulnerability as a form of collective agency and note that the social is vital in creating space for resistance. This resonates with Indu's discovery of a queer centre, Bhinneka community centre, where the supportive networks transform isolation into belonging. Similarly, Carnes (2017) documents the persistence of queer communities in the waves of activism and argues that "still here, still queer" signalling the continuity and transformation of queer communities. *Lunar Boy* embodies this argument by normalizing queer acceptance within the family and the community. It offers Indonesian readers a reparative vision of continuity against erasure.

Sedgwick's reparative narrative, which is elaborated by Hawthorne (2018), insists on developing "multiplicity, surprises, rich divergence, consolation, creativity, and love" (p. 157). This framework is important for Indonesia, where queer narratives are often viewed with paranoia and suspicion. By focusing on Indu's trans identity and queer relationship, *Lunar Boy* represents the reparative turn that offers Indonesian readers the affective resources of joy and hope rather than trauma alone. Kimura (2024) shows how reparative reading in Japanese queer art destabilizes heteronormativity by "transing spectatorship" (p. 1). This highlights how reparative readings can localize the queerness, and *Lunar Boy* extends this practice into Southeast Asia.

The body of literature relevant to this paper is the field of Indonesian and Southeast Asian queer studies. Tom Boellstorff's *The Gay Archipelago: Sexuality and the Nation in Indonesia* (2006) remains the fundamental text on gay and lesbian identity in Indonesia. Boellstorff demonstrates that Indonesian queer subjectivities are not Western imported but culturally specific formations that negotiate the local concepts of self-identity, religion, and nationhood. He highlights that Indonesian queer identity is often constituted through mass media and cultural production. This finding lends direct support to this paper's claim that *Lunar Boy* can function as a meaningful site of identity formation and community building for its queer Indonesian readers. Rodriguez (2024) applies this analysis to contemporary events, examining how queer Indonesian Muslims navigate the demands of family, religion, and sexual identity within religious conservatism

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and neoliberal policy. These analyses provide the sociocultural framework within which this paper positions its reading of *Lunar Boy*.

Donovan and Ustundag (2017) show how graphic narratives convey trauma and social justice by rendering affect visible, presenting opportunities for "a more complicated understanding of trauma, which in turn enhances possibilities for achieving social intelligibility, recognition and justice for survivors" (p. 234). *Lunar Boy*'s visual grammar of colour and panel can enhance reparative reading precisely in these ways. Jarrard (2022) examines care in queer Christian communities and adds another perspective where response to trauma cultivates solidarity. Indu's supportive mother and inclusive communities reflect this care, situating reparative narratives as both affective and political.

While previous research has highlighted the need for reparative narratives, vulnerability, and queer community building in Western and Japanese contexts, few studies have applied these frameworks to Indonesian queer narratives and graphic novels specifically. This paper addresses this gap by situating *Lunar Boy* within Indonesian sociopolitical situations, highlighting how reparative reading can empower marginalized communities in Southeast Asia and how the graphic novel form amplifies that reparative potential.

III. Methodology

This paper employs a qualitative, interpretive methodology grounded in literary analysis. The aim is to examine *Lunar Boy* (2024) as a reparative narrative for the Indonesian queer community, placing the text within both theoretical frameworks and sociopolitical contexts.

The theoretical framework that is central to the paper is Sedgwick's concept of reparative reading, which emphasizes the assembly of affective resources of hope, care, and joy rather than focus solely on the paranoid exposure of oppression and marginalization. Reparative reading, according to Sedgwick (2003), does not deny the reality of violence but insists on cultivating affective resources of joy and hope. The aim of the reparative perspective is to build up rather than tear down. Unlike paranoid reading, reparative reading adds, builds, and enriches instead of dismantles. It gathers meanings, affects, and cultural fragments to make something whole and sustaining. As Indonesian communities, like many others, may not provide enough support to the queer community, reparative reading tries to create a reservoir of richness in stories, art, or communities.

The close reading focuses specifically on *Lunar Boy* as a graphic novel where meaning is produced through the interaction of verbal narrative and visual grammar. This requires literary close reading focusing on dialogues, characterization, and thematic structure, along with visual analysis of panel compositions, colour palette, and page architecture. This approach is theoretically driven by Chute's (2010) argument that the graphic novel form demands interpretative attention to the visual and not just the verbal.

Lunar Boy is set in a fantastical, speculative future world rather than a realistic contemporary Indonesia. This paper argues that this setting does not represent indifference to Indonesia's political relevance but is rather a condition of its reparative function. According to Muñoz's (2009) argument, utopian possibility is not an escape from politics but rather the fuel. The fantastical setting enables a form of educated hope that is grounded in the specific cultural landscape of Indonesian queer life while projecting towards transformation.

The methodology involves close reading of *Lunar Boy* while focusing on key plotlines, character development, and thematic analysis. Particular attention is paid to Indu's gender identity, sexuality, family relationships, and community interactions to create the reparative environment for the Indonesian queer community.

The paper focuses on three potential areas:

- gender and sexuality
- community and understanding
- acceptance and hope

It argues that *Lunar Boy* highlights reparative reading, offering Indonesian queer readers affective resources of hope, care, and strength to imagine a future of equality and acceptance.

IV. Discussion

A. Gender and Sexuality

One of the most prominent aspects of *Lunar Boy* is its sensitive handling of Indu's gender identity. The narrative discloses the kid's name and identity in a way that enhances their recognition as a boy, not for the external validation but for their self-understanding. The narrative begins with a nameless, nonverbal child being found in the moon and brought back to the spaceship. The beginning of the novel develops the theme of gender identity. When the child is initially gendered and named in a different way, it made them uncertain and uncomfortable in their own body.

> Mom? Can I talk to you about something? … I don't think I wanted to be called that anymore … I … I don't know. I don't understand why I feel this way … or what this feeling even is. I don't think I'm … whoever it is everyone thinks I'm supposed to be. (Wibowo & Wibowo, 2024, p. 11)

The subtle and powerful choice of hiding their initial misgendered name under scribbles (Figure 1) situates Indu's gender not as something imposed or questioned but as something lived and affirmed. The visual dimension of this moment is crucial to its reparative function and merits close attention. Wibowo and Wibowo's (2024) choice to render Indu's

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deadname, physically erased from the visual surface of the page, performs a graphic act of repair that prose cannot replicate. A written narrative would be compelled to use the deadname to describe its erasure; the graphic novel creates its absence directly. The scribble is the erasure accomplished before the readers' eyes. This is the reparative gesture that is made visual, where the partial, fragmented, misnamed self is repaired into Indu, a trans boy whose identity is affirmed on the very page. As Chute (2010) argues, the graphic novel can make visible what prose erases. In Indu's story, it makes invisible what prose would be compelled to name.



Figure 1. Initial Misgendered Name Under Scribbles (Wibowo & Wibowo, 2024, p. 9)

Similarly, an essential element in the narrative is Indu's desire to participate in the Kemajuan ceremony, a rite of passage where boys in his community are sent out to the wilderness to strengthen their masculinity and "having completed the Kemajuan … the boys receive honorary tattoos upon their return to mark the passing of their Kemajuan, and their place among the men in their community" (Wibowo & Wibowo, 2024, p. 65). The ceremony is not symbolic but is a communal recognition of boyhood and a collective affirmation offering a sense of belonging. Being a trans boy, the desire that Indu has for participating in the Kemajuan ceremony highlights the difficulties and possibilities of gender identity within the cultural traditions.

The Kemajuan ceremony, which follows a tattooing ritual, highlights the tension between normative masculinity and trans embodiment. Indu's insistence on participating in this form of inclusion reflects Sedgwick's (2003) idea of reparative narrative. He does not intend to dismantle the tradition but reimagines it as a space where trans people can belong and exist. This aligns with Sedgwick's (2003) emphasis on the possibility of nurturing an alternative future through reparative reading, rather than merely focusing on the exclusion. She states that "this is the position from which it is possible in turn to use one's own resources to assemble or 'repair' the murderous part-objects into something like a whole" (Sedgwick, 2003, p. 8).

Indu's participation in this ritual becomes a reparative act, which allows the readers to imagine a community that does not rigidly police the notion of masculinity and instead redefines and expands it.

Read through Muñoz's (2009) framework of queer futurity, Indu's insistence on participating in the Kemajuan carries an additional political charge. For Muñoz, the queer gesture, which is a small, particular act in the present, carries the utopian charge of a differently organised world. Indu's Kemajuan participation is not just about inclusion; it enacts a transformed future, suggesting that culture, tradition, and trans identity are not incompatible. For Indonesian queer readers, this is not escapism but what Muñoz (2009) calls "concrete utopia" (p. 3), where the projection of a future that is not yet real can be genuinely imaginable from the present condition.

Indu's journey as a trans boy is represented with tenderness and complexity. His struggles of being a trans boy, with both linguistic and cultural adjustments, and yearning for a shared community are not framed as a pathology but a part of a broader narrative of self-discovery. The story centres on his longing for recognition and navigating the family expectations and cultural rites. Essentially, *Lunar Boy* does not isolate Indu's trans identity as an individual, singular issue but sets it within a broader affective space of alienation, belonging, and care. When Indu is welcomed to the "Bhinneka community center, a care shelter for all queer people who needed a community" (Wibowo & Wibowo, 2024, p. 149), an old Priawan,[1] Pak Ismaya, makes Indu understand that every one of them "share a history … you may not be from here, but that doesn't mean you don't share history with us. Take it from an old Priawan, we both share the future" (Wibowo & Wibowo, 2024, p. 152).

This representation is reparative, because it resists the dominant Indonesian heteronormative discourse that frames trans identities as marginal and sin. The narrative that centres Indu's experience affirms trans boyhood as legitimate and meaningful. For Indonesian queer readers, this creates a counternarrative for the stigmatized trans identities. This graphic

[1] Indonesian term for "transmasculine", a person who was born female and identifies as a man.

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novel provides a vision of a transperson's life that is celebratory and not just about survival, rooted with a community's care and tradition.

Alongside gender identity, Indu's sexuality unfolds through his encounter with his language tutor, Aminah, a trans woman and the girlfriend of Indu's stepbrother Alan. This dynamic is crucial in the narrative, as it situates queer desire within relational bonds rather than isolating them into an individual secret. This allows the readers to understand and be reassured that love can exist openly within family structures. This narrative becomes a sense of solidarity and "compelling as alternatives to text-based representations of testimony. They present opportunities for a more complicated understanding of trauma, which in turn enhances possibilities for achieving social intelligibility, recognition and justice for survivors" (Donovan & Ustundag, 2017, p. 234).

This narrative allows the reparative reading, as it keeps queer relations supportive and generative. Indu realizes that Aminah being called Waria[2] by his classmates is not derogatory; rather, it is "an older, kind of umbrella term for feminine gender-nonconforming people … Waria gave a name to something so many people felt. That helped build communities" (Wibowo & Wibowo, 2024, p. 45). This reassures Indu that queer identity is not peculiar but part of the fabric of everyday life. It provides him with the courage to tell someone outside his family that he is a "trans too! I'm a transgender boy" (Wibowo & Wibowo, 2024, p. 47), and that made him feel welcomed outside his house. It helped him explore his own desires, to see himself reflected in others, and to imagine a future where his gender identity and sexuality is not hidden but embraced.

This willingness to embrace his own sexuality and his relationship with Noah (his pen-pal crush) deepens the reparative narrative. It was in the conversation with Noah, who identifies as bisexual,[3] that Indu discloses for the first time that he likes boys. His validation of queer love becomes a road map to his brother's coming out. These dynamics show how queer relationships and their open representation can ripple outwards and support others to find courage and affirmation. Indu's relationship is not just personal but communal. It creates a space where his brother can also articulate his identity and his emotions freely. Because of this inclusive and inviting space, Alan opened up to Indu during the Kemajuan ceremony:

> I remember being so scared of what was ahead of us. Whenever I thought about how I'd come out to my family, I'd always overthink … I couldn't mess it up. I wanted so badly to tell dad about that part of me.
>
> Then I just couldn't do it. I wasn't ready. But now I'm ready to tell you. I'm panromantic,[4] Indu. I've known that I like all sorts of people since I was your age. (Wibowo & Wibowo, 2024, p. 202)

This intergenerational aspect of queer disclosure is significant in the current Indonesian context. Family often serves as a site of repression and control. This representation of how Indu's relationship works within his family, which helps his brother come out, creates a reparative family structure, where queer identities are not silenced but nurtured with mutual recognition.

By and large, Indu's gender and sexuality narrative represent Sedgwick's reparative reading, rather than solely focusing on paranoia, a "position-understandably marked by hatred, envy, and anxiety" (Sedgwick, 2003, p. 8). *Lunar Boy* assembles moments of care, recognition, and possibility. Indu's participation in the Kemajuan ceremony, his affirming attitude as a trans boy, his recognition of queer relationships, and having a progressive, affirming family structure all contribute to a reparative vision.

For Indonesian queer readers, this vision is potentially powerful. In a limiting sociopolitical environment where queer identities are often criminalized or erased, *Lunar Boy* offers a counter discourse. It allows readers to imagine a future where trans people can participate in cultural traditions, where queer love can openly exist and be acknowledged, and where families can become supportive rather than repressive. This reparative narrative does not deny the reality of hostility but insists on cultivating hope, joy, and belonging. *Lunar Boy*, as a graphic narrative, enhances this reparative narrative. Centring trans identity and queer relationships, the text affirms the identities that are marginalized in Indonesian culture. It offers the readers care and imagination, and in doing so *Lunar Boy* becomes a reparative narrative that speaks directly to the Indonesian queer community, providing affective resources for survival and imagining futures with joy and connection.

Indu's journey as a queer person is profoundly shaped by his supportive mother. In many cultural contexts, especially in Indonesia, family functions as a repressive site. Indu's mother, Dariya, symbolizes potential affirmation of queer identities. When Indu comes out to his mother as a trans boy, she offers him the recognition and care that counterbalance the hostile society.

B. Community and Understanding

[2] Indonesian term for "trans woman", a person who was born male and identifies as a woman.
[3] Experiencing attraction towards those of one's own gender and of other genders.
[4] A panromantic person experiences romantic attraction to individuals of all genders, regardless of their own gender identity.

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Figure 2. Dariya's Acceptance of Indu's Gender Identity (Wibowo & Wibowo, 2024, p. 12)

The acceptance of Indu's trans identity and his mother's willingness to nurture his desires provide a reparative foundation (Figure 2). This maternal support is crucial, because it situates Indu's identity within a family framework of love more than rejection. Sedgwick's reparative reading emphasizes the importance of assembling resources of joy and care: "Hope, often a fracturing, even a traumatic thing to experience, is among the energies by which the reparatively positioned reader tries to organize the fragments and part-objects she encounters or creates" (Sedgwick, 2003, p. 24). This allows marginalized individuals to survive and flourish, and that creates a sense of "home":

> Homes for queer individuals can be seen not just as places of resistance to heteronormativity, but as settings where daily life is shaped by taken-on responsibilities, and where personal autonomy is manifested within, rather than against, prevailing norms and values. (Rodriguez, 2024, p. 15)

Indu's mother becomes one such resource. She, along with her husband and daughter's acceptance, enables Indu to imagine himself embedded in a network of care, which is a utopian expectation in Indonesian society. This dynamic representation of home in literature will allow the community to imagine a potential future where acceptance is possible and stimulate the strength to fight for that potential future in the political hostility.

Beyond the family, Indu visits a queer care centre, Bhinneka community centre, that introduces him and the readers to the historical presence of queer culture. This centre shapes visibility, education, and affirmation. By positioning queer individuals within the historical context, the narrative challenges the dominant heteronormative norms that frame queerness as foreign and deviant. It demonstrates that queer culture has always existed and is intertwined in the fabric of society.

Boellstorff (2006) argues that Indonesian queer identity is not constituted through biology or geography but through a shared cultural memory and community belonging. When Pak Ismaya tells Indu that they "share the future" (Wibowo & Wibowo, 2024, p. 152), he is performing precisely the kind of community building that Boellstorff identifies as foundational to Indonesian queer life, where a stranger claims someone as their own through a shared history of survival and resistance. For Indonesian queer readers who have internalized the narrative that queerness is foreign or recent, the Bhinneka community centre's visual archive of historical queer presence, rendered by Wibowo and Wibowo (2024) in warm tones and careful details, constitutes a direct counternarrative enacted through image rather than argument.

This queer centre is transformative for Indu. It allows him to see himself echoed in history, recognize himself in a broader continuum, and fight the erasure of the queer identity from the historical narrative. It provides Indu with a sense of belonging that moves beyond the present moment, placing his identity in a lineage of resilience, and this recognition manifests a reparative narrative.

The Bhinneka community centre functions as a space for Indu to connect with others. The centre is a place where he develops solidarity, connections, and affirmations. The relationships that Indu creates are not incidental; they are nurtured within a shared space that validates queer existence. The centre, by assembling resources of community, history, and friendship, provides a reparative site for the readers.

Similarly, Indu's relationship with Noah is influenced by the supportive environment of the queer centre. In a culture where queer desire is often stigmatized, a representative centre providing a space where such relationships can be explored openly, without fear, allows the readers to experience queer love as something legitimate and celebratory: "I already like

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you Noah, every part of you. Even the part you're still figuring … with my whole heart" (Wibowo & Wibowo, 2024, p. 228).

Aside from his romantic relationship, his friendships also deepen in this community centre. When his friend group tries to fit him in a normative rule, he connects with Yuliana. She was also the silent victim of these normative rules and was forced to hide her sexuality. She frequently visits the Bhinneka centre, because "I don't belong anywhere" (Wibowo & Wibowo, 2024, p. 154), something Indu had also felt. By connecting with his peers who share similar experiences, Indu finds solidarity and understanding. "If Aminah hadn't told me otherwise, I would've thought 'Waria' was a bad word. I would've thought all sorts of hurtful things. I'd be exactly all like the people making Yuliana feel this way" (Wibowo & Wibowo, 2024, p. 155).

The centre fosters a sense of belonging that counters the isolation in real life, a form of reparation providing a sense of network and care. This narrative describes how queer life is not solitary but communal, sustained through bonds of friendship and love. The confidence Indu gains from his mother's support, the Bhinneka community centre's affirmation, and his friendships allow Indu to articulate his identity with the family. This reparative discourse transforms the family into a site of mutual recognition.

"In recent years, the landscape of Indonesia's family values and moral citizenship has witnessed shifts influenced by religious values and neoliberal policies" (Rodriguez, 2024, p. 4), and the presence of the community as a centre of the narrative creates a reparative environment. Sedgwick (2003) emphasizes that reparative narrative assembles the resources and allow the individuals to imagine a future beyond the trauma. Similar to Dariya being a resource, the community that accepts queer individuals in the New Earth, the speculative Indonesian setting, is one such resource. This community provides visibility and solidarity to Indu, his friends, and the readers. This community is not just an abstract idea for Indu and the readers, but a counter to the paranoia of exclusion by assembling the possibilities of care and acceptance.

When Indonesian queer people face systemic discrimination, from law to social stigma, this representation of a queer community is often prominent. By placing Indu within such community, the novel demonstrates that even among the discrimination, community acceptance can provide resources of care, and its importance among queer individuals. The graphic novel becomes a reparative narrative that speaks directly to the Indonesian queer community, filled with futures of joy and connection.

C. Acceptance and Hope

One of the most reparative gestures of *Lunar Boy* is its normalization of acceptance with the family. As discussed earlier, Indu's mother provides a foundation for care. But beyond that, the novel expands on the acceptance of siblings and extended kin. In the Indonesian context, queer identities are often silenced by the families due to social stigma and religious conservation. But the novel proudly celebrates Indu's transition by displaying his new name for his birthday.

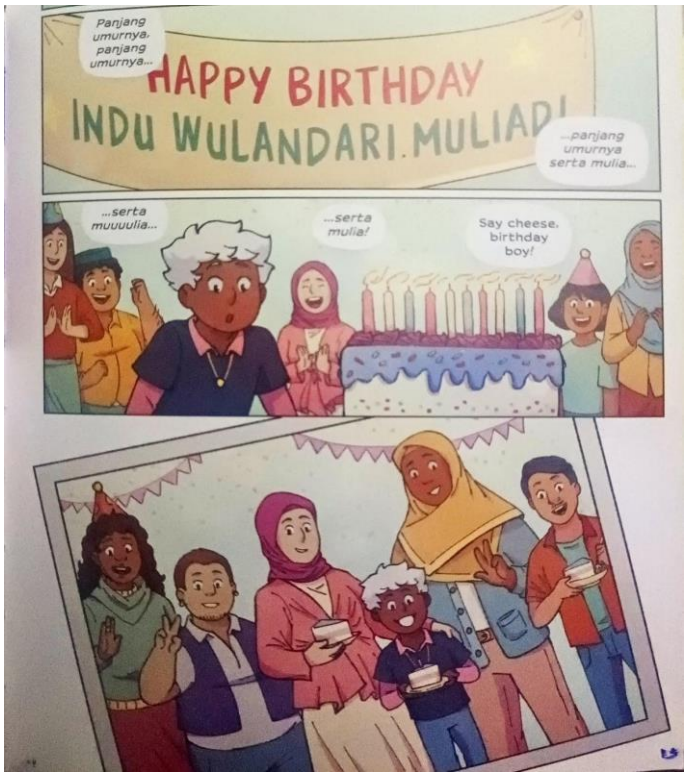


Figure 3. Indu's First Birthday as a Trans Boy (Wibowo & Wibowo, 2024, p. 13)

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This reparative narrative models a family dynamic where acceptance is possible, not hidden but embraced. This normalization of acceptance within the family provides hope for the readers that their own families might also become the site of affirmation and that they might move towards that potential future.

The visual presentation of this birthday scene (Figure 3) carries particular weight. The banners, the warm colour palette, and the assembled family gazing at Indu's name together enact Muñoz's queer gaze that carries the utopian charge of a differently organized world. It is a performative moment, where the family display acceptance openly and publicly. For Indonesian queer readers who may have experienced their family as a space of silencing, this public and celebratory act of recognition is a concrete possibility.

The acceptance from family, friends, and community taken together centres Indu's self-discovery journey. This counterargument against the current society of Indonesia provides hope, a crucial resource for the Indonesian queer community to hold on to and with which to continue the fight for justice and inclusion. Hope allows the marginalized community to breathe, to understand what they are fighting for, that queer life is not all about survival but also about acceptance and celebration with solidarity. Hope allows activism, which in turn empowers the individuals to imagine and fight for equality.

It is worth acknowledging that not all representations of hope are politically equivalent. Lauren Berlant's work on *Cruel Optimism* (2011) cautions that hope can itself become a form of harm when it attaches to futures that are structurally excluded, when the promise of acceptance becomes a reason to endure the present rather than transform it. *Lunar Boy* navigates this tension carefully. The hope it offers is not the generic optimism of liberal inclusion, with the assurance that patience and goodness will eventually be rewarded; rather, it is the "educated hope" (Muñoz, 2009, p. 3) that understands the structural obstacles to equalities and insists on collective political action as the means of realizing possibilities. Indu gains the confidence through his mother's support and the Bhinneka centre's affirmation to articulate his identity within his family, which enables the affective foundation from which political agency becomes possible.

V. Conclusion

This paper situated *Lunar Boy* through the lens of Sedgwick's (2003) reparative reading and analysed the text as a vital narrative for the Indonesian queer community at this unfavourable moment. It focused on three central themes: gender and sexuality, community and understanding, and acceptance and hope. Together, the novel functions not just as a story of individual self-discovery, but also as a reparative cultural text that provides hope, strength, and affirmation to queer Indonesians.

Lunar Boy demonstrates how graphic narratives can become the site of repair, resistance, and hope for marginalized communities. Indu's journey of self-recognition and self-acceptance, his encounters with an inclusive community, and the normalization of queer identities is more than just a story; it creates a cultural space where Indonesian queer readers can imagine themselves as visible, valued, and resilient.

Sedgwick's reparative reading insists that texts can nurture and "leave us in a vastly better position to do justice to a wealth of characteristic, culturally central practices" (Sedgwick, 2003, p. 25). The novel's narrative does not linger on trauma where "the sanctity of the family, underpinned by fundamental heteronormative and heterosexist values, requires safeguarding it from perceived contaminations, with LGBT + people being categorised as a threat" (Rodriguez, 2024, p. 4). Rather, it transforms the vulnerability into possibility, which offers readers affective resources of joy, care, solidarity, and resilience.

It is crucial to read from a reparative perspective rather than a paranoid one in a climate where queer lives are marginalized and erased. The novel's reparative position lies in the ability to show that difference among people is a source of connection and that queer love and identity can be celebrated within the cultural traditions rather than excluded from them.

The graphic form strengthens this reparative potential. It makes the emotions concrete, accessible, and shareable. It modifies the experience of recognition, ensuring that reparative reading reaches a broader audience who may find themselves reflected not just in Indu's struggles, but in his triumphs and fleeting happiness.

The paper's engagement with *Lunar Boy* as a specifically visual text makes a contribution to queer studies as well as graphic narrative studies. Following Chute (2010, 2016), the analysis emphasized that the formal properties of the graphic novel – such as panel structure, colour grammar, the drawing of bodies – independently enact reparative possibilities. The scribbled out deadname, the chromatic shift from dysphoric tone to warm tones shows belonging, and the open splash panels of queer solidarity together constitute a visual argument for reparative reading. This registers the potential of graphic narratives, which make readers feel the reparative before they fully articulate it.

This novel is not a narrative of survival, but a forethought of flourishing. *Lunar Boy* bestows the Indonesian community with hope and strength. It enables Indonesians to imagine futures of equality and belonging. It reminds the queer community that reparative narratives create resilience, affirm identities, and inspire collective action that is "invisible or illegible under a paranoid optic" (Sedgwick, 2003, p. 25).

Thus, this paper argues that *Lunar Boy* is not just a literary text, but a cultural intervention. With reparative reading, it empowers queer Indonesians to fight for recognition and imagine a future where acceptance is not exceptional, but ordinary. Moreover, the paper contributes to queer studies by extending Sedgwick's framework and Muñoz's queer futurity into a Southeast Asian context. It also contributes to Indonesian literary studies by applying graphic narrative

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theory to a culturally significant queer text. Additionally, it demonstrates how the visual grammar of *Lunar Boy* enacts reparative possibilities unavailable to prose. Together, these contributions answer Sedgwick's (2003) challenge to attend to "the many ways in which selves and communities succeed in extracting sustenance from the objects of a culture –even of a culture whose avowed desire has often been not to sustain them" (p. 35).

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Alienation in Contemporary Kazakh Prose: Artistic Mastery and Psychological Dimensions in Zhadyra Shamuratova's "Infinity Between Seconds" and "The Chest"

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***Abstract*—Being a psychological state, alienation manifests in modern literature as profound estrangement from self, others, and society, often reinforced by globalization and technology. This study aims to fill the gap in research into the motif of alienation in modern Kazakh prose. Using a comprehensive approach that combines comparative and hermeneutic methods, it explores the ways how the motif of alienation is expressed in the collections "Infinity Between Seconds" and "The Chest" by one of the prominent authors in modern Kazakhstan, Zhadyra Shamuratova. The qualitative literary analysis enabled the identification of various dimensions of alienation: self-fragmentation, social estrangement, spiritual estrangement, and loss of national identity. Our research demonstrates how individual literary techniques including the use of specialized language, detective elements, and the grotesque allow revealing alienation from different perspectives and relating them to current issues in today's Kazakhstan. This study of contemporary Kazakh prose offers conclusions regarding the writer's mastery in using contemporary imagery in prose and psychologism in revealing societal realities, as well as contributing to the enrichment of postmodern literature by connecting global existential crises with national revival.**

***Index Terms*—alienation, contemporary prose, Kazakh literature, postmodernism**

I. Introduction

The motif of alienation, which permeates the works of leading authors of world literature, such as Franz Kafka (Kittler, 2025), Haruki Murakami (Mishra & Pattnaik, 2024), and Samuel Beckett (Papa, 2025), acts as a fundamental category revealing the identity crisis of modern man. Alienation is interpreted as an individual's separation or estrangement both socially, politically, and morally (Azizova et al., 2025), and as emotional isolation or detachment from others (Lumi & Lumi, 2015). Alienation remains a persistent motif in literary works belonging to different literary

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eras, taking various forms due to social, psychological, or cultural factors (Gautam, 2025). In contemporary literature, alienation extends from a merely individual matter to "broader social malaise" (Azizova et al., 2025, p. 2) and is highlighted as a critique of modernity, portraying the isolating effects of urbanization, industrialization, and the decay of traditional values (Senapati & Bano, 2025).

Emerging in the context of post-Soviet transformation and globalization, contemporary Kazakh prose is becoming an attractive object of scholarly research within the context of understanding human existence (Zhamankozova & Toxanova, 2024). In the era of accelerated migration and digitalization, the society in Kazakhstan is experiencing a breakdown in traditional ties, resulting in an individual's existential isolation. Although the motif of alienation and loneliness in Kazakh literature first attracted the attention of writers and scholars during the Soviet period (Abdikov, 1997), it acquired a new resonance in the development of prose after Kazakhstan gained independence in 1991. The literature of independent Kazakhstan not only addresses contemporary themes but also deeply analyzes the problem of personality through the image of an individual in modern society (Temirbolat, 2023). The depiction of characters as unique, inimitable individuals, a mysterious world, and cognitive poetics (Aimukhanbet et al., 2025), gained particular potential after liberation from Soviet censorship. In contrast to the Soviet era, contemporary Kazakh prose and poetry clearly demonstrate a bold, experimental approach. Drawing spiritual nourishment from independence, the younger generation of writers and poets clearly demonstrate a tradition of mastering the latest trends in world literature, writing style, thought, and a desire for bold innovation, primarily in form.

Along with innovation, considerable attention in literary studies has recently been paid to the analysis of alienation and loneliness in contemporary Kazakh poetry. For example, a comparative analysis of the means of expressing alienation and loneliness in different eras of Kazakh literature is provided, covering psychological, social, and philosophical aspects (Tashymbayeva, 2020). In the works of the contemporary Kazakh poet Bakhyt Bedelkhanuly, alienation and loneliness are viewed as a spiritual and existential state, symbolizing deep immersion in the spiritual world and philosophical reflections on existence and nature (Khuatbekuly, 2025). However, despite the growing interest in the motif of alienation in Kazakh poetry, little is known about the specific expressions of this motif in contemporary Kazakh prose. At the same time, Kazakh prose is becoming a frequent subject of research in the field of contemporary literature, particularly in terms of analyzing the characteristics of postmodern literature through the use of conceptual metaphors (Rakymzhan et al., 2022) and the role of archetypal image in expressing modern national ideology (Akbulatov et al., 2025). While the motif of alienation and loneliness has received considerable attention in global postmodern literature (Masood et al., 2025), this area remains understudied in the Kazakh context.

In our investigation, we aim to expand the scope of analysis of Kazakh postmodern literature by examining the expression of the motif of alienation in the works by one of the prominent authors in contemporary Kazakhstan, Zhadyra Shamuratova. In her prose, the main focus is on the inner world of an individual in the context of the social transformations in independent Kazakhstan, where the central place is occupied by the motif of alienation. In our paper, a comprehensive analysis combining comparative and hermeneutic methods is done of the writer's literary works from the collections "Infinity Between Seconds" and "The Chest", aiming at the identification of various dimensions of alienation and their connection to current issues in contemporary Kazakh society. The systematic comparison of prose texts focuses on how the motif of alienation manifests itself across various narrative contexts, characters, and stylistic devices. We compare variations in the depiction of alienation across stories, identifying recurring patterns as well as contrasts in the author's approaches to the same motif. The hermeneutic method is used to interpret the symbolic, linguistic and stylistic layers of the selected texts. The analysis begins with a close reading of verbal details and moves on to reconstructing the deeper meanings these devices convey in relation to alienation, reflecting the tensions and contradictions of contemporary Kazakh society.

Our research demonstrates how individual literary techniques including the use of specialized language, detective elements, and the grotesque allow the author to reveal alienation from various perspectives, from manifestations of the individual's inner nature to the loss of national identity, from social to spiritual estrangement. This study examines the motif of alienation not as a universal designation, but as a fluid and historically constructed phenomenon, taking on various forms in diverse cultural and literary contexts. In Zhadyra Shamuratova's prose, alienation functions not only as a psychological state but also as a structuring aesthetic principle, organizing narrative, language, and genre hybridity within the context of postmodernism. This approach allows for the examination of alienation as a national-postmodernist category, reflecting both global literary trends and the unique cultural and existential challenges of contemporary Kazakh prose.

II. Tradition, Innovation, and Psychological Depth in Zhadyra Shamuratova's Prose

In postmodern literature, the mini-genre has gained prominence (Ismakova, 2015), encompassing diverse forms such as short stories, essays, novellas, and intellectual prose. In both of her collections, "Infinity Between Seconds" (2021) and "The Chest" (2023), alongside with short stories, Zhadyra Shamuratova often turns to the short genre of the novella. The novella as a short-prose genre is known for concluding the story sharply and unexpectedly, and leaving the reader with a thought. It is often considered to be the most sophisticated mode of short fiction (Kimber, 2016), differing from a story by its imaginative plot, unusual storyline, and compositional structure without detailed narration. Being longer than a short story but shorter than a novel, the novella appears to occupy a clear formal niche (Frank, 2023). The

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defining characteristic of a novella is its form: it typically has no subplots and revolves around a single main storyline, focused on one pivotal turning event, such as an unexpected accident, a revelation of one person as another, or other sudden intrusions of the inexplicable into the characters' daily lives (Fuchs, 2019). In this respect, Zhadyra Shamuratova's short works correspond to the requirements of the novella genre: they are brief in length, the plot line is completed abruptly, and the author's idea is deliberately withheld, leaving the reader with something to ponder over. Although the novellas are short, the author highlights the complex and intertwined issues of human relationships in contemporary Kazakh society exhausted by social problems in the information age.

Zhadyra Shamuratova's prose is also distinct in the way the writer selects and identifies her themes, conducting conducts their in-depth exploration, revealing their connection to her own spiritual worldview. By discovering her subject matter in this way, the writer strives to shape her unique creative signature. As evidence of this, one may point to the way she titles each of her works and how she carefully identifies and refines the urgent and pressing issues of her time. The common themes and significant issues in her novellas include the problems of youth, unemployment, the alienation of individuals in a rigid and unfeeling society, the spiritual and internal crisis of the community, the protection of Kazakh national interests in a society permeated by corruption, national education, national identity, language, the impact of global trends on national consciousness and values, the frequent occurrence of criminal incidents, the contrast between village and urban civilization, and the social, domestic, and political issues that exist between authorities and people.

Another outstanding feature in Zhadyra Shamuratova's writing is her ability to rationally use the typical features of a literary character with psychological internal and external descriptions in creating a contemporary image. This demonstrates her deep research ability and sensitivity to the social milieu. The writer skillfully portrays the issues mentioned above through the inner psychological and tragic conflicts of the ordinary people. She masterfully presents eternal themes such as the love between mother and child, the passion for art, wealth and poverty, sorrow, loneliness, the human struggle with one's inner self, and, most importantly, each character's loyalty to oneself and one's inner beliefs, regardless of circumstances. Examining the gallery of characters in Zhadyra Shamuratova's prose, one finds that her characters are either professionals suited to the modern era or members of social groups shaped by the new society. Furthermore, the author is innovative in introducing previously unseen characters in prose, who are representatives of different social groups, anti-images such as swindlers, exploiters, outcasts. These characters are neutral, without a division into "good" or "evil", which reflects postmodernism through multilayeredness and rejection of norms.

Each character in the collections by Zhadyra Shamuratova is portrayed as an unfortunate person carrying the burden of alienation. Some novellas show the incompatibility of religious beliefs and extremist tendencies among social life and modern youth with traditional national values (Akylzhan's entanglement and misguidance in religion in "Infinity Between Seconds"), while the others portray self-alienation and self-destruction of a person, for instance, "Snail Meat with Garlic", where Asylbek, consumed by greed, wagers all his possessions at a casino, ruins his family, and suffers the consequences of his reckless actions, or "The Secret Revealed at Dusk", where the actress lives in isolation from others, facing failures in love and artistic pursuits, suffering from mental illness, and being forced to isolate herself from people. Through her characters, the writer presents a realistic picture of our contemporary era by displaying prototypes of people in today's society.

In Zhadyra Shamuratova's works, special attention is attracted to artistic details and techniques of portraiture in psychological depiction. Her writing reveals the inner emotions and struggle of the characters, employing stream of consciousness, free dialogue, and narrative-driven artistic expression. Another innovative feature of her writing is the addition of a detective element, as she thoroughly explores criminal themes and strives to develop this literary field. The frequent presence of detective elements in her works is no coincidence, as the author herself has experience working in the press of the internal affairs sector. This background allows her to deeply study and reflect on her topics, providing the freedom to address domestic social and universally relevant issues. Although Zhadyra Shamuratova writes artistic prose, she pays special attention to factual details, highly values research, and demonstrates an essential intellectual and critical approach. In her works, she achieves significant artistic depth, making her a master of short literary forms in modern Kazakh prose.

All of these works artistically demonstrate the complexity of alienation in modern life. The author, from a thematic perspective, addresses a wide range of pressing issues in contemporary society, such as unemployment, wealth and career, underestimation of art, the confusion of individuals corrupted by riches and cannot control their will, as well as problems related to casinos and religion, etc. In addition to the main issues, she delves deeply into the psychological state of her characters' inner worlds, seemingly seeking answers to why people endure the anguish of loneliness. But rather than blaming someone, the author prefers to leave it to the readers to make various thoughts and decisions through the actions of the genre, which is driven by various situations in society. Based on the qualitative analysis of Zhadyra Shamuratova's writing, we identified four main dimensions of alienation expressed in her prose and their relation to current issues in contemporary Kazakh society.

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III. Dimensions of Alienation in Zhadyra Shamuratova's Prose

A. Alienation as Self-Fragmentation

In Zhadyra Shamuratova's stories and novellas, alienation appears as a universal burden for heroes cut off from loved ones and themselves. In the short story "The Secret Revealed at Dusk", alienation is caused by two parallel concepts that are woven together: the former represents wealth in modern society, the latter signifies lack and poverty. But the common motif of both threads is alienation. By describing the sadness behind wealth, the author attempted to portray the motif of alienation from a new perspective within the context of today's society. The main characters are a pathologist named Arys and his maternal aunt, who is an actress. The crux of the story is revealed when we delve into the secrets of the secret diary and immediately understand that the actress is, in fact, Arys's biological mother.

Arys experiences the hardships of life and encounters poverty. His only support in life is his mother, who has passed away. Before his mother dies, she informs her son that he has a maternal aunt who is his only relative. When Arys meets this previously unknown relative, he is disappointed. While Arys has grown up witnessing life's difficulties, his maternal aunt is a wretch who suffers from loneliness even though she lives in the midst of great wealth. However, she has a harsh character and does not even greet guests. She is completely accustomed to loneliness and has no companion other than her dog. The following fragment adds to the characteristic of Arys's aunt and his attitude to her:

> Arys's maternal aunt seemed strangely cold and indifferent, paying little attention to people. Even upon hearing about the death of her sister, she sat stiffly without shedding a tear. Her question appeared peculiar:
>
> - Did she pass from cancer?
> - From the heart.
> - Did everyone from the maternity hospital come?
> - Yes. Everyone came. They even helped with the funeral.
> - Did she suffer much?
> - No. It seemed as if she did not suffer at all. Or at least she didn't let me know.
> - If she left quickly, your mother was lucky.
>
> The young man was taken aback. What did she mean? Was leaving life early considered happiness? She had raised and educated her only child, expecting to enjoy the fruits of her labor, so how could leaving him alone in a big city, without any relatives, be considered happiness? This person is strange. (Shamuratova, 2021, p. 11)

Although Arys, whose mother has passed away, contemplated marrying Aiya and establishing a household, he is saddened by the thought that he has no relatives to support him in this big city. Despite his suspicious and cautious nature, which makes him unwelcoming even to visitors, Arys chooses to confide in the only person left to him after his mother, and the vivid tableau of his thoughts on the bus, along with the events passing before his eyes, can be seen as a mirror of contemporary society:

> What he loves to do in the world is to observe the faces, movements, and clothes of the people in the salon. Thanks to his dark glasses, he can especially gaze at the figures of women. Faces marked by anger or resentment, tired, bored eyes, or vacant, meaningless glances never weary him. Not only does he recognize them, but he even feels as if his way of life is the same as those people he has seen only once in his life, and as if they were his own kin. Not all the passengers were like him, returning late from work, hurriedly eating Chinese noodles, sheltering in dilapidated, filthy dormitories, and draping an old jacket from last year over themselves; among them were those with a reasonably comfortable life. Yet, the atmosphere in the salon was such that, in everyone, one could sense dissatisfaction with their day and a tendency to blame someone for it. Then why are they dissatisfied? Is it because they're not rich, because they're sitting in this salon with people like me? Or maybe it's because when they came looking for a better life, everything didn't turn out as great as they thought?
>
> - Either stand back or move aside! You're really in the way!
>
> The woman with the hoarse voice who spoke to him seemed sleepy at first glance, judging by the length and thickness of her eyelashes. Her sleepy eyes were piercing and cold. As he stepped aside to let the passengers who were about to get off pass by, a sudden burst of acrid body odor brushed harshly against his nose and mouth. "She must have spent all her money on fake eyebrows, eyelashes, and getting her nails done, and didn't have enough left for a bar of soap to wash her armpits," he thought with disgust. (Shamuratova, 2021, p. 19)

From this very detail alone, the author seems to unravel many concealed truths born from the brief crossing of different destinies and the glances of various lives. By conveying social reality, a vivid picture of our modern life through the consciousness of the character, the author, as a member of that social environment, is able to see every phenomenon with a writer's refined sensibility and strives to present that social environment through the viewpoint of his characters. It seems that, rather than depicting the characters as conventionally good or bad, the author's primary aim is to convey that they are, above all, ordinary human beings. The author reveals Arys's inner vulnerability, known only to himself, thus avoiding one-sided characterization and striving to maintain artistic conventionality as the guiding principle in shaping the image.

The climax of the story "The Secret Revealed at Dusk" is revealed when the protagonist reads the crimson leather diary written by his maternal aunt. Although the pathologist Arys constantly encounters secrets in his professional life,

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he is nonetheless astonished to realize that, despite the familial ties of sisterhood, the people he regards as his mother and maternal aunt are worlds apart, and that part of the mystery lies in their lifelong neglect to seek one another. The solution to this mystery is revealed as follows:

> From the moment of his birth, I fled from him in fear that we might become too close; I hurried away before I could even cherish him as my child and did not even give him a name. It was the child's fate, truly, the nurse was a good person; she had made him into a human being. She named him Arys. He grew up to be a decent guy. What a height! All my life, I had convinced myself that I had never given birth to a child. Yet, when my son, whom I had abandoned at birth, came searching for me, I was nearly driven out of my senses. I experienced so many different states in one moment that it seemed as if my brain had forgotten how to think. I didn't know how to behave in front of him. Let's just say that I couldn't even get into a momentary role... (Shamuratova, 2021, p. 43)

Here, the heroine pours out her soul secrets in her diary that she could not tell anyone. The actress, suffering from a nervous disorder, ultimately abandons her own child. The psychologically captivating effect of the short story on the reader, the simplicity of the language and the style of narration will not leave the reader indifferent. At the same time, the author skillfully weaves scientific terminology into the language of literary narrative. The protagonist, Arys, a forensic pathologist, is a figure unprecedented in Kazakh literature. In depicting his work moments and his assessment of the surrounding world, the author not only employs medical terminology appropriately but also reveals the inner nature of a professional unfamiliar to the reader. This approach serves a dual purpose: it provides the author with a vehicle to convey detailed information about the character and demonstrates the author's thorough research into the professional field to credibly position Arys as the central character of the narrative:

> To restore the firmness of the materials, he placed them in formalin. In this way, the tissue remnants underwent several rounds of processing before being embedded in special paraffin. Separate slides contained bile, a part of the tumor, and materials that the surgeon had cut out during the operation. In order to clearly see the cells under a microscope, the tissues were stained with a special liquid, in this process, organs stained with blood appeared gray, while very thin tissues took on lighter shades. He took a few glasses and put them away. He sat there, calmly, without thinking about all this. It usually takes 2-4 days to study a biopsy, and about ten days to make a definite diagnosis. Now all that remained was to fill out the report and draw up a conclusion on today's work. The silence was broken only by the clicking sound of the keyboard. The printer whirred as the first report was completed. He then proceeded to the second. It was as if he knew each of his patients personally. (Shamuratova, 2021, p. 7)

B. Alienation as Social Estrangement

The central theme of the story "The Builder" is unemployment. It reflects the life of Kazakhs wandering through large cities like Astana in search of ways to support their families. Even though the country has passed through the transitional years of independence, the author portrays the unresolved hardships of Kazakh life in parallel with the beautiful buildings of a major city like Astana. Numerous impressive buildings have risen in Astana, yet the author raises the question whether all the people behind these structures are truly happy. The answer to the question is reflected in the life of the builder Kuat. Many young Kazakhs like Kuat, who work in construction, are wandering around without receiving their wages. It is true that in today's reality, powerful companies often create various obstacles when it comes to paying workers their wages. The fact that ordinary workers, who have contributed to the development of Astana, go for months without receiving their salaries; the burden placed on men as heads of their families; the many domestic problems they face; and the rise in divorces and other misfortunes caused by unemployment, all these real-life issues are brought together in this short novella, which seems to pinpoint the ailing side of contemporary society with striking accuracy.

The setting of the novella's plot is an unfinished high-rise building in Astana, where construction is rapidly underway. Within this construction environment, the story reveals the unheard cries of ordinary workers, unseen construction workers and hired hands, who fall into despair because their wages remain unpaid. Although the construction worker, Kuat, enjoys standing on the upper floors of the new building and observing the life of Astana from above, his mood darkens whenever he thinks of his family's difficult situation back in the village. He especially feels helpless when he listens to audio messages from his son:

> Kuat likes observing the city from above; when he first came to the capital, the countless lights shimmering in the deep darkness after the chaos of the daytime bustle would somehow lift his spirits. Every time his eyes fell on the words 'This is the place of happiness' written on the blue-roofed construction fences buzzing with activity behind them, he would drift into a dream: "The people living in those homes must truly be happy. If only, if not for himself, then at least his children could find a place in this so-called abode of happiness". (Shamuratova, 2023, p. 7)

Through the character's divided thoughts, the author reveals the turmoil and restlessness of his inner world:

> Recently, the city has begun to seem boring, even its restless daytime bustle no longer catches his eye as it used to, and when evening falls, its once dazzling lights appear dimmed. Over the past day or two, he has come to realize that he is utterly out of place in this city. What is he even doing here? He ought to look for another

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> job, or perhaps return to his village, but where can he go without a single coin to his name? There is no one left he can borrow money from. (Shamuratova, 2023, pp. 7-8)

In this passage, Kuat's inner turmoil is clearly visible. Behind the images of each character such as Kuat, who cannot obtain the payment he deserves and ends up arguing; the burly Eraly; the middle-aged man in his fifties whose name is not mentioned; and the hawknosed Bolat, stand the prototypes, the reflections, of countless ordinary Kazakh men. It goes without saying that there is a social problem of exploitation of honest work, the social and everyday struggles of those who cannot reap the fruits of their own work, a harsh reality, many issues intensifying in society. It is as if today's society has grown numb to such problems. The author delves into the causes and consequences of why, even in the era of independence, a handful of Kazakhs continue to live in poverty.

From the character of Aidar, the brigade leader in the novella, we see how people of his kind, those eager to profit during a turbulent transition period and to live off the struggles of others, began to thrive. The author briefly describes the moment when Brigadier Aidar becomes an intermediary and conveys the words of his superiors. Through this depiction, the narrative hints at those who flourished in such times, the very people responsible for the everyday hardships of an era riddled with corruption, for example:

> "Let me say it again", the big boss says, "There's no money, but be patient, we'll figure it out." They'll sort it out, don't worry, everything will be "okay", guys. – His eyes flickering restlessly, he patted Kuat, who was standing to the side, on the back. His face looked gentle. – Think about it, where will you go if you leave? There are layoffs everywhere, no one's doing well. So why don't you just wait it out a bit longer and keep working? You'll get it eventually. Isn't that right, Kuat? – His laugh seemed mocking.
>
> Earlier, when the guys had said about Aidar, "that man has two or three hidden layers inside him," he had not paid attention. But now he seemed to finally recognize that fake, affected expression. One look from that sly fox was enough to see he had been through plenty. Kuat was on the verge of grabbing him by his wispy, scraggly beard and smashing a bright flash of a blow straight into those murky, muddy eyes of his… but Bolat held him back. (Shamuratova, 2023, p. 11)

The novella presents a vivid portrayal of the deceit, cunning, and fraudulence of the modern era through the character of Aidar, who embodies these traits as a prototype. It can be said that during the difficult transition period of Kazakhstan, which passed to market economy, fraudsters were rampant and lived off the people. "The eye" reveals the entire inner nature of a person, the author paid attention to the eyes in detail. The contradictory aspects of society, the changes in human nature in difficult times, are deeply touched through the description "with playful eyes and gentle face".

The idea of the story is that no matter how many political and social reforms there are, when viewed from the perspective of national interests, it is the concerns of the small, disadvantaged people, the ordinary Kazakh, that truly matter. Although the economy has developed, the author conveys the unresolved contradictions between society and the individual in a system deeply affected by corruption. Yet, the author gives priority to hope in the inner struggle of man. What hardships has the resilient Kazakh nation not endured? The story depicts a society that, despite the difficult social and economic conditions that the people of independent Kazakhstan experienced in the early years, has continued its modest daily life without losing hope for the future.

The next morning, as soon as he woke up with a new resolve, he hurried along the streets of Astana, ruled by a cold and indifferent stillness, driven by the frantic struggle simply to survive:

> "No, this city is not heartless, it is a huge beehive made up of thousands of blocks, and the people like bees leave their hives early in the morning, each striving toward their own purpose, each certain to find the ray of warmth they seek." No sooner had this thought crossed his mind than one thousand and fifty rays of light, frozen in the clear air, suddenly scattered in all directions, and a joy filled with hope seemed to spread through his entire being. Hope does not die. (Shamuratova, 2023, p. 14)

In "The Builder", the problem of exploiting ordinary people's labor is clearly raised. Individuals like Kuat, who earn their bread through honest work, live with a quiet hardship, yet they do not lose hope for a better future. The author emphasizes that even in today's developed society, many powerful people still benefit from the labor of the weak, exploiting the skills and efforts of socially vulnerable groups for their own interests. The writer depicts a society that belittles robust, strong-built Kazakh men, men with the stature of warriors, and exposes the problems of labor exploitation and poverty.

C. Alienation as Spiritual Estrangement

The work "Parapsychologist Patirgul" is a novella with a grotesque, allegorical content. From the beginning to the end of the story, the self-deprecation of the character is clearly visible in the author's narration. The central idea of the story evokes the period in post-1990s Kazakhstan when, after the stagnation of public life and the crisis that followed, the country saw an explosion of fortune-tellers, shamans, healers, clairvoyants, and self-proclaimed advisers who deceived and manipulated the population like mushrooms sprouting after rain. Although they did not disappear completely in later times, it is no secret that they were replaced by various energy-information coaches, spiritual practitioners, various affirmation makers, astrologers, numerologists, and other loudly advertised -ologists.

The subject of the novella reflects the true face of contemporary society: a spiritually exhausted community that, instead of seeking knowledge in books or science, fills its inner void by listening to various fraudsters, and mistaking

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them teachers. How many Patirguls are there who take advantage of the current Kazakh people, impressionable, easily influenced, and spiritually hollow at a time when society's consciousness is increasingly filled with foreign and misleading ideas? They may consider themselves to be the spreaders of spiritual knowledge, yet we witness the collapse of national education in the era of modern global trends. In an era where there are sorcerers, soothsayers, and those who poison the human mind, like Patirgul, this is a work that takes a critical look at our nation itself. Because, as the author states in the novella, most of those who turn to Patirgul are Kazakhs: "the Kazakh character is like this, they love the limitless in everything, if it's words, they are verbose; if it's praise, it is abundant; and when they need to trust someone, they open their mouths like children and believe blindly" (Shamuratova, 2023, p. 21). Here is the sorrow and lament of so many deceived people in modern society. In today's world, it is no longer surprising to see people who are deceived by fraudsters who embezzle their money in the hope of getting an easy prey. This seems to have become an established trend. The author, approaching this issue with grotesqueness and bitter sarcasm, seems to blame the gullible people who, in times of spiritual crisis, did not resort to education and work, but visited saints, soothsayers, fortune-tellers, and numerologists. This constitutes the first core aspect of the story.

The second, symbolic layer subtly portrays the situation between the people and the political system. The author also includes officials among the above-mentioned characters. The author summarizes the novel in a romantic tone, saying that an apparatus to combat fraudsters, embezzlers, and corrupt people has been invented and imported from Japan:

> Meanwhile, word suddenly spread that they had started evaluating all those useless advisers and self-proclaimed shamans, identifying the frauds and keeping only the true experts. Lately, since everyone had caught the disease of lying and people could no longer tell who was a numerologist, who was an akim, who was an astrologer or a deputy, the government, which has lost its mind, has ordered a remarkable, one-of-a-kind device from Japan. The astonishing thing about this device was that whenever a liar opened their mouth, it would fill the space with a loud, irritating buzzing sound, preventing their words from reaching anyone else (compared to this, your lie detector with wires tied to your body is nothing). It didn't matter whether you were in an office, at home, in the East or the West, if you opened your mouth and started lying, it seemed you wouldn't even be able to hear your own voice.
>
> Since the arrival of that device, around eight thousand officials who had been deceiving the public by claiming, 'We did this, we did that' while pocketing the money meant for roads and bridges, as well as those who earned money by pretending to cure nonexistent illnesses or by 'removing curses,' have been convicted, with many of them already serving prison sentences. Patirgul does not consider herself a fraud, yet she has become cautious after hearing the government's announcement. Whether from worry or from the 'spirit' her mentor supposedly summoned for her, lately Patirgul has begun talking erratically, saying whatever comes to her mind, they say. (Shamuratova, 2023, pp. 25-26)

From the image of Patirgul in the story, we can understand some indicators of the disconnection between the government and the people in today's society. The author's idea in the novella is that the Patirguls who deceive the ordinary people, or the government, are all condensed into one image. However, through the detail that "Patirgul does not consider herself a fraud", the author suggests that certain phenomena deeply rooted in society are difficult and burdensome to change. This story of the author is not only a socio-economic problem of the people, but also an open criticism of the other side of the political life of our country. Through the theme of eliminating fraud and mutual collusion, we sense the author's wish for our people and nation to improve their living conditions and achieve happiness through hard work and honesty.

The novella discusses anti-moral values against the established social ethical norms of modernity, which become the core of the author's idea and reflect the image of society in a socially symbolic way, either explicitly or implicitly. This is because, while value, as a philosophical and sociological category, represents positive or negative meanings related to a person, anti-values are considered phenomena that are contrary to the centuries-old ethics of human society, openly condemned, and especially contrary to the worldview of the Kazakh people, which is based on the foundations of national knowledge and traditions, and weaken spiritual culture and national identity. In "The Parapsychologist Patirgul", the author uncovers the vices of today's world to an absurd degree. Patirguls are not merely petty swindlers deceiving ordinary people; they can be regarded as the very embodiment of tricksters and fraudsters in modern Kazakh society. On a deeper level, they also serve as a typified, grotesquely portrayed artistic image of those in power. On an almost absurd level, beneath a delicate yet grotesque subtext, the author masterfully portrays some of the confusions of the whole nation in an era of advancing civilization, inability to distinguish good from evil, the genuine from the false, capturing these states with remarkable artistic precision.

D. Alienation as Loss of National Identity

Zhadyra Shamuratova connects alienation with a disconnection from roots. In "The Chest", the chest, serving as a symbol of tradition, national spirit, customs, unity, is moved to a barn, looted and forgotten. This is an allegory for globalization devouring Kazakh identity. In this way, the author raises the issue of the neglect of national values that are on the verge of being swallowed by modern civilization and global trends. As times change, values also change, yet the spiritual values accumulated over centuries that preserve a nation's identity must remain intact. Using the chest as a narrative detail, the author brings forward a very delicate issue overshadowed by global cultural expansion and offers it to the thoughtful reader.

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In “The Chest”, the writer addresses the change of time, transformations within society, and the changing attitudes toward national values that accompany the transition from one generation to the next. The chest serves as a narrative detail. The chest emphasized by the writer symbolizes the national concept itself; it represents national identity, traditional customs, national spirit, national heritage, and the repository of what has been passed down from our ancestors. Its gradual removal from the place of honor and its relocation to the shed or storage area, as well as its worn and neglected state, symbolically reflects the contemporary era in which Kazakh identity is becoming increasingly distant. The chest lying open and scattered symbolizes the plundering and loss of national heritage. This forms the core of the author’s main idea in the story.

In the collections of stories, Zhadyra Shamuratova depicts numerous issues, such as a mother who rejects her own child, unstable and ill-fated love, rivalry and competition in the arts, linking them to the present-day face of a society that is gradually drifting away from its national values. In general, she speaks about this in one of her interviews:

> Since our childhood fell in the 90s, the people of our village seem different to me, with less humor and more sadness. At that time, the strong men of the village wasted away from drinking and some were found hanged in a drunken state. There were those who, out of helplessness, took their own lives thinking, ‘Even if I die, at least my children will receive an orphan’s allowance.’ And the children who grew up as orphans had no one to whom they could claim their fathers’ worth. Nowadays, there are plenty of trainings and psychologists, but back then, if only there had been two or three elders in the village whose words and presence carried real weight, such tragedies might not have happened.
>
> Yes, although for some people it may look like nothing more than a soot-covered castiron pot, the qazan (cauldron) is a symbol. The Kazakh qazan is a symbol of the unity of all the people in the house, the harmony and unity of family members gathering to share a meal from one vessel, and the prosperity that arises from that unity. A Kazakh whose black cauldron never leaves the fire is said to be truly wealthy. The Kazakhs used to call someone the most foolish one, because it is impossible for a person who overturns and breaks a pot that is on fire to be sane. In the story, there is a moment when the old woman sighs, saying, “What good can come of someone who abandons her own cauldron and runs away?” The Kazakh spirit and traditional character have remained in the old homesteads together with those black cauldrons. When did the trend of changing the identity and traditions of the nation begin? It has been many years. There is a line where the narrator says, “One of those cauldrons came from my father’s house,” and this too is symbolic. In the past, no matter how dearly a Kazakh family loved their daughter, they would never give her their household cauldron when she married. The reason was that once the girl left, she became part of another family; if you gave her your cauldron, the abundance and prosperity of your own home would shift to that new household. Over time, as eras changed, we gradually drifted away from such traditions. The worry now is whether the cauldron that once fed the Kazakh people will, one day, turn into nothing more than an archaism. (Shamuratova, 2020, p. 18)

The ideas mentioned in this interview and “The Chest” are closely connected with the notions of hybridity and transculturation (Roudometof, 2015) as a glocal phenomenon (Figlerowicz & Mertehikian, 2023). This process combines uniformity with diversity (Robertson, 1995) while innovatively fusing global and local cultural traditions (Aleshinskaya, 2020), yielding texts that negotiate post-Soviet transitions into global modernity. During the years of independence, the absorption of national ideology into global processes and the rapid penetration of market economic relations have, in fact, contributed to a gradual detachment from national values. The chest symbolizes the erosion of national identity, emphasizing the uneven fusion of transculturation in modern Kazakhstan, where national Kazakh traditions are devoured by global market forces.

IV. Conclusion

This study illuminates the motif of alienation as a multifaceted prism through which Zhadyra Shamuratova analyzes the existential and social problems of independent Kazakhstan. In her collections “Infinity Between Seconds” and “The Chest”, alienation emerges not as a single theme, but as a dynamic interplay of self-fragmentation, social alienation, spiritual disunity, and cultural disorientation. In the story “A Secret Revealed at Sunset”, the personal isolation of Aris and his mother underscores self-alienation, where family ties dissolve into irreconcilable worlds, amplified by innovative medical terminology that reveals the characters’ inner voids. “The Builder” reflects social alienation through the exploitation of Kuat against the glittering facades of Astana, critiquing alienation and corruption among workers through vivid prototypes such as the duplicitous Aidar, while maintaining an undying sense of hope. The grotesque allegory of “Parapsychologist Patirgul” highlights spiritual alienation, satirically depicting the gullible flight of society to charlatans amid the post-Soviet spiritual vacuum. “The Chest” symbolizes the loss of national identity, and the plundered relic evokes the generation gap under the onslaught of globalization. Zhadyra Shamuratova’s artistic techniques, including detective intrigue, stream of consciousness, antiheroes, symbolic details, the grotesque, and specialized language, go beyond simple representation, transforming alienation into a critique of the isolating forces of modernity: urbanization, market predation, and the decline of national values. These aspects resonate globally, yet are unique to Kazakhstan, intertwining personal psyche with the pain of national revival.

The findings of this study have broader implications for understanding the role of alienation in contemporary Kazakh literature and post-Soviet cultural discourse. By demonstrating how alienation is expressed through narrative form, style

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and linguistic choice, this analysis contributes to the theoretical understanding of Kazakh postmodernism and ways of reimaging global motifs in the national context. It also paves the way for comparative investigations into alienation in post-Soviet and Central Asian literature, as well as for further exploration of the engagement of prose with socio-political change, identity and modernity.

This study has several limitations. Focusing on a limited number of texts from two collections by Zhadyra Shamuratova, it cannot claim to represent the full spectrum of alienation in contemporary Kazakh prose. Furthermore, the interpretation is based primarily on literary-hermeneutic and comparative methods, without employing quantitative or sociological approaches that could complement the analysis of reader perceptions or authorial intentions. Future research could expand the corpus, incorporate oral or digital data, and thereby more fully explore how various levels of alienation (personal, social, spiritual, national) function in the works of other Kazakh writers.

Declaration of the Use of AI

Perplexity.ai was used for translating fragments from Kazakh into English and checking basic language elements such as grammar, spelling, and punctuation. AI-translated fragments were afterwards checked by the authors to allow for clarity and precision.

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The Conception of Women's Identity and Subjectivity in Margaret Atwood's Novels: A Feminist Perspective

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***Abstract*—This article aims at revealing the women's identity and subjectivity being represented in Margaret Atwood's selected novels. This study employed the qualitative descriptive method. Data were collected from four of Atwood's novels: *The Edible Woman* (1969), *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985, 2017), *The Blind Assassin* (2000), and *The Testaments* (2019). The analysis was conducted using the feminist literary criticism, particularly gynocriticism. The research result indicates that, by considering several factors such as Atwood's background as the Canadian writer who emphasizes the themes of the victimization and survival and her position as the realist writer, Atwood constructs the women's identity and subjectivity based on the women's personalities shaped by the concrete social realities. From the perspective of the feminist thought, Atwood's novels portray the female's characters through various paradigms, particularly those associated with the second-wave and third-wave feminisms. In the context of the second-wave feminism, Atwood emphasizes the women's effort to discover the "true" identity and subjectivity. Meanwhile, from the third-wave feminist perspective, she depicts the women's identity and subjectivity in terms of the social discourse formation.**

***Index Terms*—feminism, gynocriticism, women's identity, subjectivity, Margaret Atwood**

I. Introduction

In the interview with Margaret Kaminski, as cited by Tolan (2004), Margaret Atwood argued *"I don't consider it feminism; I just consider it social realism."* This statement indicates Atwood's resistance to the public tendency to label her works strictly as the feminist. Atwood is widely recognized as the prolific Canadian novelist and poet who has produced more than twenty works across various genres, including the poetry, fiction, nonfiction, children's literature, and short stories. Despite her refusal to be categorized solely as the feminist writer, her works are consistently discussed within the feminist frameworks. Numerous scholars classify Atwood as the feminist writer, although they arrive at differing conclusions, positioning her works either within the second- wave or third-wave feminism. Atwood is often associated with the second-wave feminism because her first novel was published during the rise of the second-wave feminism movement (Macpherson, 2010, p. 111). Furthermore, her works address the concerns and themes being central to the second-wave feminism, particularly the emphasis on the rediscovery of "womanity" that has been consciously or unconsciously repressed by the male hegemony or patriarchal system (Tolan, 2004; Weedon, 1993, pp. 20-23).

At the same time, Atwood's works are also interpreted as the representation of the third-wave feminism. Her novels encompass a wide range of genres, including the dystopia, realism, experimentalism, and detective fiction (Snaith, 2017). The thematic scope of her works extends from the politics and environmental issues to the gender and socio-cultural concerns. This diversity of the genres and themes contributes to the portrayal of the female protagonists as the subjects with the complex, diverse, and non-unified identities, which aligns with the central concerns of the third-wave feminism (Wallace, 2009; Obidič, 2017). Moreover, through the studies on Atwood's novels, *The Edible Woman* and *Lady Oracle*, Waugh (2012, p. 169) argues that while Atwood is not typically regarded as the postmodernist or third-wave feminist writer, her works reveal the fictional structures that are only superficially modified by the realist conventions and the liberal ethos, allowing the deeper ideological tensions to the surface. The third-wave feminism, in general, challenges the stable and essentialist conceptions of the femininity and "womanity," emphasizing their instability and fluidity (Barker, 2012, p. 169; Eagleton, 1996).

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Referring to Tolan's conclusion that Atwood's works represent the second-wave feminism and Wallace's contrasting view that they reflect the third-wave feminism, it can be assumed that these differing interpretations are not mutually exclusive, rather than positioning one interpretation as correct and the other as flawed. These perspectives reflect the distinct critical paradigms and methodological approaches to Atwood's oeuvre. Such divergent conclusions may be synthesized as the reflection of the development of Atwood's perspectives both as the woman and the writer in response to the evolution of the feminist movement. From the second-wave to the third-wave feminism movements, Atwood's career as the writer, activist, and cultural figure spans more than four decades, the period during which the feminist theories and movements have undergone the significant transformations (Howell, 2006).

The development of the feminist movements and theories has inevitably influenced Atwood's intellectual and creative activities, both directly or indirectly. Therefore, it can be hypothesized that Atwood's literary works engage dialectically with various feminist discourses, particularly those associated with the second-wave and third-wave feminisms. This dialectical engagement shapes Atwood's consciousness and influences her understanding of the reality, especially regarding the women's identity and subjectivity as represented in her novels. This article examines Atwood's conception of the womanhood through four selected novels: *The Edible Woman* (1969), *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985, 2017), *The Blind Assassin* (2000), and *The Testaments* (2019). By analyzing the female characters in these works, this study seeks to contribute to the deeper understanding of Atwood's position within the feminist discourse, particularly in relation to the evolving concepts of the women's identity and subjectivity.

II. Literary Review

In the feminist discourse, the identity and subjectivity are crucial issues in uncovering the "true" identity of women or in questioning whether the stable foundation exists for them to exist as the autonomous selves. Weedon (as cited in Eagleton, 2003, p. 112) defines the subjectivity within the feminist theory as encompassing the conscious thoughts, feelings, the sense of self, and the unconscious meanings, wishes and desires shaping the identity.

The terms 'subject' and 'subjectivity' are fiercely contested within the feminist philosophy, as well as the social and cultural theory. The feminist debates on the subjectivity have long revolved around whether the femaleness and femininity possess the essential, unchanging characteristics grounded in the female body, psyche or experience or whether they are historically and socially specific (Weedon; as cited in Eagleton, 2003, p. 112). The problem of the women's identity raises the fundamental question is: what we call as the women's identity is truly constructed independently by the women themselves? In fact, the feminist theory argues that the women's identity is constructed within the unequal power relations, in which the women are positioned as inferior in relation to the men, who are constructed as superior.

Early modern feminism is closely associated with the liberal women's movement, which emphasized the individual as the free, rational and autonomous person (Gerson, 2002). Through the work of Mary Wollstonecraft, the women were positioned within the modern project as the free and rational subjects. Wollstonecraft argued that the humanity being understood as the rational beings shaped by the social construction as proposed by the modern philosophers such as Descartes and John Locke, had to necessarily include the women and treat them equally (Donovan, 2000, pp. 20-21). The subjectivity in the eighteenth-century assumed that the women could achieve their true identity through the free development of rationality (Weedon; as cited in Eagleton, 2003, p. 128). The second-wave feminism emerged from the women's disappointment with their social roles; despite gaining access to the political and social aspects of the public sphere, the women continued to occupy the subordinate position. In relation to the second-wave feminist agenda on the subjectivity, Weedon (Eagleton, 2003, p. 111) explains this clearly through the well-known feminist slogan:

> The feminist rallying cry "the personal is political," encouraged women to examine how their subjectivity had been shaped by the patriarchal relations which determined their aspiration, self-worth, the sexual division of labor and patriarchal gender roles.

In contrast to the second-wave feminism, the feminist poststructuralism assumes that the sex and gender, as well as the women's identity and subjectivity are socially and culturally constructed rather than biologically determined. Because they are socially constructed, the claims of the universality, stability, and foundational femininity or "womanity" are inherently unstable (Barker, 2012, p. 292). The concepts such as the women, feminism, history and collectivity are understood as the discursive constructions that are unstable and only temporarily stabilized through the social practice (Barker, 2012, p. 229).

The post structuralist thought has significantly influenced the feminist theory, leading to the rejection of the idea of the stable, unified, and autonomous female subjects. Some feminists have developed the new theoretical frameworks based on the linguistic paradigms. Judith Butler, for instance, develops her concept of the women's identity and subjectivity through the notion of performativity (Weiss, 2023; Weedon, 2004, p. 6). Further comments on Judith Butler's concept argue that the identities are often internalized by the individuals through the repeated performance in everyday life. Butler (1990, p. 13), focusing on the gender, argues that "there is no gender identity behind the expression of gender; rather, the gender is the cultural interpretation of sex, while the sex itself is already the gendered category".

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III. Method

The data were collected and analyzed using the feminist criticism, particularly the gynocriticism strategy, encompassing the biological, linguistic, psychoanalytic, and cultural models, which examined the female construction, communication, psyche, and societal conditioning (Bressel, 1994, p. 106). Showalter (1985, p. 131) argues that:

> The feminist research in the history, anthropology, psychology, and sociology developed the hypotheses of the female subculture including not only the ascribed status and the internalized construction of the femininity, but also the occupation, interaction and consciousness of the women.

In applying the gynocritical analysis, this research followed these subsequent steps: First, the intrinsic analysis was conducted by focusing on the elements or structures of Atwood's novels independently, with the specific emphasis on the women's identity and subjectivity. Second, the extrinsic analysis examined the writer, Margaret Atwood, as the social being who both influenced and was influenced by the cultural, political, social and feminist values. This stage focused on Atwood's biography and social-historical context in shaping her literary style, genre, and perspective on the women's identity and subjectivity. Third, the dialectical reading was undertaken between the results of the intrinsic and extrinsic analyses. This synthesis aimed to identify the author's vision and worldview as represented in her novels, as well as her position as the writer within the broader evolution of the feminist movement.

IV. The Result and Discussion

A. Female Characters in Atwood's Novels

The following table summarizes the identity and subjectivity of the women's characters in Atwood's selected novels such as *The Edible Woman*, *The Handmaid's Tale*, *The Blind Assassin*, and *The Testaments*.

Table 1
The Identity and Subjectivity of the Women's Character

1. The Edible Woman (TEW)		
The Characters	Marian MacAlpine	
Marian	Being inferior (p. 13), as well as the dependent and passive woman (pp. 71, 81) who is unable to make her own decision, under Peter's hegemony (p. 94). She adheres the traditional conception of the marriage and gender roles (pp. 37-29, 159).	Marian's anorexia (p. 225) and "hallucination moment" (p. 154) are symbolized as the alternative form of consciousness through which she discovers the freedom and independent female identity. The act of eating the cake serves as the climactic moment in which she reclaims her subjectivity as the woman (p. 300). Furthermore, her friend Ainsley's unconventional opinion on the marriage contribute to Marian's evolving awareness of herself as both the woman and self-aware subject (p. 79).
2. The Handmaid's Tale (THT)		
The Characters	Before being captured by the Gilead regime, Offred lived as the working mother and independent woman with the full autonomy. During her time as the Handmaid, Offred loses her original identity and subjectivity, as she is reduced to the mere reproductive object.	
Offred	Before the Gilead Regime seized the power, Offred was the working woman with the husband and the daughter, characterized as the independent and free individual. The previous regime maintained the equal social system between the women and men (p. 286). Offred lost her identity and subjectivity upon becoming the Handmaid, in which she is reduced to the mere reproductive tool (pp. 6-8, 73-74, 84, 295).	By remembering Luke (p. 200) and her daughter (p. 84), Offred maintains her sense of self, desire, emotion, and capacity for love as the human being (pp. 97, 262). She copes with her situation by reclaiming her womanhood (p. 80) and engaging in affairs with both the Commander and Nick. Significantly, her affair with Nick is based on her own decision, allowing her to assert the control over her body, desire and consciousness (pp. 268-269, 271).
3. The Blind Assassin (TBA)		
The characters	- As Iris' sister, Laura is portrayed as the "rebel" whose character contrasts sharply with the Iris' passivity. Laura is represented as the modern woman with the strong conviction, the stubborn nature and fierce desire for the independence. - Iris Richard Griffin, as the protagonist of the novel, she is depicted in the earlier chapters as the passive and dependent woman, unable to make the autonomous decision under her husband's domination. However, she gradually transforms into the independent and active subject who successfully resists her husband's hegemony through the act of writing the writing, which allows her to reclaim her own narrative.	
Iris Richard Griffin	Under Richard's domination, Iris becomes mentally powerless and oppressed (pp. 233, 323), turning into the submissive wife with no personal desire and obedient wife (pp. 296, 458) displaying no personal desire as the woman whose opinions are valued and who possesses the space to actualize her potential as the woman and human being (pp. 293, 457).	Richard's sexual abuse of her sister, Laura, prompts Iris to leave his house and begin orchestrating the revenge strategy against him. By authoring the novel *The Blind Assassin*, Iris intellectually succeeds in taking the revenge and escaping Richard's hegemony (p. 486). Furthermore, her affair with Alex Thomas serves as the definitive moment of independence for Iris; it represents her ability to make the autonomous decision and to exercise the control over her body freely and consciously.
4. The Testaments (TT)		
The Characters	- Agnes Jemima, woman who was born and raised in Gilead country. She experiences the internal conflict between her inner doubt and the doctrine in Gilead. Agnes initially delineates her childhood life in Gilead as similar to that of children elsewhere, as she is not yet fully aware of Gilead's oppressive culture. However, as she matures, Agnes is portrayed as the woman who develops the critical consciousness towards the regime. - Baby Nicole, also known as Daisy, is the young girl who was smuggled out of Gilead by her mother, the handmaid and raised by the members of the resistance organization Mayday. She is depicted as the critical female figure who dedicates herself to exposing and overthrowing the Gilead regime.	

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	- Aunt Lydia was a successful woman who worked as the judge before Gilead regime took the power. In Gilead, she was portrayed as an authoritative and powerful woman being responsible for enforcing Gilead's doctrine upon the women, particularly the handmaids, including supervising ritualized sexual practices between the Commander and Handmaids.	
Agnes Jemima	- Agnes Jemima initially perceives her childhood in Gilead as similar to that of the children elsewhere, as she has not yet developed the awareness of the regime's ideological and cultural systems (pp. 9, 20-21). - Although she possesses the latent capacity for the critical awareness regarding the Gilead system (p. 21), the state's delusive doctrine concerning the "true" identity as the woman (p. 105) renders her passive and obedient conditions. This indoctrination leads her to accept the Gilead scenario, including her arranged marriage to the Commander (pp. 85, 90, 94-95, 225).	- Agnes's experience of the sexual abuse significantly enhances her awareness of the man and patriarchal power. Her anger, frustration and disgust toward this abusive experience reshape her consciousness by changing her perception of the reality, particularly within Gilead (p. 240). - Agnes strives to assert her authentic self, harboring the desire to be the woman who rejects being the subject dictated by Gilead's values. She aspires to become the woman who is capable of making independent decision about her own life (pp. 289, 297, 303). - Choosing to become an "Aunt" serves as Agnes's strategy to escape from the system, while also brings her to the pivotal moment, when she discovers the true nature of Gilead regime. The discovery of Gilead's criminal practices provides Agnes with the agency to resist and act against the regime (p. 307).
Baby Nicole or Daisy	- Baby Nicole's character is portrayed as the critically-minded young woman (pp. 45-46) - Having grown up within the Mayday movement-an organization committed to opposing the Gilead regime, she develops the critical consciousness and the deep-seated opposition to Gilead's oppressive system (pp. 133, 197).	She becomes more aware and decides to intensify her struggle to destroy the Gilead regime when she is smuggled back into the country and witnesses firsthand how the regime systematically exploits the women.
Aunt Lydia	Aunt Lydia's identity and subjectivity cannot be understood simply in terms of the linier development. Instead, she embodies the double or split identity throughout the novel. On the one hand, she performs the role of "*Aunt Lydia,*" the authoritative and seemingly powerful woman who enforces Gilead's doctrines, particularly upon the Handmaids, and supervises the ritualized sexual practices between Commanders and Handmaids. However, Aunt Lydia is depicted with two distinct personalities. While she appears to be the key figure being responsible for the system that brutally exploits the women, she is also portrayed as the intelligent and rational woman who secretly orchestrates the strategies to subvert and destroy the Gilead regime, the system that stripped her of her freedom as the successful woman in the previous regime (pp. 62, 115, 317).	

B. Atwood as a Writer, a Woman and a Canadian

An Analysis of Margaret Atwood' context can assist in discovering the correlation between her view and the vision within her works not only in terms of her identity as the female writer but also as the Canadian writer. During her studies at Radcliffe College, she encountered the reality that the existence of Canadian literature was largely invisible under the hegemony of the American and British literature. Consequently, her book *Survival: A Thematic Guide to Canadian Literature* (Atwood, 2012) represented her effort to contribute to the establishment of what is recognized as the "Canadian Literature". Atwood (2012, pp. 54-58) formulates those Canadian literatures being characterized by the themes of the survival (stemming from Canadians' efforts to engage with the wild and extreme nature) and victimization (as the country with the colonial history and mentality). Meanwhile, she also concretely deals with the dilemmatic situation; she faces the dual marginalization, not only due to her status within the "inferior" national class but also the woman writer confronting the gendered social constructions (Bouson, 2013, p. 7). Atwood herself asserts her dual position in the literary world as the Canadian writer and the feminist, stating:

> I see the two issues as similar. In fact, I see feminism as the part of the larger issue: human dignity. That's what Canadian nationalism is about, what feminism is about, and what black power is about. They're all part of the same vision. (Tolan, 2007, p. 7)

Her works mostly depict the women's lives through their roles as the protagonists, however she unrestricted her writing solely to the feminism or gender issues (Atwood, 2022, p. 335). Her concerns extend to the social, political, and environmental issues, such as the global warming. As Atwood argues, "*I have always seen Canadian nationalism and the concern for the women's rights as the part of the larger, non-exclusive picture*" (Howell, 2006, p. 22). Consequently, she both criticizes the broader social problems including the politics, environment crisis, economic shift, capitalism, and describes the women's struggles to reclaim their rights within these complex systems.

C. The Dialectical Reading of Atwood and Her Novels

Understanding Atwood's vision, as represented in the selected novels such as *The Edible Woman*, *The Handmaid's Tale*, *The Blind Assassin* and *The Testaments*, requires the approach through her specific literary paradigm. This involves examining her understanding of the relationship between the literary works and social reality, her self-positioning as the female writer within the feminist discourse, and her role within the Canadian literary tradition. Atwood's literary vision is not restricted to the feminism or feminist theory, rather she is deeply concerned with the broader human problems across various domains. This perspective characterizes her as the realist writer who frames the universal human issues through the lens of the woman's experiences. In short, Atwood addresses the global concerns by situating them within the experienced realities of the women's lives.

Atwood recognizes the intellectual contestation between the modernist and postmodernist thoughts, particularly concerning the women's conception. Thus, she portrays the female characters with the diverse personalities, refusing to be restricted to the single model of the "ideal woman.". In addition to creating the varied characters, Atwood employs

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the multiple genres and narrative techniques. She remains deeply concerned with the human problems across all life aspects, political, economic, and environmental parts. As Atwood said "*I live in the society; I also put the society inside my books, so that you get a box within a box effect.*" Accordingly, in the interview of Margaret Atwood with Margaret Kaminski, as cited in Tolan (2004), Atwood asserts, "*I don't consider it feminism; I just consider it social realism."* This claim reinforces her rejection of being categorized strictly as the feminist writer. She realizes that accepting such the label could restrict her work to the narrow classification, as Eagleton argues (as cited in Abbas, 2001) that if the women writers focus on the women's lives, they risk being labeled as "partial", "narrow", or as producing merely "women's books".

Therefore, Atwood's identification as the realist rather than the feminist offers her greater freedom to create the works which address the human problems in general. From the readers' perspective, this positioning allows Atwood's works to be acknowledged and appreciated as the literature without the restrictive label. Consequently, Atwood contextualizes the women's issues in the proportion to the broader human concerns, as she states *"I see feminism as the part of the larger issue: human dignity."* Nevertheless, her deep commitment to the women's issues remains the evident in the fact that the protagonists of her novels are predominantly women.

Based on the analysis of the identity and subjectivity in Atwood's selected novels, *The Edible Woman, The Handmaid's Tale, The Blind Assassin,* and *The Testaments*, the key female characters include Marian McAlpin and Ainsley (*The Edible Woman*); Offred (*The Handmaid's Tale*), Iris Chase Griffin, Laura Chase Griffin and Winifred (*The Blind Assassin*), Baby Nicole, Agnes Jemima, and Aunt Lydia (*The Testaments*). Marian McAlpin, as the protagonist of *The Edible Woman*, experiences the identity crisis marked by the profound pessimism sense. This outlook arises from her awareness that her career advancement is stifled by the male domination in the workplace. As Tong (as cited in Hall, 2004, p. 42) argues, the female subordination is rooted in a set of the customary and legal constraints that block the women's access to, and success in the public sphere. Marian's conception of the womanhood is initially grounded in the traditional paradigm, specifically, her belief that the motherhood must be preceded by the marriage. Conversely, her roommate, Ainsley, challenges this notion by rejecting the marriage and asserting that the motherhood can exist independently of it. Furthermore, Marian is depicted as the woman who consistently views herself through the male perception. She struggles to make the autonomous decision, living under the patriarchy that subsumes her identity within Peter's shadows, ideals and expectations. However, Marian's awareness evolves as she attains the subjectivity through the unconscious denial of her body and the eventual annulment of her engagement.

The Edible Woman was published during the rise of the second-wave feminism, centering on the gendered subjectivity amidst the broader feminist struggle against the patriarchal exploitation, sexual double standards, and for the equal rights, as noted by Eagleton (2003). Marian's character embodies the fight against the male hegemony in both the domestic and public spheres. Her resistance to the male domination is symbolized through the anorexia, the cancellation of her engagement, and the act of consuming the cake she bakes. The anorexia symbolizes the rejection of the male gaze and patriarchal construction of the female body, while consuming the cake affirms her reclaiming of the subjectivity.

The Handmaid's Tale not only depicts the systematic alteration of the women's identity and subjectivity but also exposes the overwhelming power of the male dominated regime operation through the militarism, religious doctrine, and patriarchy. Offred, the protagonist, represents the women's victimization having once lived as the autonomous individuals with the social and political freedom being transformed into the mere object under the Gilead regime. Offred resists this imposed identity by consciously reclaiming her past as the self-aware subject and maintaining the psychological distance between her consciousness and her commodified body.

Howells (as cited in Bouson, 2013, p. 60) drawing on Cixous's seminal essay "The Laugh of the Medusa," argues that Offred positions her body and voice against the patriarchal domination. Through this dystopian narrative, Atwood not only warns the readers about the potential socio-political condition, particularly the women's oppression under the authoritarian patriarchy, but also critiques the incomplete project of the gender equality, especially the persistence of the male dominance. This critique is reflected in Aunt Lydia's statement: "Freedom to and freedom from. In the days of anarchy, it was freedom to. Now you are being given freedom from. Don't underrate it." This manipulation suggests that the women's supposed protection merely masks the systemic exploitation. Offred's internal dialectic between the survival, resistance, and submission culminates in her decision to assert the subjectivity despite the risks, even as she is ultimately taken into the custody.

In *The Blind Assassin*, Iris Chase Griffin represents the traditional upper-class woman, characterized by the passivity and pessimism, and socially conditioned to be the wife, mother, and domestic supporter. Atwood (2022, p. 335), in her essay "Am I a Bad Feminist?", highlights the historical restrictions on the women's rights, including the property ownership, financial independence, education, reproductive control. Iris' marriage to Richard reflects the survival through the economic necessity, while the victimization is palpable in Iris' systematic oppression and Laura's sexual abuse. Iris' transformation occurs through the act of writing, which becomes her primary means of the resistance and self-awareness. By crafting her narrative, Iris exposes Richard's crimes and reclaims autonomy over her own history. Cixous (as cited in Gay, 2025, p. 207) asserts, the women must "write themselves" to create the transformative ruptures in history. Through this literary act, Iris overcomes the fear and oppression, ultimately achieving identity and autonomy

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(Arora et al., 2017). Atwood (2012, p. 30) further explains that the survival evolves from mere the physical endurance to the spiritual survival, in which the liberation from fear becomes the ultimate goal.

> A preoccupation with one's survival is necessarily also the preoccupation with the obstacles to that survival. In earlier writers, these obstacles are external—the land, the climate, and so forth. In the later writers, the obstacles tend to become both harder to identify and more internal; they are no longer obstacles to the physical survival but obstacles to what we may call the spiritual survival, to life as anything more than the minimally human being. Sometimes, the fear of these obstacles becomes itself the obstacle, and the character is paralyzed by terror. . . It may even be life itself that he fears; and when life becomes the threat to life, you have the moderately vicious circle.

Atwood's latest novel, *The Testaments* experiments, with the post-feminist, the conceptions of the identity and subjectivity through three protagonists: Baby Nicole, Agnes Jemima, and Aunt Lydia. Agnes Jemima, raised within the Gilead system, becomes critically aware of its oppression and resists her assigned identity by choosing to become the aunt rather than the wife. Aunt Lydia represents the dual, fragmented identity: publicly enforcing Gilead's regime while secretly orchestrating its downfall. From the post-structuralist feminist perspective, Aunt Lydia embodies the discursive and performative identity (Weiss, 2023), illustrating that the identity is unstable and temporarily the fixed through the social practice (Barker, 2012, p. 229). Similarly, Waugh (1989, p. 169) argues that the feminine subject is often fragmented and dispersed. Aunt Lydia performs the imposed identity while internally resisting it, exemplifying Hall's (2004, p. 101) concept that the subject though constructed by the discourse, retain the capacity for the reflection and resistance.

Ultimately, Atwood's strategic use of the diverse genres, combined with her Canadian paradigm of the survival and victimization, uniquely shapes her depiction of the woman's identity and subjectivity. Although she consistently rejects the feminist label, her works over five decades demonstrate the profound engagement with the women's lives. This reveals the dialectical relationship with the feminist theory spanning from the second-wave feminism to the post-feminist thought, while remaining firmly aligned with her broader concern for the human dignity and humanity.

V. Conclusion

By considering Atwood's novels intrinsically, alongside her biography and context as the writer, it can be concluded that her worldview regarding the women's identity and subjectivity is grounded in the universal vision of humanity. Although she recognizes that the women's struggles are the part of the broader human issues, Atwood consistently prioritizes these concerns by featuring the female protagonists in almost all of her works. Her vision of the women's identity and subjectivity is also intrinsically linked to her project of formulating the Canadian literary identity. One of her non-fictions works, *Survival: A Thematic Guide to Canadian Literature*, serves as the manifesto of her writing style and her claim regarding the Canadian identity. In this work, Atwood constructs the Canadian literary identity as being fundamentally concerned with the themes of the victimization and survival. Consequently, Atwood's selected novels, *The Edible Woman*, *The Handmaid's Tale*, *The Blind Assassin*, and *The Testaments* represent the women as the protagonists who survive and struggle against the male hegemony across the cultural and political domains. Through these struggles, the women develop their own understanding of their bodies, language, and the world. As the realist writer, Atwood's vision of the women is not confined to any single feminist doctrine. She understands the women's problems based on their lived realities and situational contexts, exploring the pathways for the women's resistance against their disadvantaged positions as the oppressed class under the male hegemony. From the feminist theoretical perspective, it can be concluded that Atwood draws upon both the second-wave and third-wave feminist conceptions in constructing the women's identity and subjectivity.

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Decoding Figurative Language in Journalism Translation: Human and LLM Translation of English-Vietnamese Metaphors

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***Abstract*—The increasing use of large language models (LLMs) in professional translation has reshaped multilingual news production. While prior research has reported gains in fluency and surface-level accuracy, limited attention has been paid to LLMs' ability to translate figurative language, which plays a key role in meaning construction and evaluative stance in journalistic discourse. This study investigates the extent to which state-of-the-art LLMs achieve functional and cultural equivalence in the English–Vietnamese translation of journalistic metaphors, in comparison with professional human translators. Adopting a mixed-methods comparative design, the study analyzes a purposively selected corpus of 50 metaphorical sentences from major international news outlets. Translation outputs produced by two LLMs (GPT-4o and Claude 3.5) under two prompting conditions (zero-shot and advanced prompting) were compared with a human benchmark generated by senior Vietnamese news editors. All translations were evaluated through blind expert assessment based on four criteria: semantic accuracy, naturalness, cultural equivalence, and journalistic style. The findings show that advanced prompting significantly improves AI performance, particularly in semantic accuracy and stylistic fluency. However, LLMs continue to underperform in cultural equivalence, often exhibiting literalism and reduced metaphorical resonance. These findings underscore the indispensable role of human expertise as cultural and pragmatic mediators, suggesting that while LLMs accelerate production, human transcreation remains essential to preserving the rhetorical integrity of multilingual journalism.**

***Index Terms*—large language models, metaphor translation, journalistic discourse, English–Vietnamese translation, cultural equivalence**

I. Introduction

The rapid integration of large language models (LLMs) into professional translation workflows has profoundly transformed contemporary journalistic practices, particularly in multilingual news production. Advances in generative AI have enabled news organizations to accelerate cross-linguistic content circulation, reduce production costs, and respond to the increasing demand for real-time global reporting. As a result, translation in journalism is no longer a purely human activity but is increasingly characterized by forms of human–AI collaboration, in which automated systems generate initial drafts that are subsequently revised, evaluated, or curated by professional translators and editors.

Despite substantial progress in LLM-based translation with respect to fluency and surface-level grammatical accuracy, considerably less attention has been paid to the ability of these systems to handle figurative language. In journalistic discourse, figurative expressions, particularly metaphors, are not merely stylistic embellishments. Rather, they function as central framing devices that shape readers' interpretations, convey evaluative stance, and organize complex political, economic, and social realities. Inaccurate or inappropriate translation of such expressions may therefore lead to subtle but consequential distortions in meaning, tone, and ideological positioning in multilingual news dissemination.

The challenge of translating figurative language is especially pronounced in the English–Vietnamese language pair. English journalistic metaphors are often grounded in culturally entrenched conceptual domains such as WAR, FIRE, MOTION, and NATURAL DISASTERS, which reflect Anglophone media conventions and sociocultural assumptions. These metaphorical mappings do not always have direct or conventionalized equivalents in Vietnamese, a language with distinct typological features, discourse preferences, and culturally salient figurative patterns. Consequently, successful translation frequently requires strategies of adaptation, reformulation, or metaphorical substitution rather than direct lexical transfer. This places substantial cognitive and cultural demands on translators and raises critical

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questions regarding the extent to which current LLMs can approximate such expertise.

Although a growing body of research has examined the performance of machine translation and LLM-based systems in general translation tasks, empirical studies focusing specifically on figurative language remain limited, particularly in domain-specific genres such as journalism and in under-researched language pairs such as English–Vietnamese. Existing studies tend to prioritize global accuracy metrics or sentence-level fluency, often underrepresenting higher-level pragmatic, cultural, and rhetorical dimensions of translation quality. As a result, there is insufficient empirical evidence regarding how LLMs handle metaphorical meaning in professional news translation and how their performance compares with that of experienced human translators.

Against this background, the present study investigates the translation of figurative language in English digital journalism into Vietnamese, comparing the performance of state-of-the-art large language models with professional human translators. Specifically, the study aims (1) to compare human and LLM performance in translating English journalistic metaphors into Vietnamese; (2) to examine strengths and weaknesses in LLM output across multiple dimensions of translation quality, including semantic accuracy, naturalness, cultural equivalence, and journalistic style; and (3) to identify recurrent types of metaphor-related translation errors and their underlying linguistic and conceptual causes. By addressing these objectives, the study seeks to contribute to applied linguistics and translation studies by offering empirically grounded insights into the current capabilities and limitations of LLMs in handling figurative language, while also informing responsible models of human–AI collaboration in multilingual journalistic practice.

II. Literature Review

A. Previous Studies on Figurative Language and AI Translation

Research on machine translation (MT) and, more recently, large language models (LLMs) has predominantly focused on general translation quality, with an emphasis on lexical accuracy and overall fluency (Castilho et al., 2022). However, empirical evidence suggests that figurative language remains a persistent challenge. Studies examining idiom and metaphor translation in MT systems have reported systematic tendencies toward literalism and inappropriate image transfer (Moorkens & O'Brien, 2023). Recent investigations into LLMs such as GPT-4 indicate that while they exhibit greater contextual sensitivity, they often struggle with culturally embedded expressions, resulting in translations that are fluent yet stylistically flattened (Kocmi et al., 2023). Recent evaluations of large language models have further shown that while they excel in grammatical accuracy, they still struggle with the cultural and cognitive nuances of figurative language (Kojima et al., 2023). Furthermore, modern frameworks for translation quality assessment now emphasize functional equivalence and communicative effect, particularly when dealing with complex linguistic structures in low-resource language pairs (Hendy et al., 2023). Notably, existing work has largely concentrated on high-resource language pairs, leaving the English-Vietnamese pair relatively under-investigated.

B. Research Gap

Despite increasing scholarly interest in LLMs, several gaps remain in the existing literature. First, few studies have systematically examined the translation of figurative language using multidimensional evaluation frameworks that capture semantic, pragmatic, cultural, and stylistic dimensions simultaneously. As noted by Lucas (2023), the integration of AI in newsrooms has fundamentally shifted the translator's role toward post-editing; however, there is still a lack of empirical evidence on how these models maintain metaphorical integrity under such professional constraints. Second, research on LLM performance often lacks comparison with professional human benchmarks grounded in real-world newsroom practice. Third, there is a significant lack of empirical data regarding how LLMs handle the typological and cultural distance inherent in English-Vietnamese metaphor translation. These gaps necessitate a context-sensitive analysis of AI capabilities in professional journalism.

III. Theoretical Grounds

The present study is grounded in an integrated framework that combines Cognitive Metaphor Theory and Functionalist Translation Theory. From a cognitive perspective, metaphors are viewed as powerful framing mechanisms that shape how readers interpret complex events (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). This is complemented by Nida's (1964) concept of functional equivalence and House's (2015) functional-pragmatic model, which provide the criteria for evaluating translation success. In this study, a successful translation is not defined by formal correspondence but by its ability to fulfill a similar communicative function, preserving the evaluative stance and rhetorical force of the source text within the target language's discourse norms.

IV. Research Methodology

A. Research Design

This study adopts a mixed-methods comparative research design to examine differences between professional human translators and large language models (LLMs) in the translation of figurative language in English–Vietnamese digital

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journalism. Quantitative analysis is used to compare translation quality scores across predefined evaluation dimensions, while qualitative analysis is employed to identify recurrent patterns of figurative translation strategies and errors. This design enables both statistical comparison and in-depth interpretive analysis, in line with applied linguistics approaches that emphasize triangulation between numerical and discourse-analytic evidence (Saldanha & O'Brien, 2014).

The study is evaluative and comparative in nature. Professional human translations are used as a reference benchmark representing current newsroom standards, against which LLM outputs are compared. This benchmarking approach is not intended to treat human translation as an infallible gold standard, but rather as an ecologically valid point of comparison reflecting professional norms and editorial expectations in Vietnamese journalistic practice.

Two experimental factors were manipulated: (a) translation agent (human vs. LLM) and (b) prompting condition for LLMs (basic zero-shot prompting vs. advanced Chain-of-Thought prompting). This design allows for examination of both overall human–AI differences and the specific contribution of advanced prompting strategies to figurative language translation quality.

B. Research Data and Corpus

The dataset consists of a purposively constructed corpus of 50 English sentences containing metaphorical or idiomatic expressions, extracted from major international English-language news outlets, including The Economist, The Financial Times, and The New York Times. These outlets were selected due to their frequent use of metaphorical framing and rhetorically sophisticated language, making them appropriate sources for testing high-level translation competence in journalistic discourse.

Corpus construction followed a multi-stage purposive sampling procedure. In the first stage, two independent linguists with expertise in discourse analysis and translation studies identified an initial pool of approximately 100 candidate sentences containing potential figurative language, following the linguistic metaphor identification principles established by Steen et al. (2010). In the second stage, these candidates were jointly reviewed and filtered based on two predefined criteria:

- Semantic opacity, defined as the extent to which the figurative meaning cannot be reliably inferred from the literal meanings of the component words.
- Cultural loading, defined as the degree to which the metaphor relies on culturally specific conceptual schemas commonly found in Western political, economic, or social discourse.

From this pool, 50 items were selected for inclusion in the final dataset. The corpus was balanced across five thematic domains (10 items each): Economics, Politics, Technology, Environment, and General Idioms. This thematic stratification was designed to ensure coverage of both relatively conventionalized metaphors and highly context-sensitive expressions, thereby enhancing the analytical breadth and representativeness of the dataset.

C. Human and LLM Translation Procedures

For each of the 50 source sentences, three translation outputs were generated: one professional human benchmark translation and two LLM translations under different prompting conditions. This resulted in a total of 150 translation outputs for evaluation (50 human, 50 LLM basic prompting, and 50 LLM advanced prompting).

D. Human Translation Benchmark

To establish a professional reference benchmark, two senior Vietnamese news translators/editors, each with more than 15 years of professional experience in international journalism and English–Vietnamese translation, independently translated all 50 source sentences. A third senior editor then reviewed both versions and selected the translation judged to be most natural, rhetorically effective, and appropriate for publication in Vietnamese news media. This three-stage procedure was designed to approximate professional newsroom workflows and to ensure that the benchmark translations reflected both linguistic accuracy and journalistic stylistic norms.

E. LLM Translation Protocol

Translations were generated using two state-of-the-art large language models: GPT-4o and Claude 3.5. The choice of GPT-4o and Claude 3.5 as the primary LLMs for this study was informed by their state-of-the-art performance in current linguistic benchmarks. According to the LMSYS Chatbot Arena and recent industry evaluations (2024-2025), these models consistently demonstrate superior reasoning and creative writing capabilities compared to their predecessors. Specifically, Claude 3.5 was selected for its reported strengths in nuance-heavy tasks, while GPT-4o was chosen for its robust cross-lingual capabilities, making them the most relevant candidates for investigating the complexities of figurative language translation. To enhance replicability and procedural transparency, a standardized interaction protocol was implemented for all LLM queries.

For each source sentence, two prompting conditions were applied:

- Basic zero-shot prompting, using the minimal instruction: "Translate the following English sentence into Vietnamese."
- Advanced Chain-of-Thought prompting (Wei et al., 2022), using an engineered prompt that required the model to: (a) identify the figurative expression, (b) explain its intended meaning and pragmatic function in context, and (c) produce a final Vietnamese translation prioritizing functional and cultural equivalence.

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All prompts were administered in isolated sessions, and conversational memory was reset between queries to minimize cross-item influence. Temperature and other stochastic generation parameters were held constant across all queries to reduce variability attributable to generation settings. Only the final Vietnamese translations were retained for evaluation; intermediate reasoning outputs were excluded to ensure blindness in the rating procedure.

F. Evaluation Criteria and Rating Procedure

All 150 translations were evaluated using four predefined criteria:

- Semantic Accuracy (SA): The degree to which both propositional and figurative meanings of the source text are correctly conveyed.
- Naturalness (NAT): The extent to which the translation reads fluently and idiomatically in Vietnamese.
- Cultural Equivalence (CE): The degree to which the figurative expression is rendered in a culturally appropriate and conceptually meaningful way for Vietnamese readers.
- Journalistic Style (JS): The extent to which the translation conforms to Vietnamese news discourse norms in terms of register, tone, and stylistic conventions.

Each criterion was rated on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = very poor, 5 = excellent). Detailed descriptors and illustrative examples were provided to guide rater judgment and enhance rating consistency.

G. Raters and Inter-Rater Reliability

To ensure a rigorous evaluation, we recruited three independent experts, all of whom hold doctorates in applied linguistics or translation studies and possess extensive experience in quality assessment. Before the formal rating began, these experts underwent a structured calibration session to align their perspectives. During this time, they thoroughly reviewed the four evaluation criteria and jointly graded a pilot set of 10 translations (excluded from the main study).

This process was essential to harmonize their interpretation of the scales and minimize subjective bias. The consistency of their judgments was then verified using Cronbach's alpha. The analysis revealed strong reliability across all criteria: semantic accuracy ($\alpha = .88$), naturalness ($\alpha = .86$), cultural equivalence ($\alpha = .91$), and journalistic style ($\alpha = .84$). Since these figures comfortably exceed the standard thresholds for applied linguistics research, they confirm that the rating procedure was both stable and robust.

H. Data Analysis

Quantitative analysis was conducted using descriptive and inferential statistics. Mean scores and standard deviations were calculated for each translation condition and evaluation criterion. One-way ANOVA tests were performed to examine statistically significant differences among the three translation conditions (human benchmark, LLM basic prompting, and LLM advanced prompting). Where appropriate, post-hoc comparisons were conducted to identify specific pairwise differences. Effect sizes were also calculated to provide an indication of the magnitude of observed differences.

To complement the quantitative findings, a qualitative error analysis was conducted focusing on AI-generated translations that received a mean score below 3.0 on cultural equivalence or naturalness. These outputs were subjected to inductive coding to identify recurrent patterns of figurative translation failure. Through iterative coding and rater discussion, three dominant error categories were established: (a) literalism, (b) collocational clash, and (c) rhetorical dilution. Representative examples were selected to illustrate typical patterns and to support interpretation of the quantitative findings.

I. Ethical Considerations

The study did not involve the collection of personal or sensitive data. All human translators and raters participated voluntarily and provided informed consent for their contributions to be used for research purposes. No personally identifiable information was collected or reported. The news texts used in the corpus were publicly available materials used for research and educational purposes. The study was conducted in accordance with standard ethical guidelines for applied linguistics and translation studies research, with particular attention to transparency, replicability, and responsible reporting of AI system performance.

V. Research Findings and Discussion

A. Research findings

(a). Overall Performance Across Translation Conditions

Table 1 presents the mean scores and standard deviations for the three translation conditions. The results indicate clear differences in overall translation quality across conditions. Translations produced under the basic prompting condition obtained the lowest mean score ($M = 2.85$, $SD = 0.92$), suggesting relatively weak and unstable performance. In contrast, advanced Chain-of-Thought prompting was associated with higher and more consistent scores ($M = 3.92$, $SD = 0.54$). The human benchmark achieved the highest mean score ($M = 4.75$, $SD = 0.28$), with notably low variability, reflecting consistently high-quality translations.

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A one-way ANOVA indicates that differences among the three conditions are statistically significant ($p < .001$). Post hoc comparisons further suggest that advanced prompting significantly outperforms basic prompting, while the human benchmark remains significantly higher than both LLM conditions.

TABLE 1
MEAN SCORE ACROSS TRANSLATION CONDITIONS (N = 50)

Translation condition	M (mean score)	SD (standard deviation)
LLM (Basic prompting)	2.85	0.92
LLM (Advanced prompting)	3.92	0.54
Human benchmark	4.75	0.28

(b). Performance Across Evaluation Criteria

To further examine specific dimensions of translation quality, mean scores for the advanced LLM condition and the human benchmark across the four evaluation criteria are reported in Table 2. The smallest difference is observed in semantic accuracy (LLM: M = 4.50; Human: M = 4.90), indicating that LLMs generally succeed in transferring core propositional meaning. A larger gap is evident for naturalness (LLM: M = 3.80; Human: M = 4.80), suggesting that AI outputs are perceived as less idiomatic in Vietnamese.

The most substantial discrepancy is found in cultural equivalence (LLM: M = 3.20; Human: M = 4.75), representing a difference of 1.55 points. This result indicates persistent difficulty for LLMs in achieving culturally appropriate metaphorical transcreation. Differences in journalistic style are comparatively smaller (LLM: M = 4.20; Human: M = 4.65), suggesting that LLMs are generally able to approximate professional news register.

TABLE 2
MEAN SCORES BY EVALUATION CRITERION (ADVANCED AI VS. HUMAN)

Criterion	AI (M)	Human (M)
Semantic accuracy (SA)	4.50	4.90
Naturalness (NAT)	3.80	4.80
Cultural equivalence (CE)	3.20	4.75
Journalistic style (JS)	4.20	4.65

(c). Distribution of Metaphor-Related Error Types

Qualitative coding of LLM outputs identified three recurrent categories of metaphor-related errors. As shown in Table 3, literalism accounts for the majority of identified errors (65%). These cases involve word-for-word renderings that preserve surface form but fail to convey intended metaphorical meaning in Vietnamese. Collocational clashes account for 20% of errors and are characterized by grammatically acceptable but pragmatically unnatural combinations. The remaining 15% involve loss of rhetorical force, where over-explication or neutralization reduces the evaluative and persuasive impact of the metaphor.

TABLE 3
DISTRIBUTION OF METAPHOR-RELATED ERROR TYPES IN AI OUTPUTS

Error type	Percentage
Literalism	65%
Collocational clash	20%
Loss of rhetorical force	15%

(d). Inter-Rater Reliability

To assess the consistency of metaphor identification and strategy coding, inter-rater reliability was examined on a randomly selected subset of the dataset comprising approximately 50 items. Agreement between coders was found to be high, indicating that the coding scheme was applied consistently across raters. These results support the methodological robustness of the quantitative distributions reported above.

(e). Illustrative Examples of Metaphor Translation Patterns

To complement the quantitative distributions reported above, this section presents illustrative examples that exemplify typical patterns observed in human and LLM translations. These examples are representative of recurrent phenomena identified during qualitative coding and are intended to make concrete the types of metaphor-related successes and failures observed in the dataset.

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TABLE 4
ILLUSTRATIVE EXAMPLES OF METAPHOR TRANSLATION PATTERNS

Source metaphor (English)	Human benchmark translation (Vietnamese)	Typical AI translation (Vietnamese)	Identified issue
"The economy is facing strong headwinds."	"Nền kinh tế đang đối mặt với những lực cản mạnh mẽ."	"Nền kinh tế đang đối mặt với những cơn gió mạnh."	Literalism (surface-form transfer)
"The proposal triggered a political firestorm."	"Đề xuất này đã làm bùng lên làn sóng chỉ trích dữ dội."	"Đề xuất này đã gây ra một cơn bão lửa chính trị."	Collocational clash
"Tech stocks took a beating."	"Cổ phiếu công nghệ lao dốc mạnh."	"Cổ phiếu công nghệ bị đánh đập."	Literalism
"The policy opened the floodgates to criticism."	"Chính sách này đã mở đường cho làn sóng chỉ trích ồ ạt."	"Chính sách này đã mở cổng lũ cho sự chỉ trích."	Rhetorical dilution / unnatural imagery
"The talks hit a brick wall."	"Các cuộc đàm phán rơi vào bế tắc."	"Các cuộc đàm phán đâm vào bức tường gạch."	Literalism

A closer examination of specific cases in Table 4 reveals the underlying nature of these translation failures. In the case of 'political firestorm', for instance, the LLM produced 'cơn bão lửa chính trị'. This is a clear instance of collocational clash; while 'firestorm' is a standard metaphorical source domain for intense criticism in English, its direct equivalent in Vietnamese ('bão lửa') is typically restricted to literal military or fire-related contexts. A more functionally equivalent rendering would be 'làn sóng chỉ trích dữ dội' (a fierce wave of criticism), which aligns with Vietnamese journalistic conventions. Similarly, the literal rendering of 'took a beating' as 'bị đánh đập' or 'hit a brick wall' as 'đâm vào bức tường gạch' demonstrates the model's struggle to move beyond word-level semantic mapping to conceptual-level transfer.

These illustrative cases directly reflect the dominant error categories reported in Table 3, particularly the prevalence of literalism and collocational mismatch. By contrast, human benchmark translations consistently employ conventionalized target-language expressions to preserve rhetorical force and genre appropriateness".

B. Discussion

(a). Overall Performance Patterns and Functional Differentiation Between Human and AI Translation

The present study set out to investigate not only whether state-of-the-art large language models (LLMs) can approximate professional human performance in translating journalistic metaphors from English into Vietnamese, but also how differences in performance are distributed across dimensions of translation quality. The results reported in Tables 1–3 reveal a differentiated performance profile in which LLMs demonstrate substantial gains in semantic accuracy and surface-level fluency, particularly under advanced prompting conditions, while human translators maintain a consistent advantage in cultural equivalence, rhetorical force, and journalistic appropriateness.

This pattern supports and extends recent empirical findings in LLM-assisted translation research, which suggest that contemporary LLMs are increasingly effective in producing linguistically well-formed and semantically plausible translations, yet remain limited in their ability to handle pragmatically and culturally embedded meaning (Moorkens & Reiter, 2023; Zhu et al., 2024). In the present study, prompting led to statistically and substantively meaningful improvements in semantic accuracy (Table 1), indicating that prompting strategies can partially compensate for weaknesses in default model behavior. However, these improvements did not translate into equivalent gains in cultural equivalence or metaphorical force (Table 2), underscoring a persistent gap between linguistic competence and culturally grounded interpretive competence.

From a theoretical perspective, this differentiated pattern reinforces the argument that translation quality cannot be reduced to a unidimensional construct. Instead, the findings align with multidimensional models of translation quality assessment, such as MQM (Lommel et al., 2014) and House's (2015) functional-pragmatic framework, which emphasize that accuracy, fluency, style, and cultural-pragmatic adequacy constitute partially independent dimensions. The present results empirically demonstrate that LLMs may achieve high scores on dimensions that are more closely tied to lexical-semantic mapping, while underperforming on dimensions that require culturally situated interpretation and rhetorical judgment.

(b). Literalization and Metaphorical Attenuation as Systematic AI Failure Patterns

A central qualitative finding of the study concerns the tendency of LLMs to default to literalization strategies when confronted with metaphorical expressions, even under advanced prompting. As illustrated in Table 3 and in the illustrative examples, a substantial proportion of AI-generated translations exhibited metaphorical attenuation, whereby the figurative force of the source expression was weakened or replaced by a more neutral, descriptive paraphrase.

This pattern is theoretically significant for several reasons. First, it suggests that LLMs, despite their extensive exposure to metaphorical language in training data, may prioritize propositional meaning over rhetorical framing. This aligns with prior work showing that neural systems often favor semantically transparent paraphrases at the expense of stylistic or pragmatic equivalence (Moorkens & O'Brien, 2023). Second, the attenuation of metaphorical force has important discourse consequences in journalistic contexts, where metaphors frequently function as framing devices that shape readers' interpretations and emotional responses to news events (Charteris-Black, 2011; Schäffner, 2004).

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The observed literalization strategies can also be interpreted through the lens of cognitive metaphor theory. According to Lakoff and Johnson (1980) and Kövecses (2010), metaphors are not merely linguistic ornaments but reflect entrenched conceptual mappings. Successful metaphor translation therefore requires not only recognizing a metaphorical expression, but also identifying an appropriate target-language mapping that is culturally conventionalized. The present findings suggest that LLMs often fail at this second step, opting instead for semantically safe but rhetorically flattened renderings.

This tendency has important implications for the notion of functional equivalence (Nida, 1964). While AI outputs may preserve core propositional content, they frequently fail to reproduce the pragmatic and affective impact experienced by source-language readers. As a result, LLMs may achieve a form of semantic equivalence without achieving functional or communicative equivalence, particularly in figuratively dense journalistic texts.

(c). Differential Performance Across Metaphor Types and Source Domains

While the overall findings point to a general tendency toward literalization and metaphorical attenuation in AI output, a closer examination of the dataset reveals that these effects are not evenly distributed across metaphor types and source domains. Qualitative coding indicates that LLM performance varies systematically depending on whether metaphors are drawn from highly conventionalized source domains (e.g., MOTION, CONTAINER, FORCE) or from more culturally and discourse-specific domains (e.g., FIRE, WAR, SPORTS, NATURAL DISASTERS in political framing).

Metaphors grounded in highly conventionalized domains such as MOTION (e.g., "the economy is slowing down") and CONTAINER (e.g., "fall into recession") were more likely to be translated by LLMs in ways that approximated professional human renderings. In such cases, Vietnamese possesses relatively stable and conventionalized equivalents (e.g., chậm lại, rơi vào suy thoái), allowing LLMs to rely on high-frequency collocational patterns learned during training.

By contrast, metaphors drawn from evaluatively and rhetorically charged domains such as FIRE ("political firestorm"), WAR ("battle over reforms"), and SPORTS ("tech stocks took a beating") were associated with a markedly higher incidence of literalization and collocational clash. These domains are particularly salient in English-language journalistic framing but do not always map straightforwardly onto culturally conventionalized Vietnamese metaphor systems. As a result, LLMs frequently produced surface-level transfers that were semantically transparent yet pragmatically and stylistically incongruent.

This pattern aligns with cognitive linguistic accounts emphasizing that metaphor translation requires sensitivity not only to conceptual mappings but also to the degree of conventionalization in the target culture (Kövecses, 2010; Schäffner, 2004). The present findings thus suggest that LLMs perform relatively well when metaphorical mappings are highly entrenched cross-linguistically, but struggle when mappings are culturally specific or genre-bound. This provides a more fine-grained account of LLM limitations than global claims about metaphor processing and highlights the importance of domain-sensitive evaluation in applied translation research.

(d). English–Vietnamese Specificity and Typological–Cultural Distance

The English–Vietnamese language pair represents a particularly demanding testing ground for metaphor translation, due to substantial typological and cultural differences. Vietnamese, as an isolating and tonal language, relies heavily on pragmatic particles, discourse conventions, and culturally conventionalized idioms, including four-syllable expressions, to convey evaluative stance and rhetorical emphasis.

The present findings indicate that LLMs struggle to consistently select culturally appropriate Vietnamese metaphorical equivalents, often producing translations that are semantically interpretable but stylistically incongruent with professional Vietnamese journalistic norms. This result supports Toury's (2012) notion of translationese, whereby target-language norms are subordinated to source-language patterns, resulting in pragmatic unnaturalness.

Recent applied translation research has emphasized that such effects are particularly pronounced in typologically distant language pairs and in culturally dense genres such as journalism (Moorkens & O'Brien, 2023). By providing empirical evidence from an underrepresented language pair, the present study contributes to broadening the empirical base of AI translation research, which has to date focused predominantly on high-resource European languages. The findings therefore raise important questions about the generalizability of optimistic claims regarding LLM translation performance across diverse linguistic and cultural contexts.

(e). Applied Linguistics Perspective: Figurative Competence and Advanced Language Use

From an applied linguistics perspective, the findings highlight figurative competence as a critical dimension of advanced language use that remains challenging not only for second language (L2) learners but also for AI systems. Research on L2 metaphor processing has long demonstrated that even advanced learners often rely on literal or transfer-based strategies when encountering culturally specific metaphors, leading to reduced pragmatic appropriateness (Littlemore & Low, 2006; Kövecses, 2010).

The parallel between L2 learner difficulties and LLM failure patterns is theoretically instructive. It suggests that figurative competence is not merely a function of exposure quantity, but depends on the acquisition of culturally entrenched conceptual mappings and discourse conventions. In this sense, LLMs may be seen as exhibiting a form of

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"advanced but non-native-like figurative competence," characterized by high fluency and semantic coverage but reduced cultural and pragmatic attunement.

This analogy provides a novel Applied Linguistics framing for understanding AI language performance. It opens up new avenues for comparative research between human L2 learners and AI systems, particularly in relation to the development of figurative and pragmatic competence. Such a perspective also underscores the continued relevance of human expertise in contexts where language is used not merely to convey information, but to construct stance, evaluation, and cultural meaning.

(f). The Role of Prompting: Gains and Structural Limits

The results demonstrate that advanced prompting strategies, including Chain-of-Thought prompting, can significantly improve LLM performance in terms of semantic accuracy and overall coherence. As shown in Table 1, Level 3 prompting substantially narrowed the gap between AI and human translators on accuracy-related dimensions. This finding is consistent with recent research indicating that prompting can elicit more structured reasoning and improved task performance in LLMs (Wei et al., 2022; Kojima et al., 2023).

However, the limited impact of prompting on cultural equivalence and metaphorical force (Table 2) suggests that prompting primarily optimizes processes that are already within the model's representational capacity. While prompting can encourage more careful analysis and reduce obvious errors, it cannot fully compensate for the absence of deeply entrenched, culturally specific conceptual mappings. This highlights a structural limitation of current LLM architectures in handling culturally grounded figurative language.

From a theoretical standpoint, this finding supports the argument that certain dimensions of translation quality are not easily reducible to explicit instructions or reasoning prompts. Instead, they depend on long-term immersion in specific linguistic and cultural communities, a form of situated competence that current AI systems do not possess.

(g). Methodological Implications for Evaluating Figurative Translation

The present findings also raise important methodological issues regarding the evaluation of metaphor translation quality. Automatic metrics such as BLEU and COMET, while useful for large-scale benchmarking, are limited in their capacity to capture functional equivalence, rhetorical force, and culturally grounded meaning (Rei et al., 2020; Reiter, 2023).

The use of expert human raters in this study therefore constitutes a key methodological strength. It enabled the analysis to capture subtle pragmatic and stylistic dimensions that remain invisible to automated evaluation. This supports recent calls in applied linguistics and translation studies for greater reliance on human-centered, multi-dimensional evaluation frameworks, particularly in research on creative and figurative language (Castilho et al., 2022; Moorkens & O'Brien, 2023).

More broadly, the findings suggest that research on AI translation quality must move beyond narrow accuracy-based metrics and incorporate discourse-level and culturally sensitive criteria if it is to provide a realistic assessment of system capabilities in professional contexts.

(h). Pedagogical Implications for Translator Education and EFL Contexts

Beyond newsroom practice, the findings have important implications for translator education and advanced EFL pedagogy. Figurative competence has long been recognized as a hallmark of advanced proficiency, yet it remains underrepresented in many curricula, which tend to prioritize grammatical accuracy and lexical expansion over metaphor awareness and rhetorical framing.

The systematic patterns observed in LLM output provide a novel pedagogical resource. LLM-generated translations, particularly those exhibiting literalization and metaphorical attenuation, may be used as diagnostic tools in translator training programs. By comparing LLM output with professional human benchmarks, students can be guided to identify subtle pragmatic and rhetorical mismatches and to develop greater sensitivity to culturally conventionalized metaphor use in Vietnamese journalistic discourse.

Such an approach aligns with recent pedagogical models that emphasize contrastive analysis, reflective post-editing, and critical engagement with AI tools as part of translator education. Rather than viewing AI as a threat to professional expertise, the present findings suggest that AI can be repurposed as a scaffold for developing higher-order figurative and pragmatic awareness.

In EFL contexts, the results also underscore the importance of explicitly teaching metaphorical framing and genre-specific metaphor use. Given the parallels between LLM and L2 learner difficulties, instructional interventions that target metaphor recognition, cross-cultural mapping, and genre-sensitive reformulation may benefit both human learners and professionals working with LLM-assisted translation systems.

(i). Micro-Level Discourse Effects and Framing Consequences

At a micro-discursive level, the attenuation or distortion of metaphorical framing observed in AI translations may have cumulative effects on how news events are interpreted by target-language audiences. Metaphors in journalism function not only as stylistic devices but also as framing mechanisms that structure evaluation, causality, and agency attribution.

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For example, the replacement of a metaphor such as "political firestorm" with a literal or weakened equivalent reduces the sense of intensity, urgency, and conflict encoded in the original framing. Over repeated instances, such systematic attenuation may subtly reshape the evaluative tone of translated news discourse, leading to a less emotionally charged and less rhetorically dynamic representation of events.

This observation resonates with discourse-analytic research on framing and ideology, which emphasizes that small shifts in metaphorical choices can have disproportionate effects on audience interpretation (Charteris-Black, 2011). From this perspective, LLM-mediated metaphor translation is not merely a technical matter but a site of discursive intervention, with potential implications for how international news narratives are localized and consumed.

(j). Implications for Newsroom Practice and Human–LLM Collaboration

The results have direct implications for professional newsroom practice. The evidence supports a Human–LLM collaboration model in which LLMs are deployed primarily as support tools for initial drafting, rough translation, and preliminary metaphor identification, while human translators and editors retain responsibility for cultural adaptation, rhetorical refinement, and final quality control.

Such a division of labor allows news organizations to benefit from the efficiency and speed of LLM systems without sacrificing cultural and stylistic quality. Importantly, the findings suggest that reliance on LLM without sufficient human oversight may lead to systematic flattening of metaphorical framing, with potential consequences for audience interpretation and journalistic integrity.

From a professional training perspective, the results also highlight the need to equip translators and editors with skills for critically evaluating and post-editing LLM output, particularly in relation to figurative language and cultural resonance. This reinforces the role of Applied Linguistics in informing curriculum design for translator education in the age of AI.

(k). AI Governance, Ethics, and Discursive Risk

Beyond operational concerns, the findings raise broader ethical and governance-related issues. Metaphors play a central role in framing public discourse, shaping ideological positioning, and influencing audience interpretation (Charteris-Black, 2011). Systematic distortion or attenuation of metaphorical framing by AI systems therefore constitutes not merely a technical limitation, but a discursive risk.

Current AI governance frameworks tend to prioritize factual accuracy, data protection, and bias mitigation, while paying comparatively limited attention to rhetorical and discursive effects. The present findings suggest that figurative language should be recognized as a high-risk category in LLM-mediated communication, particularly in journalism and public information contexts.

From an AI governance perspective, this underscores the need for domain-sensitive risk assessment and the development of guidelines that explicitly address figurative and evaluative language. Such measures are necessary to ensure that the efficiency gains offered by LLM-based systems do not come at the expense of subtle but consequential shifts in public discourse framing.

(l). Theoretical Integration and Contribution

The findings contribute to theoretical debates in both translation studies and applied linguistics by empirically demonstrating the limits of current LLMs in culturally embedded figurative translation. The study supports multidimensional models of translation quality, reinforces cognitive and functional approaches to metaphor, and provides an applied linguistics framing that conceptualizes figurative competence as a form of culturally situated expertise that remains resistant to automation.

By situating English–Vietnamese journalistic translation within this broader theoretical landscape, the study advances understanding of how LLM-based systems interact with culturally grounded meaning and highlights the continuing centrality of human expertise in professional translation practice.

Despite the significant insights provided by this study, several limitations should be acknowledged. First, the corpus was restricted to 50 purposively selected metaphorical sentences. While this sample size might appear modest for broader statistical generalizations, it was strategically chosen to allow for a rigorous, expert-led qualitative error analysis. As noted by Saldanha and O'Brien (2014), in-depth interpretive research in translation studies often prioritizes the granularity of analysis over sheer data volume. This size enabled a meticulous examination of cognitive and cultural nuances that larger, automated datasets might overlook. Future research could expand this scope by utilizing larger parallel corpora or exploring a wider range of journalistic genres to further validate these preliminary findings.

VI. Conclusion

This study provided a multidimensional comparative analysis of metaphor translation in digital journalism, contrasting professional human editors with state-of-the-art LLMs. The empirical findings reveal a bifurcated landscape: while LLMs demonstrate remarkable proficiency in surface-level semantic integrity and grammatical fluency, they encounter significant barriers in navigating the nuances of figurative language. The persistent discrepancy between human and machine performance, particularly in cultural equivalence, underscores the limitations of pattern-based linguistic modeling in capturing the conceptual and ideological weight of metaphorical framing.

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Qualitative evidence suggests that LLM-generated translations often exhibit a "literalist bias," leading to collocational clashes and rhetorical dilution. By defaulting to literal renderings, LLMs risk stripping journalistic discourse of its evaluative stance and persuasive force. Although advanced prompting techniques such as Chain-of-Thought protocols can mitigate errors in semantic transfer and register appropriateness, they cannot yet substitute for the deep-seated cultural intuition and pragmatic judgment of professional human mediators. In the high-stakes environment of international news production, human expertise remains indispensable for ensuring that translated content resonates meaningfully within the target socio-cultural context.

Ultimately, this research contributes to applied linguistics by offering a grounded framework for evaluating the limits of LLM-based systems in handling non-literal meaning. As AI integration in journalism accelerates, these findings advocate for a human–AI collaboration model that prioritizes human oversight in the "transcreation" of figurative language. Future research should explore the evolving boundaries of LLM competence across more diverse language pairs and complex rhetorical genres, fostering a more nuanced understanding of the intersection between cognitive linguistics, professional translation practice, and generative artificial intelligence.

Declaration of the Use of AI

The author would like to acknowledge the use of ChatGPT-4o and Claude 3.5 for linguistic refinement and grammatical editing of this manuscript to ensure clarity. Furthermore, the core translation data analyzed in the methodology were generated by ChatGPT-4o and Claude 3.5 as part of the research design. The author has reviewed and edited all AI-assisted outputs and takes full responsibility for the final content of the article.

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A Typology of Frame-Based Models of Intellectual Concepts in Kazakh, Russian, and English Linguacultures

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***Abstract*—The relevance of this study is driven by the growing interest of modern linguistics in the contrastive analysis of the intellectual conceptosphere and the need to identify universal and culture-specific mechanisms of conceptualizing thinking across different linguacultures. The aim of the study is to develop a typology of frame-based models of intellectual concepts in Kazakh, Russian, and English linguacultures on the basis of their cognitive-semantic and linguacultural comparison. The methodology combines frame analysis, a typological approach, and linguacultural analysis, drawing on a corpus of texts representing different genres and discourse types. The scientific novelty of the study lies in identifying and systematizing semantic domains of intellectual concepts as internal cognitive–semantic subsystems that form hierarchically organized frame-based models. The results establish the dominant types of conceptualization of the intellectual domain and identify universal and culture-specific elements of the frame structure of concepts across the three languages. The main conclusions confirm the productivity of frame-based and typological approaches for analyzing the intellectual conceptosphere and demonstrate their potential for intercultural comparison and further cognitive-linguistic research.**

***Index Terms*—typology of intellectual concepts, conceptosphere, frame-based model, linguaculture, cognitive semantics**

I. Introduction

The study of intellectual concepts within the linguacultural paradigm is a relevant area of cognitive linguistics, since concepts reflect patterns of thinking and culturally specific characteristics of language users. Frame-based models provide an effective tool for structuring and analyzing such concepts. In Kazakh, Russian, and English linguacultures, both similarities and differences can be observed in the organization of conceptual systems, which makes their comprehensive comparison necessary. The analysis of intellectual concepts contributes to a deeper understanding of the relationship between language, thought, and culture, and it also supports the development of intercultural communication. Contemporary approaches to frame modeling make it possible to identify universal cognitive mechanisms as well as the

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specificity of particular cultural contexts. Thus, investigating frame-based models of intellectual concepts in a contrastive format is significant both scientifically and in applied terms.

Recent studies confirm the importance of cognitive and cultural approaches to concept research. Safaralieva and Perfilieva (2023) demonstrated the potential of modeling multidimensional linguacultural concepts using the concept *OLD AGE* across different languages. Orazbaeva et al. (2025) proposed a generative cognitive model that enables the analysis of linguistic structures and thinking processes in Kazakh. Beknazarova et al. (2021) emphasized the role of conceptual metaphor as a cognitive tool for modeling culturally specific meanings. Narziev (2025) showed how a frame-based approach can be applied to the analysis of economic concepts through conceptual metaphors, demonstrating both intercultural differences and similarities. These studies confirm the scholarly value of an integrated analysis of intellectual concepts using frame-based models.

Despite the accumulated findings, questions of a systematic typology and comparison of intellectual concepts across three linguacultures simultaneously remain unresolved. Existing studies are often limited to a single language or culture, which prevents the identification of both universal and culture-specific elements of conceptualization. A comprehensive methodology is needed to classify and analyze frame-based models of concepts while taking cognitive and cultural parameters into account. These gaps motivate the present study, the aim of which is to develop a typology of frame-based models of intellectual concepts in Kazakh, Russian, and English linguacultures.

II. Literature Review

This section reviews the main strands of research that inform the present study. It first outlines theoretical approaches to frames and related tools for meaning and discourse analysis, then summarizes findings on the modeling of intellectual and other abstract concepts through metaphor and frame-based representations. The review further highlights contrastive and typological work relevant to Kazakh–Russian–English linguacultures, including issues of bilingualism and translation, and concludes with prior studies that motivate the analytical choices and typological framework adopted in this article.

A. Theoretical Approaches to Frame-Based and Conceptual Analysis

A substantial body of publications is devoted to the theoretical understanding of *frames* as a tool for analyzing meaning and discourse. Hu and Chen (2019) show that *frames perform not only a representational function but also a pragmatic one*, contributing to author positioning and guiding text interpretation. Similarly, Spiess (2025) treats *frames as jointly constructed cognitive structures* emerging in dialogic interaction. Multimodal studies (Bateman et al., 2021) expand the traditional understanding of frames by incorporating visual, auditory, and textual resources; however, the question of their comparability across different linguacultures remains open.

Within typological lexical semantics, an increasingly productive approach involves comparing semantic domains and their internal relations (as a form of conceptual organization) through colexification modeling and areal-typological comparison. This creates a formalizable bridge between the cognitive reconstruction of frames and cross-linguistic testing of the stability of semantic links (Schapper & Koptjevskaja-Tamm, 2022). Recent work in Linguistic Typology further shows that colexification links may differ in “persistence” versus “diffusibility”, which is methodologically important for distinguishing stable semantic associations from contact-driven distributions in typological inference (Gast & Koptjevskaja-Tamm, 2022). Likewise, large-scale evidence from African colour-term systems demonstrates that colexification patterns can form robust areal clusters, strengthening the empirical basis for treating semantic-domain links as typologically testable generalizations (Segerer & Vanhove, 2022).

The integration of *frame semantics and conceptual metaphor* theory helps refine the internal structure of *metaphorical concepts*, including intellectual and emotional categories (Neumair et al., 2025), yet unified criteria for typologization have not been established. As shown in previous research (Spiess, 2025; Pan, 2022), dynamic approaches account for frame activation in communication, while instruments such as DMIP (Reijnierse et al., 2018) and MetaNet (Petruck, 2016) enable metaphor identification and the modeling of complex conceptual networks. Studies by Thiele et al. (2024), Brugman et al. (2019), and Gibbs and Siman (2021) emphasize the need to consider *discursive, non-verbal, and cultural aspects in frame reconstruction*.

From a methodological perspective, it is important that typological studies of lexico-semantic networks published in Linguistic Typology demonstrate that *nodes* and *clusters* of meanings (corresponding to frame zones) can be identified not only interpretively but also as recurring cross-linguistic patterns of semantic association. This strengthens the justification for constructing a typology of frame-based models when comparing multiple linguacultures (Schapper & Koptjevskaja-Tamm, 2022).

B. Intellectual and Abstract Concepts Through Metaphor and Frames

Research in cognitive linguistics shows that abstract *concepts (e.g., reason, knowledge, understanding, evaluation)* are represented through *metaphors and frames* that become activated in communication. Mon et al. (2021) found that *conventional metaphors elicit higher engagement in comprehension* than literal expressions by mobilizing cognitive attention. O’Dowd (2025) demonstrated that metaphor and metonymy modify the interpretation and evaluation of concepts. Burgers et al. (2016) proposed HIP, a hyperbole identification procedure that captures how hyperbole intensifies

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evaluative components. Thibodeau et al. (2017) and Thibodeau and Boroditsky (2011) show that metaphors provide *cognitive scaffolding for reasoning, affecting causal attribution and role assignment.*

Typologically oriented research on the perception–cognition domain indicates that "*intellectual*" meanings (e.g., KNOW/UNDERSTAND; THINK/BELIEVE) form stable cross-linguistic clusters and function as connecting hubs in semantic networks. This is conceptually close to the idea of frame zones and provides empirical support for typologizing intellectual concepts, for example by identifying dominant frame domains and their links across languages (Georgakopoulos et al., 2022).

Altavilla et al. (2025) treat metaphor as a tool for constructing the "Self," demonstrating the socio-cognitive nature of *intellectual concepts*. Cross-cultural studies (Wnuk & Ito, 2021; Lederer, 2019; Zhang et al., 2022) emphasize that *cultural schemas shape the selection of metaphorical patterns and the types of frames* that become activated. Alejo-González (2023) examines stable metaphors in English as a lingua franca, while Navarro i Ferrando and Esbrí-Blasco (2024) clarify semantic roles in metaphorical mappings. Grisham et al. (2025) demonstrate the social influence of metaphors on the perception of intellectual qualities.

Additional support comes from typological analyses of cross-modal semantic associations in perception, showing that languages systematically *connect* sensory meanings and their expression (including through word formation), and that such links provide an important cognitive background for shifts from perceptual to abstract/intellectual meanings, including pathways for conceptualizing knowledge, understanding, and evaluation (Norcliffe & Majid, 2024).

Finally, research on colexification patterns demonstrates that abstract qualities and evaluations can become entrenched through embodied and object-based anchors (embodied/metonymic foundations), such as stable links like BONE–STRENGTH or systematic mappings between body parts and objects. This is directly relevant for explaining why frame structures of intellectual concepts include both universal and culture-specific components across linguacultures (Schapper, 2022; Tjuka, 2024).

C. Kazakh–Russian–English Linguacultures: Concept Comparison, Bilingualism, and Translation

Comparing concepts across languages and cultures requires attention to bilingualism, cultural specificity, and translation mechanisms. Kalinin and Ignatenko (2024) show that metaphorical force strengthens the cognitive and evaluative functions of concepts in Russian discourse. Baigozhina et al. (2019) demonstrate that media discourse transforms cultural meanings, creating new frames for the concepts of *knowledge, understanding,* and *evaluation* in Kazakhstan.

Tokpayeva et al. (2024) identify *universal cognitive cores and culture-specific semantic nuances* in Kazakh, Russian, and English children's folklore. Suleimenova et al. (2021) argue that the diversification of Russian in Kazakhstan gives rise to specific *concept frames*. Wong et al. (2023) analyze how bilingual children with dyslexia conceptualize *intellectual processes through metaphors* and *frames*, while Xu et al. (2022) demonstrate *multimodal frames in educational practice*. Dalpanagioti (2023), Ptashkin (2021), and Sullivan (2016) show how FrameNet, MetaNet, and constructional semantics contribute to the formalization of cross-linguistic *concept typologies*.

D. Related Prior Studies

A number of studies examine intellectual concepts through the lens of frame-based and linguacultural analysis, which aligns with the objectives of the present study. In particular, the study *Linguo-Conceptual and Linguocultural Analysis of the Concept "Memory": Semantic Typology of Kazakh-Russian-English Phraseology* (Bakytzhanova et al., 2025a) is devoted to a contrastive analysis of phraseological units that represent the concept of memory in Kazakh, Russian, and English linguacultures. This co-authored study was published in 2025 in *Theory and Practice in Language Studies*, which is indexed in Scopus.

Within that research, *key semantic microfields* were identified, reflecting processes of consolidation, forgetting, and retrieval of information, as well as their cultural and evaluative marking. Methodologically, the analysis combined etymological, componential, structural-semantic, and comparative methods, together with *modeling*, which made it possible to construct a typological map of the frames of the concept *memory* and to identify universal cores and culture-specific elements.

On the basis of these findings, *phraseological units were interpreted as cognitive-cultural markers* that reflect distinctive values, archetypes, and thought patterns in each linguaculture. Specifically, in the Kazakh corpus, memory frames incorporate historical-cultural and collective elements; in Russian, educational and personal elements; and in English, individual-cognitive and instrumental-analytic elements. These results provide an empirical foundation for constructing an intercultural typology of frame-based models of intellectual concepts.

Comparing these results with published findings by other researchers (Sharifian, 2017; Neumair et al., 2025) shows that *universal cognitive cores* are preserved across languages, whereas *cultural and contextual markers* vary. This supports the need to account for cross-linguistic differences when typologizing concepts. The analysis also indicates that intellectual concepts such as memory function as *integral elements of the conceptosphere*, where cognitive processes, cultural values, and evaluative components are combined into a unified *frame representation*.

Another aspect of Bakytzhanova et al. (2025b) concerns the Kazakh legal conceptosphere, where intellectual parameters of legal discourse are analyzed through the concepts *quqyq* ('law/right'), *qorgau* ('protection'), *adildik* ('justice/fairness'), and *tendik* ('equality'). The study demonstrates that legal concepts are *structured through frames that*

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include cognitive, normative, and cultural elements, which allows them to be interpreted as *intellectual constructs within a national linguaculture* and compared with Russian and English-language conceptospheres in the context of legal translation and interpretation.

The publication by Akhmetova et al. (2025) investigates the representation of ethnocultural concepts in the linguistic consciousness of Kazakh youth. The authors examine three culturally salient terms: *körimdik* ('a gift given at a first meeting'), *qūiryq-bauyr* ('a ritual dish symbolizing kinship ties'), and *qoşqar müiız* ('ram's horn as a symbol of strength and well-being'). A free-association experiment with 62 participants revealed mental representations of these concepts, including associations such as "money" for *körimdik*, "matchmakers/parents of the newlyweds" for *qūiryq-bauyr*, and "ornament" for *qoşqar müiız*. The results showed that traditional meanings are maintained, while some associations shift under the influence of contemporary social and family factors, indicating the dynamics of cultural perception.

The study by Akhmetova et al. (2025) not only expands the empirical basis for analyzing cultural and cognitive structures but also confirms the need to integrate *methods of cognitive linguistics, frame analysis, and concept typologization* when studying the intellectual conceptosphere in a multicultural environment.

These studies demonstrate that *language and culture shape national identity*, and that fixed expressions and idiomatic units reflect both cognitive and value structures of an ethnoculture. A methodological approach that includes the analysis of mental representations and free associations makes it possible to *identify cognitive and cultural cores* of concepts, which aligns with the typologization of frame-based models of intellectual concepts in the present article (Bakytzhanova et al., 2025b).

III. Material and Methods

This section describes the empirical basis of the study and the methodological framework used to analyze intellectual concepts in Kazakh, Russian, and English. It specifies the composition of the multilingual corpus, outlines the analytical tools adopted from cognitive linguistics, and summarizes the step-by-step procedure through which frame structures were identified and compared across linguacultures, ensuring transparency and reproducibility of the results.

A. Research Materials

The empirical basis of the study comprises a multilingual corpus of approximately 650 text units in Kazakh, Russian, and English, representing both written and spoken linguacultural practice. The corpus was compiled from several source groups: fiction texts, popular-science and academic publications, online resources, official documents, and public speeches. To improve representativeness, the materials were selected so as to include both institutional and everyday discourse, as well as texts reflecting different communicative situations and cultural contexts.

In genre terms, the corpus includes narrative, expository, analytical, and publicistic materials. The sampling procedure aimed to ensure balance across the three linguacultures and to cover the verbalization of intellectual concepts in both formal and informal contexts. The materials were selected from contemporary sources, with priority given to texts reflecting current language use and stable cultural models of conceptualization.

In addition to corpus data, the study also involved language users, colleagues, and professional linguist experts who participated in the interpretation and classification of the concepts. This made it possible to combine quantitative and qualitative procedures and to increase the interpretive reliability of the frame-based analysis.

B. Research Tools and Methods

To analyze intellectual concepts, methods from cognitive linguistics were applied, including frame analysis, conceptual mapping, and cognitive-contextual analysis. Frame analysis made it possible to identify the structure of concepts and the relations among their components. Conceptual mapping ensured the visualization of links between concept elements and the identification of universal and culture-specific components (Safaralieva & Perfilieva, 2023). Cognitive-contextual analysis enabled the comparison of data from different linguistic and cultural sources and the determination of which concept elements are preserved and which vary across linguacultures (Orazbaeva et al., 2025). The advantage of these methods lies in their capacity to integrate structural analysis of concepts with interpretation of their cultural and cognitive contexts. The authors have previously applied these methods, which ensured high verification of results in similar studies, for example in *Linguo-Conceptual and Linguocultural Analysis of the Concept "Memory": Semantic Typology of Kazakh-Russian-English Phraseology* (Bakytzhanova et al., 2025a).

C. Research Procedure

The research procedure consisted of several interrelated stages:

1. *Corpus compilation and preliminary classification*
    - Sampling textual units to compile an empirical corpus in Kazakh, Russian, and English.
    - Classifying texts by source types and genres to ensure diversity of cognitive and cultural contexts.
2. *Identification of key components of concepts*
    - Using frame analysis to determine the concept core, attributes, role elements, and cultural markers.
    - Applying conceptual mapping to visualize relations among components and to identify universal and culture-specific elements.

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3. *Cross-linguacultural comparison of concepts*
    - Conducting a comparative analysis of concepts in Kazakh, Russian, and English linguistic environments.
    - Identifying universal elements preserved across all languages and culture-specific markers reflecting distinctive cognitive and cultural features in the three linguacultures.
4. *Processing and visualization of results*
    - Using statistical tools to analyze frequencies and distributions of concepts.
    - Employing visualization (tables, schemes, typological frame maps) to enhance clarity, confirm data reliability, and enable reproducibility of the results.

This procedural algorithm ensured logical consistency with the selected methods and provided a solid foundation for constructing the typology of frame-based models of intellectual concepts in Kazakh, Russian, and English linguacultures.

IV. Results and Discussion

This section reports the outcomes of the study in a way that makes the analytical trajectory explicit from the empirical basis to the interpretive generalizations. The results are presented as a combination of corpus-driven observations and model-based interpretations: quantitative patterns are used to motivate which concepts are most central in the dataset, while qualitative evidence is used to show how those concepts are structured as frames and how their components vary across linguacultures. Importantly, the results are not limited to listing lexical items; instead, they demonstrate how recurrent linguistic evidence supports (i) the identification of frame cores and peripheral zones, (ii) the separation of attributes, role elements, and culturally salient markers, and (iii) the construction of a typology that captures stable cross-linguistic regularities alongside systematic variation. In this sense, the section is designed to be cumulative: each step adds a new level of explanatory depth, moving from distributional tendencies to structural descriptions and, ultimately, to typological conclusions that can be tested and extended in further contrastive research.

A. General Characteristics of the Corpus and Criteria for Selecting Concepts

The research corpus included 650 text units in Kazakh, Russian, and English, representing written and spoken sources from different genres, including fiction, popular-science texts, and official/business discourse. Key concepts were identified based on frequency of use and their cognitive and cultural significance for the language and the linguacultural environment. Such a selection ensured corpus representativeness and made it possible to cover both everyday and institutionalized forms of verbalizing the intellectual conceptosphere.

The selection of key concepts was based on a combination of quantitative and qualitative criteria. The analysis included concepts that, first, show high frequency and stability in the language; second, have pronounced cognitive and cultural significance; and third, demonstrate a developed frame structure comprising role, functional, and evaluative components.

As a result, the following concepts were identified and analyzed: *thinking, knowledge, memory, intellect,* and *stupidity*. This set reflects the core of the intellectual conceptosphere and provides a methodological basis for subsequent frame-based and typological comparison across the three linguacultures.

B. Quantitative Distribution of Intellectual Concepts Across the Three Linguacultures

To identify universal and culture-specific tendencies in conceptualizing the intellectual domain, a quantitative analysis was conducted of the distribution of concepts across cognitive-semantic categories in Kazakh, Russian, and English. The results are presented in *Table 1*.

TABLE 1
QUANTITATIVE DISTRIBUTION OF INTELLECTUAL CONCEPTS BY COGNITIVE-SEMANTIC CATEGORY

Cognitive-semantic category	*Kazakh*	*Russian*	*English*
thinking	120	135	142
knowledge	95	110	108
memory	70	85	82
intellect	60	72	75
stupidity	40	50	48
Other intellectual nominations	85	90	95

As shown *in Table 1*, the concepts *thinking* and *knowledge* are the most represented in all three linguacultures, which indicates their universal character and their fundamental role in the cognitive organization of knowledge. At the same time, the concepts *intellect* and *stupidity* show more pronounced cultural variability, which is associated with differences in value orientations, social norms, and ways of evaluating intellectual activity. These data provide an empirical basis for subsequent frame analysis.

C. Structural Features of Frame-Based Models of Intellectual Concepts

To identify the internal organization of intellectual concepts, frame analysis was applied, involving the identification of the concept core, attributes, role elements, and cultural markers. This approach made it possible to compare not

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individual lexical units but structurally organized cognitive models. *Table 2* presents typical frame-based models of the key concepts.

TABLE 2
STRUCTURAL PARAMETERS OF FRAME-BASED MODELS OF INTELLECTUAL CONCEPTS

Concept	***Concept core***	***Attributes***	***Role elements***	***Cultural markers (Kazakh / Russian / English)***
thinking	Thinking activity	Logic, reflection	Individual, community	collective deliberation / rationality / critical thinking
knowledge	A set of internalized information	Information, experience	Scholar, learner	oral tradition / academicism / applied orientation
memory	Retention and retrieval	Stability, activation	Individual, culture	historical-cultural memory / educational memory / individual cognition
intellect	Intellectual ability	Analytical capacity, flexibility	Person	moral maturity / intellect / cognitive competence
stupidity	Deficit of rationality	Error-proneness, limitation	Person	social condemnation / personal evaluation / cognitive constraints

The data in *Table 2* show that the core and attributive characteristics of the frames are predominantly universal, whereas role elements and cultural markers vary depending on the linguacultural environment. This result confirms the rationale for moving from descriptive analysis to typological generalization.

D. A Typology of Frame-Based Models of Intellectual Concepts

Based on the contrastive analysis, a typology of frame-based models was developed that reflects differences in the dominant ways of conceptualizing intellectual reality. The typological basis included the functional-semantic focus of a concept, its cultural orientation, and the character of cross-linguistic variability (*Table 3*):

TABLE 3
TYPOLOGICAL PARAMETERS OF FRAME-BASED MODELS OF INTELLECTUAL CONCEPTS

Concept	*Type of conceptualization*	*Frame focus*	*Cultural vector*	*Cross-linguistic variability*
thinking	Processual	Cognitive operations	Cognitive-functional	Structural universality with differences in metaphorization
knowledge	Resultative	Representation and transmission	Social-institutional	Variability of acquisition scenarios
memory	Dynamic	Experience activation	Cultural-historical	Differences in domains and value load
intellect	Evaluative-normative	Personal quality	Axiological	Ethical and cultural specificity
stupidity	Negative-evaluative	Deviation from the norm	Social-regulatory	High cultural markedness

As shown in *Table 3*, intellectual concepts form a systemically organized typology in which processual and functional models *(thinking, memory)* are opposed to evaluative-normative ones *(intellect, stupidity)*, while the concept *knowledge* occupies an intermediate position. The resulting typology captures stable models of conceptualizing the intellectual domain in the three linguacultures.

The contrastive analysis of intellectual concepts showed that, despite universal cognitive foundations, ways of conceptualizing them in Kazakh, Russian, and English linguacultures display stable variability driven by cultural, value-based, and discursive factors. Within the frame-based and typological approaches, this is manifested in differences at the level of attributes, role elements, and cultural markers, whereas the concept core typically retains an invariant character.

To illustrate how the proposed typology operates in a concrete contrastive case, the discussion below focuses on *memory* as a representative intellectual concept. Positioned between cognitive-mechanistic and culture-sensitive dimensions, *memory* combines a universal function of experience activation with linguaculturally marked patterns of preserving and interpreting experience. This makes it particularly suitable for demonstrating how typological parameters (frame focus, cultural vector, and cross-linguistic variability) are realized across Kazakh, Russian, and English linguacultures.

A particular point of interest in this context is the concept *memory*, as it occupies an intermediate position between the cognitive and cultural components of the intellectual conceptosphere. Unlike concepts oriented primarily toward operational or evaluative-normative characteristics, *memory* simultaneously functions as a universal cognitive mechanism and as a culturally marked way of preserving and interpreting experience. This makes the concept a representative example for demonstrating the typology of frame-based models and for identifying linguacultural differences in the conceptualization of the intellectual domain.

The frame model of the concept *memory* in the linguacultures under analysis constitutes a multi-layered cognitive-semantic structure that includes a core, attributive characteristics, role elements, and cultural markers. At the core level, *memory* in all three languages is conceptualized as the subject's ability to retain and reactivate past experience, ensuring cognitive and cultural continuity. This level demonstrates a high degree of typological universality and confirms the basic status of *memory* as an element of the intellectual conceptosphere.

The attributive level of the frame reveals culturally conditioned differences in the interpretation of *memory*. In Kazakh linguaculture, emphasis is placed on the stability and sacral nature of memory associated with historical and genealogical continuity, which reflects a collective orientation and the value of preserving cultural experience. In Russian

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linguaculture, *memory* is often modeled as an emotionally saturated and reflexive space connected with personal experiences and moral evaluation of the past. In English linguaculture, by contrast, a rationalized understanding of memory predominates, treating it as an individual cognitive ability subject to control, development, and functional evaluation.

The role elements of the frame also demonstrate typologically significant differences. The Kazakh model is characterized by an orientation toward correlating individual memory with collective and cultural memory, whereas the Russian model foregrounds the interaction of personal and social levels of memory. In English linguaculture, the individual subject predominates, viewing memory primarily as a personal cognitive resource. These differences confirm that memory performs different socio-cognitive functions in different linguistic communities.

At the level of cultural markers, the most pronounced linguacultural divergences are observed. In Kazakh, memory is conceptualized as a value-laden and sacralized resource associated with moral responsibility toward the community and ancestors. In Russian, memory is often understood as a source of emotional tension, reflection, and inner dialogue. In English, memory is predominantly interpreted in pragmatic terms as a cognitive competence that ensures the efficiency of thinking and activity. These markers reflect not differences in the cognitive mechanisms themselves, but culturally conditioned ways of frame activation.

Thus, the analysis of the concept *memory* clearly demonstrates the productivity of typological and frame-based approaches for identifying universal and culture-specific characteristics of intellectual concepts. The results confirm that, while the cognitive core is invariant, the frame organization of the concept varies depending on cultural dominants, creating a methodological basis for the contrastive analysis of other components of the intellectual conceptosphere.

Within frame analysis, the concept *memory* is modeled as a multi-level cognitive-semantic structure including a core, attributive features, role elements, and culturally marked components. The frame organization of this concept reflects not only universal cognitive mechanisms of memorization, storage, and retrieval of information, but also nationally specific ways of conceptualizing them in the linguistic worldview.

The core of the frame (universal level): the core of the concept memory in all three linguacultures represents the subject's cognitive ability to retain and reactivate past experience. At the universal level, memory is understood as:

- a mechanism for recording information;
- a means of ensuring continuity of personal and collective experience;
- a condition of intellectual and cultural identity.

This level demonstrates a high degree of typological commonality and confirms the universal character of memory as a basic element of the intellectual conceptosphere.

The attributive level of the frame: at the level of attributes, dynamic characteristics of memory are identified, associated with processuality and evaluative meaning:

- Kazakh linguaculture emphasizes the stability, preservation, and sacral nature of memory *(zhady, es, oi, kokei, konil)* (approx. 'remembrance/memory; memory as capacity; thought; inner mind; inner state/heart'), which reflects an orientation toward continuity and collective experience (*Zheti atany bilu* ('to remember and know seven generations; up to the seventh ancestor'));
- Russian linguaculture models memory through emotional-psychological intensity, dramatization, and inner tension (*vrezat'sya v pamyat'* ('to become unforgettable; to leave a deep imprint'), zakhlesnulo v pamyati ('memories flooded back/overwhelmed'), *zarubit' na nosu* ('to remember once and for all; to keep firmly in mind'));
- English linguaculture demonstrates a rationalized and functional understanding of memory as an individual cognitive resource (*retain information, have a photographic memory, store information).*

Thus, the attributive level of the frame reflects the variability of the cognitive interpretation of memory depending on the cultural dominant.

The role elements of the frame: the role components of the concept *memory* are associated with types of subjects and sources of memory:

- in the Kazakh model, the key roles are the i*ndividual* and *culture*, which is manifested in the *dominance of collective and genealogical memory*;
- in the Russian model, both the individual and the community are foregrounded, and *memory functions as a space of personal experience and social evaluation*;
- in the English model, the leading role is the *individual subject*, who possesses *memory as a cognitive competence*.

Role differences confirm that memory performs different socio-cognitive functions in different linguacultures.

Cultural markers (language-specific level): the most pronounced typological differences manifest at the level of cultural markers, which fix value-based and mental attitudes.

- Kazakh: *memory* is conceptualized as a *sacralized resource associated with historical and genealogical continuity and moral responsibility* before ancestors and the collective (sacralization of memory; cultural duty to remember).
- Russian: *memory* is modeled as an *emotionally loaded space* in which recollections may be traumatic, intrusive, or morally significant (*memory as a source of inner conflict and reflection*).

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- English: *memory* is interpreted predominantly in *pragmatic terms* as *an individual cognitive ability that is amenable to development, control, and evaluation* (*memory as skill; cognitive efficiency*).

It is important to emphasize that these markers are not separate concepts, but culturally conditioned ways of frame activation of the same concept.

The typological conclusion regarding the frame model of the concept *memory* demonstrates:

- the universality of the core and basic cognitive processes;
- the variability of attributive and role components;
- the cultural specificity of markers reflecting the value and mental dominants of each linguaculture.

The resulting typology confirms the productivity of the frame-based approach for analyzing the intellectual conceptosphere and creates a methodological basis for the contrastive study of other concepts (e.g., *intellect* and *stupidity*) within a unified typological model.

To refine the internal structure of the typology, the analysis further distinguishes semantic domains as concept-internal cognitive-semantic subsystems. This step makes it possible to represent *memory*, *intellect*, and *stupidity* as multi-level frame formations that incorporate analytical, functional, social, and value-related aspects.

To identify the internal organization of intellectual concepts, a typological procedure was applied that distinguishes semantic domains as internal cognitive-semantic subsystems of each concept. Rather than treating concepts as undifferentiated units, this approach models *memory*, *intellect*, and *stupidity* as multi-level frame formations combining functional, social, and value-related aspects. Table 4 summarizes the contrastive results for Kazakh, Russian, and English linguacultures.

TABLE 4
SEMANTIC DOMAINS OF FRAME-BASED MODELS OF INTELLECTUAL CONCEPTS

Semantic domain	*Domain description*	*Lexico-cultural markers (Kazakh / Russian / English)*
Concept: MEMORY		
Type of memory	Differentiation of memory by duration and stability of information storage	qysqa merzimdi es, uzaq merzimdi es / kratkovremennaya pamyat', dolgovremennaya pamyat' / short-term memory, long-term memory
Process of retention and retrieval	Retention, activation, and retrieval of experience and knowledge	este saqtau, eske alu, oida ustau / sokhranenie, vospominanie / retention, recollection
Memory and learning	The role of memory in knowledge acquisition and cognitive development	bilimdi saqtau / uchebnaya pamyat', sokhranenie znanii / learning memory, knowledge retention
Concept: INTELLECT		
Analytical ability	Ability for logical analysis and reasoning	aqyl, paiym, oi / um, rassudok / intellect, reasoning
Cognitive efficiency	Speed of thinking, quick-wittedness, intellectual productivity	tapqyrlyq, zerektik / soobrazitel'nost', nakhodchivost' / mental agility, sharpness
Decision-making	Assessing a situation and choosing a rational decision	sheshim qabyldau / prinyatie reshenii, blagorazumie / decision-making, judgment
Social-normative evaluation	Intellect as a socially approved personal quality	aqyldy adam, altyn basty, aqyly telegei teniz / umnyi chelovek, khodyachii universitet, strelyanyi vorobei / intelligent person, a walking encyclopedia
Value-ethical aspect	The link between intellect and responsibility, maturity, moral evaluation	kop korgen, baiypty / razumnyi, zrelyi / wise, sensible
Concept: STUPIDITY		
Cognitive limitation	Lack of ability to analyze and comprehend	oisyzdyq, aqymaqtyq, mii almaityn, oisyz qulaq, topastyq / glupost', ogranichennost', dyryavaya bashka / stupidity, lack of reasoning, poor judgment
Erroneous thinking	Tendency toward misconceptions and incorrect inferences	zhansaq oi / zabluzhdenie, oshibka / misconception, fallacy
Behavioral manifestation	Manifestation of stupidity in actions and behavior	orynsiz areket, ersilik zhasau, ersi qylyq / glupoe vyrazhenie, nerazumnyi postupok, delat' gluposti, oprometchivye deistviya / foolish behavior, reckless behavior, poor decision-making
Social evaluation	Negative evaluation of a person by society	aqymaq adam, topas, aqpa qulaq, salpan qulaq / glupyi chelovek, solomennaya golova, dubina, nedalekii chelovek / foolish person, a simple-minded person, not very bright
Ironic-metaphorical construal	Use of the concept in irony, admonition, and evaluative statements	aqylyngdy shashpa, aqylyngdy qaida zhogaltyng, basyn istemei qaldi / ne bud' gluptsom, ne bud' durakom, golova ne varit / don't be foolish, use your head, don't be a fool

As *Table 4* shows, each intellectual concept is characterized by a *hierarchically organized system of semantic domains* reflecting different aspects of cognitive and cultural conceptualization. The concept *memory* exhibits a predominantly functional–cognitive structure; the concept *intellect* combines cognitive and value–normative domains; while the concept *stupidity* includes a pronounced socio-evaluative and pragmatic–metaphorical component. A comparison of lexico-cultural markers across the three languages reveals *universal domains* of conceptualization alongside *culturally specific emphases*, which confirms the productivity of the frame-based and typological approach for analyzing the intellectual conceptosphere.

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It is interesting to note, with respect to the concept *stupidity*, that in English linguaculture the concept *stupidity* in the aspect of cognitive limitation is predominantly represented through analytical and institutionally neutral constructions *(lack of reasoning, poor judgment, limited understanding)*, reflecting the culture's orientation toward rationality and critical thinking. Expressive metaphors *(not the sharpest tool in the shed)* are used as mitigated evaluative devices and function mainly in informal discourse, which distinguishes the English model from the more imagistic and expressive Kazakh and Russian nominations.

The ironic-metaphorical construal of the concept *stupidity* demonstrates culture-dependent variability:

1. in Kazakh linguaculture, folkloric and phraseological structures dominate, with emphasis shifted toward moral admonition and a collective understanding of error;
2. in Russian linguaculture, both normative and colloquial forms occur with an ironic coloring, aimed at behavior correction or emotional impact;
3. in English linguaculture, preference is given to universal and idiomatic forms, often softer, regulating social perception, with an emphasis on personal responsibility and rational behavior.

Thus, this type of frame makes it possible to identify culturally specific and universal strategies for evaluating intellectual limitations, which is useful for the typology of frame-based models and for intercultural analysis.

E. Discussion

Our findings are consistent with previous research showing that concepts combine an invariant cognitive core with culturally variable attributes, role components, and evaluative parameters. In this regard, our results support frame-semantic approaches that interpret a concept not as an isolated lexical unit but as a structured scene of relations and elements; similarly, FrameNet-based work demonstrates that meaning can be modeled through frames and frame elements that capture both stable and extendable components of conceptual knowledge (Boas et al., 2024). Our shift from comparing individual words to comparing models of conceptualization also agrees with Sullivan's view of framing as both a cognitive structure and an interpretive mechanism (Sullivan, 2023). At the same time, the differences we identified in the axiological load and normativity of intellect, stupidity, knowledge, and thinking correspond to the broader cognitive-linguistic claim that universal embodied foundations tend to remain stable, whereas culture shapes their evaluative interpretation. This is in line with evidence that beliefs about intelligence may be activated through metaphorical links such as INTELLIGENCE IS BRIGHTNESS (Sullivan, 2015), that shared embodied frameworks coexist with culturally reshaped metaphorical and metonymic realizations (Tran, 2022), and that trilingual Kazakhstani data likewise reveal invariant cognitive content alongside differences in cultural connotations and evaluative components (Bakytzhanova et al., 2025a).

The practical significance of this study lies in the possibility of applying the proposed typology of frame-based models in intercultural communication, cognitive linguistics, and linguacultural analysis. The findings can be used by researchers, instructors, and language-education specialists to interpret intellectually salient concepts more precisely and to design courses aimed at developing intercultural and cognitive competence.

Future research should expand the methodological toolkit by integrating frame-based and typological analysis with corpus-based and experimental methods, and by incorporating additional languages and discourse types. Of particular interest is further investigation of the dynamics of the intellectual conceptosphere under conditions of digital communication and globalization, which can be pursued within interdisciplinary research at the intersection of cognitive linguistics, cultural semantics, and discourse analysis.

V. Conclusion

The study showed that intellectual concepts in Kazakh, Russian, and English linguacultures have a hierarchically organized frame structure in which universal cognitive components coexist with culture-specific elements. The identified types of conceptualization processual-operational, resultative-representational, functional-dynamic, and evaluative-normative confirm that ways of construing the intellectual domain depend on cultural scenarios and value orientations of linguistic communities, which is consistent with findings in contemporary cognitive and cultural linguistics.

The reliability of the conclusions is ensured by the representativeness of the corpus, which includes texts from different genres and discourse types, as well as by the use of established methods of frame-based, typological, and linguacultural analysis. The convergence of the universal tendencies identified here with results reported in previously published international research confirms the reproducibility and scientific grounding of the proposed typology of frame-based models of intellectual concepts and demonstrates its explanatory potential for further contrastive studies.

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Reimagining Futures in Crisis: Utopian Reinvention and Resistance in Butler's *Parable of the Sower*

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***Abstract*—Dystopian literature has increasingly emerged as a critical mode for examining contemporary anxieties surrounding environmental collapse, social inequality, and systemic instability. Butler's *Parable of the Sower* offers a prophetic vision of a near-future society shaped by climate crisis and socio-economic breakdown, while simultaneously imagining alternative modes of survival. Although existing scholarship has examined the novel through dystopian, Afrofuturist, and ecocritical lenses, these approaches often remain analytically separate. This study addresses this gap by offering an integrated reading that brings these frameworks into dialogue. Adopting a qualitative methodology grounded in close textual analysis and theory-guided coding, the study examines key thematic categories, including collapse, inequality, spirituality, and futurity. The findings demonstrate that Butler reconfigures dystopia as a generative space of resistance, where Earthseed operates as a practical ethical system guiding adaptation, community formation, and collective survival. The novel thus transforms crisis into a foundation for utopian reinvention and ethical responsibility. By synthesising ecological critique, Afrofuturist imagination, and dystopian theory, this study contributes to contemporary debates on climate justice, resilience, and the role of speculative fiction in reimagining sustainable and inclusive futures.**

***Index Terms*—Afrofuturism, Earthseed, environmental justice, utopian reinvention, ecocriticism**

I. Introduction

Dystopian literature has increasingly emerged as a powerful mode of cultural and political critique, addressing urgent global concerns such as environmental collapse, systemic inequality, racialised violence, and authoritarian governance. Rather than merely projecting dark futures, dystopian narratives function as what Jameson (1988) describes as "cognitive maps", enabling readers to interpret complex crises of history, identity, and power. Dystopia, in the current context, operates not only as a warning but also as a critical framework through which contemporary anxieties can be examined and reimagined.

Within this tradition, Octavia E. Butler's *Parable of the Sower* (1993, 2019) stands out as a profoundly prophetic narrative. Set in a near-future United States fractured by climate change, economic instability, and social breakdown, the novel resonates strongly with present-day debates surrounding environmental vulnerability, displacement, and structural inequality (Dubey, 1999; Haugaard & Mølgaard, 2023). However, Butler's work does more than depict collapse. Through the philosophy of Earthseed, centred on the principle that "God is Change", the novel reframes dystopia as a space of adaptation, resilience, and collective reinvention. This shift from fatalism to possibility marks a significant intervention in dystopian writing.

Existing scholarship has examined *Parable of the Sower* through multiple critical lenses. Afrofuturist studies emphasise the challenge to Eurocentric notions of futurity and centre Black experience as a source of survival and transformation (Guerrero, 2020; Nelson, 2022; Ruffin, 2005). Ecocritical readings situate the novel within climate discourse, highlighting its engagement with environmental justice and adaptive ethics (Agustí, 2005; Malvestio, 2022). Similarly, dystopian studies underscore Butler's alignment with what Baccolini (2004) terms the "persistence of hope", where dystopian conditions generate possibilities for renewal rather than closure. While these approaches provide valuable insights, they often remain compartmentalised, focusing on isolated dimensions, such as ecological crisis, Afrofuturism, or socio-economic critique.

This fragmentation reveals a significant gap in existing research. There is limited sustained analysis of how these critical dimensions—ecological, spiritual, and futurist—intersect and function collectively within Butler's narrative. As a result, the novel's integrated vision of survival and reinvention remains underexplored. Addressing this gap is essential for understanding how *Parable of the Sower* transforms dystopia from a narrative of despair into a framework for ethical and collective action.

This paper therefore argues that *Parable of the Sower* reconfigures dystopia as a site of utopian reinvention and resistance by synthesising ecological critique, Afrofuturist imagination, and spiritual philosophy into a coherent ethical vision. Rather than presenting collapse as an endpoint, Butler positions it as a starting point for imagining alternative futures grounded in adaptability, community, and moral responsibility. Thus, the novel advances a radical rethinking of survival in the context of the Anthropocene.

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Methodologically, this study adopts a qualitative approach grounded in close textual analysis supported by theory-guided coding. Key motifs, such as collapse, inequality, spirituality, and futurity, are identified and interpreted in relation to established frameworks in dystopian studies, Afrofuturism, and ecocriticism. This approach enables a systematic yet flexible engagement with the text, allowing for the integration of multiple critical perspectives without the constraints of rigid report structures.

The argument unfolds in four stages. First, it maps the critical landscape surrounding Butler's work, identifying key debates and limitations in existing scholarship. Second, it presents a close reading of the novel based on derived thematic codes, highlighting patterns of collapse, adaptation, and community formation. Third, it synthesises these textual insights with relevant critical frameworks to demonstrate how Butler's narrative produces new interpretive possibilities. Finally, the paper argues that this integrated perspective not only enhances our understanding of Butler's work but also positions dystopian literature as a vital resource for reimagining ethical futures in times of crisis.

II. Literature Review

Studies of dystopian fiction have increasingly emphasised that such narratives extend beyond representations of decline to function as sites of critical reflection and transformation. Baccolini (2004) argues that "critical dystopias" resist narrative closure and instead sustain the possibility of renewal. In a similar vein, Jameson's (1988) notion of "cognitive mapping" suggests that dystopian narratives enable readers to interpret complex socio-political realities. Building on these perspectives, Claeys (2010) identifies *Parable of the Sower* as a representative critical dystopia, where environmental collapse and systemic instability generate conditions for adaptation and resilience. In this sense, Butler's narrative simultaneously diagnoses crises and imagines alternative modes of survival.

This dystopian framework is further expanded through environmental humanities, which situate the novel within the broader context of the Anthropocene. Ziser and Sze (2020) provide analytical tools such as econarratology and scale theory to examine how narratives represent environmental crises across temporal and spatial dimensions, while Haugaard and Mølgaard (2023) highlight the novel's engagement with climate-related trauma. However, Yusoff (2021) cautions that dominant Anthropocene narratives risk obscuring histories of racial dispossession and inequality. Butler's work resists this abstraction by explicitly linking ecological degradation with social injustice, thereby foregrounding climate crisis as a lived and unequal experience. Scholars such as Trexler (2023) and Trexler and Johns-Putra (2021) further argue that climate fiction promotes collective ethics of survival, while Guerrero (2020) demonstrates how Butler integrates past, present, and future into a continuous narrative of adaptation. Malvestio (2022) conceptualises the novel as an "eco-dystopia", where catastrophe coexists with the potential for regeneration, a duality also recognised in earlier studies (Dubey, 1999; Phillips, 2002; Stillman, 2003).

Afrofuturism deepens this critical landscape by reframing futurity through the lens of marginalised experience. Nelson (2022) describes Afrofuturism as a framework that reclaims futures historically denied to Black communities, challenging dominant narratives of progress. Similarly, Shapii et al. (2013) highlight how identity, race, and history intersect to resist systemic oppression, a dynamic that resonates strongly with Butler's portrayal of Black female subjectivity. Within this tradition, *Parable of the Sower* functions both as a warning and as a speculative reimagining of survival. Drawing on Hobbes's (1968) depiction of life under conditions of precarity, Butler reframes instability through Earthseed's philosophy of adaptability and collective responsibility. Ruffin (2005) interprets Earthseed as an Afrofuturist theology that combines spirituality with political consciousness, while Guerrero (2020) emphasises the concept of a "vulnerable sense of place," where instability becomes a condition for transformation.

Recent scholarship further extends these perspectives by foregrounding care, embodiment, and relational survival. Williams (2024) identifies Black motherhood and practices of care as central to futurity, situating Butler's narrative within embodied interdependence. Capers (2024) brings Afrofuturist thought into legal discourse, interpreting the novel as a speculative framework for justice in times of crisis. Agusti (2005) similarly demonstrates how Butler negotiates the relationship between individual subjectivity and collective survival, emphasising that identity formation is inseparable from communal structures. These insights resonate with anthropological perspectives on liminality and transformation, where instability becomes a site for rearticulating resilience and human adaptability (Sharma, 2025).

The ecocritical dimension of the novel further reinforces its interdisciplinary significance. Malvestio (2022) situates *Parable of the Sower* within the framework of eco-dystopia, where environmental catastrophe prompts reflection on ecological responsibility. Trexler and Johns-Putra (2021) argue that climate narratives foster collective ethical awareness, while Trexler (2023) underscores their pedagogical potential in encouraging readers to critically engage with the Anthropocene. Ziser and Sze (2020) similarly highlight how such narratives incorporate justice into their structural logic, and Stein (2021) introduces the concept of "promising pessimism" to describe Butler's balance between despair and hope. Yusoff (2021) further emphasises that ecological analysis must remain attentive to racial inequality, a concern Butler addresses through themes of dispossession and systemic breakdown. Complementing this, Davis's (1998) notion of an "ecology of fear" contextualises the novel's depiction of urban collapse, while Benjamin's (1968) reflections on art underscore literature's capacity to critique and intervene in socio-political realities.

Taken together, these scholarly perspectives position *Parable of the Sower* as both a dystopian critique and an Afrofuturist blueprint for reinvention. The novel emerges as a climate-justice narrative that not only reflects crisis but also imagines pathways of adaptation and collective survival. Through the ethical framework of Earthseed and the

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formation of the Acorn community, Butler presents a vision of hope grounded in resilience and transformation (Stillman, 2003). These concerns also align with Sharma's (2017) interpretation of ecocriticism as a pathway toward renewal, as well as his later work (2023, 2025), which emphasises literature's role in addressing cultural fragility and systemic crises across diverse contexts.

Despite this breadth of scholarship, a significant limitation remains. Existing studies often privilege a single critical framework, whether dystopian, Afrofuturist, or ecocritical, thereby overlooking the integrated nature of Butler's narrative. The convergence of ecological justice, spiritual philosophy, and futurist resistance within the novel remains insufficiently synthesised. This study addresses that gap by approaching *Parable of the Sower* as a model of utopian reconstruction within dystopian conditions, demonstrating how Butler transforms catastrophe into a framework for ethical, collective, and adaptive survival.

III. Research Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative interpretive methodology grounded in close textual analysis and theory-guided thematic coding. Such an approach is particularly appropriate for *Parable of the Sower* because the novel operates simultaneously at symbolic, ecological, political, and philosophical levels (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Given, 2016). The primary text for analysis is Octavia E. Butler's *Parable of the Sower* (1993, 2019), supplemented by Butler's essays and relevant scholarly works in dystopian studies, Afrofuturism, climate fiction, and ecocriticism.

The research employed a two-stage coding process. During the first stage, an open descriptive coding method was applied through repeated close readings of the novel. Passages related to environmental collapse, social instability, violence, spirituality, survival, mobility, and community formation were identified and marked. Initial descriptive labels such as "resource scarcity," "privatised security," "collective adaptation," "hyperempathy," and "Earthseed ethics" emerged during this phase.

In the second stage, focused coding and thematic clustering were conducted to refine broader analytical categories. Through memo writing, comparison of recurring narrative patterns, and thematic consolidation, five final interpretive categories were established: collapse and environmental breakdown; social inequality and violence; survival practices and adaptation; Earthseed as ethical philosophy; and futurity and community formation. For example, passages describing gated communities, water scarcity, and corporate labour structures were coded under "collapse and inequality," while Lauren Olamina's reflections on change and adaptation were grouped under "Earthseed ethics." A representative coded passage includes Lauren's observation that society is becoming "twenty-first-century slavery" (Butler, 2019, p. 159), which was categorised under both "capitalist exploitation" and "systemic collapse." Similarly, Earthseed verses such as "God is Change" (Butler, 2019, p. 161) were coded under "adaptive spirituality" and "futurist ethics".

The coding framework was subsequently interpreted through selected theoretical models from dystopian criticism (Baccolini, 2004; Jameson, 1988), Afrofuturism (Nelson, 2022; Ruffin, 2005), and ecocriticism (Malvestio, 2022; Stein, 2021). This interpretive triangulation ensured conceptual rigour while allowing the text to remain central to the analysis. Furthermore, to enhance reliability and analytical consistency, the study employed iterative memoing, repeated textual comparison, and cross-referencing between theoretical frameworks. The final themes were retained only when supported by recurring textual evidence across multiple narrative episodes. Rather than treating the novel merely as a representation of catastrophe, the methodology enabled the identification of patterns through which Butler transforms collapse into a framework for ethical adaptation and collective reinvention.

IV. Results and Discussion

This section first draws insights from a close reading of Butler's *Parable of the Sower* (2019) and other authorial texts (Baccolini, 2004; Malvestio, 2022; Nelson, 2022; Ruffin, 2005; Stein, 2021), following the derived codebook categories of collapse, inequality, security, spirituality, and futurity. The results are then situated and interpreted within existing scholarship in dystopian studies, Afrofuturism, and ecocriticism. To maintain clarity and transparency, the results are confined to textual observations grounded in the primary material, while theoretical interpretation and engagement with scholarly debate are reserved for the discussion.

A. Results

This section presents findings derived from a close reading of *Parable of the Sower* (2019), organised according to the study's coding framework: collapse, inequality, security, spirituality, and futurity. The analysis focuses strictly on textual observations grounded in the primary text, while theoretical interpretation is reserved for the subsequent discussion section. The results reveal four major thematic clusters that structure the narrative's representation of survival, adaptation, and community formation.

(a). Conditions of Systemic Collapse

The novel constructs collapse not as a sudden apocalyptic event but as a slow process of institutional erosion. Butler repeatedly foregrounds environmental scarcity, economic fragmentation, and social violence to normalise instability within everyday life. Lauren's observation that "you can't trust anyone outside your walls anymore" reflects the

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psychological internalisation of fear and social fragmentation (Butler, 2019). The walls surrounding Robledo symbolise both physical protection and ideological isolation, revealing how survival becomes dependent on exclusion.

The narrative also exposes the unequal distribution of vulnerability. While wealthier communities temporarily sustain security through privatised protection, poorer populations are left exposed to hunger, homelessness, and violence. Lauren's description of public spaces crowded with "squatters, winos, junkies, and homeless people" demonstrates how collapse transforms human beings into disposable social categories (Butler, 2019, p. 10). Butler's imagery therefore critiques neoliberal systems that reduce survival to economic privilege. Additionally, the emergence of corporate towns functions as a critique of exploitative capitalism. Lauren's description of debt-based labour structures as "company slavery, more or less" (Butler, 2019, p. 287) reveals how economic dependency reproduces historical systems of oppression. Rather than depicting dystopia as distant fantasy, Butler links collapse directly to existing inequalities and systems of privatised power.

(b). Household Strategies and Micro-Practices of Survival

In response to the breakdown of social order and material security, the narrative documents a range of practical survival strategies adopted by individuals and groups. As Lauren observes, the streets overflow with "squatters, winos, junkies, and homeless people in general" (Butler, 2019, p. 10), while hunger, disease, and despair spread unchecked. Characters ration water, conceal resources, and regulate movement to minimise exposure to risk. Everyday practices, such as bartering, scavenging, monitoring travel routes, and limiting visibility at night illustrate a continuous process of risk management. Olamina's hyperempathy functions as a heightened perceptual tool, informing decisions about when to remain hidden, move, or assist others. Her journal entries record evolving group protocols, including watch schedules, resource distribution, and defensive strategies. These adjustments demonstrate an increasing capacity for collective organisation and coordinated survival (Butler, 2019).

The novel repeatedly demonstrates that survival depends upon flexibility, observation, and collective cooperation. Lauren's hyperempathy syndrome becomes symbolically significant because it transforms vulnerability into ethical awareness. Her inability to detach herself from others' pain forces her to develop relational forms of survival rather than purely individualistic strategies.

(c). Earthseed as an Ethic of Practice

Earthseed functions throughout the novel as a dynamic philosophy that transforms uncertainty into ethical direction. Butler repeatedly positions change not as destruction alone but as a force demanding conscious adaptation. The foundational Earthseed verse - "All that you touch / You Change. / All that you Change / Changes you" - establishes mutual transformation as the basis of survival (Butler, 2019, p. 161). Unlike traditional religious systems grounded in permanence or transcendence, Earthseed is rooted in movement, instability, and futurity. Lauren's formulation that "God is Change" rejects passive acceptance and instead promotes active participation in shaping reality. Earthseed therefore becomes both spiritual and political. It provides a language through which marginalised individuals reinterpret crisis as an opportunity for reconstruction. The repeated recitation of Earthseed verses during moments of fear and uncertainty demonstrates their practical function within the community. Rather than abstract theology, Earthseed operates as behavioural guidance, shaping decisions regarding trust, mobility, cooperation, and leadership. Butler thus transforms spirituality into an adaptive ethics capable of confronting ecological and social collapse.

(d). Earthseed Group Formation and the Founding of Acorn

The narrative traces a gradual transition from mobile survival to structured community formation. As Lauren and her companions travel north, encounters at campsites, water sources, and roadside exchanges contribute to the expansion of the group. New members are assessed, incorporated, and assigned functional roles, including surveillance, food preparation, and negotiation. The establishment of shared rules, covering weapon use, resource contribution, and watch rotations, lays the foundation for collective stability. This process culminates in the founding of Acorn, a planned settlement designed to sustain the group under conditions of environmental and social instability.

Lauren's journal entries emphasise practical considerations such as access to water, defensibility, and agricultural potential. At the same time, they outline expectations related to labor distribution, caregiving, and conflict resolution. These developments mark a shift from reactive survival strategies to organised, rule-based coexistence (Butler, 2019).

Across these thematic clusters, a consistent pattern emerges. Episodes of material disruption are followed by strategies of risk management, which are then accompanied by Earthseed reflection and practical adjustment. This sequence demonstrates that the novel's ethical framework operates through everyday practices rather than abstract formulation. Earthseed statements are closely aligned with decisions concerning movement, secrecy, group membership, and labour organisation, indicating their functional role in guiding action. The transition to Acorn consolidates these practices into a stable system, representing a shift from transient survival to sustained community formation (Butler, 2019).

The formation of Acorn marks a significant transition from temporary survival toward intentional community building. Throughout the journey north, the travelling group gradually develops systems of cooperation, shared labour, and mutual protection. These interactions culminate in the creation of Acorn, which represents the material embodiment of Earthseed philosophy. Importantly, Acorn is not presented as a perfect utopia. Butler instead portrays it as a fragile and evolving

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social experiment grounded in responsibility, adaptability, and collective labour. Lauren's emphasis on water access, agriculture, and shared work reveals that sustainable futures must be materially organised rather than merely imagined.

The founding of Acorn also symbolises resistance against systems of fragmentation and isolation. Whereas gated communities depend on exclusion and fear, Acorn is built through cooperation and ethical interdependence. Butler therefore redefines utopian possibility not as escape from crisis but as the creation of resilient social structures within crisis itself.

B. Discussion

The findings demonstrate that *Parable of the Sower* redefines dystopia not merely as a narrative of collapse but as a framework for ethical adaptation, collective resilience, and futurist reinvention. Butler connects ecological crisis with social inequality, racial vulnerability, and economic precarity, thereby positioning survival as both a political and ethical challenge. Through Earthseed, the novel transforms instability into a philosophy of conscious adaptation and communal responsibility. By integrating dystopian critique, Afrofuturism, and ecocriticism, Butler constructs an alternative vision of survival grounded in justice, adaptability, and collective transformation. The following discussion interprets these findings within broader theoretical and scholarly contexts.

(a). Dystopia as Diagnostic Prism

This interpretation underlines how Butler diagnoses systematic crisis and proposes resilience strategies. Her portrayal of social and ecological collapse illustrates Haugaad and Molgaard's (2023) idea of dystopian fiction as a "diagnostic lens" for the Anthropocene, revealing how ecological devastation is inseparable from social injustice. Through descriptions of water shortage, privatised economies, and debt bondage, Butler illustrates what Davis (1998) called the "ecology of fear" and her vision resonates with Trexler and Johns-Putra's (2021) "climate collectivism paradox", wherein survival is negotiated within exploitative systems. Stein's (2021) concept of "promising pessimism" further stresses how grim scenarios can inspire moral consciousness and political action. All these readings situate *Parable of the Sower* within both the dystopian traditions (Claeys, 2010; Jameson, 1988) and modern discussions of neoliberal precarity and environmental justice.

(b). Afrofuturist Ethics and Earthseed

Earthseed's function as a philosophy of transformation further demonstrates Butler's originality. Ruffin (2005) reads it as an Afrofuturist theology combining faith with liberationist ethics, while Nelson (2022) frames Butler's vision as "Afrofuturism redux", restoring the future for the voiceless and marginalised. Williams (2024) strengthens this perspective by showing how Butler reimagines Black motherhood and care as central to visions of the future. Similarly, Agusti (2005) and Phillips (2002) emphasise Earthseed's ability to mediate between individual subjectivity and collective survival, highlighting its practical relevance as a philosophy of adaptation. These interpretations align with Baccolini's (2004) concept of the "persistence of hope" in which social collapse creates, rather than blocks, the possibility of new futures.

(c). Resistance to Futurists and Ecocritical Vision

The findings on futurist resistance suggest that *Parable of the Sower* functions as both prophetic and prescriptive text. Lauren Olamina's founding of Acorn enacts what Nelson (2022) identifies as an Afrofuturist reclamation of futurity, in which marginalised communities construct alternative worlds for themselves. Earthseed's vision of "seeding among the stars" (Butler, 2019, p. 305) aligns with Malvestio's (2022) view of eco-dystopias as forces of change and renewal, as well as with Stein's (2021) concept of "promising pessimism", where despair coexists with adaptive possibility. Ziser and Sze (2020) further demonstrate how climate narratives embed justice within their structures, reflecting Butler's commitment to linking planetary futures with ethical responsibility. Guerrero (2020) likewise shows how Butler redefines belonging as dynamic and adaptive. In doing so, Butler anticipates Yusoff's (2021) critique of Anthropocene discourse for erasing racial inequality, instead presenting a vision in which ecological and social justice remain inseparable.

(d). Synthesis and Significance

This discussion highlights the novelty of the present study. Although earlier research has investigated Butler's dystopian critique (Canavan, 2016; Stillman, 2003), her Afrofuturist imagination (Nelson, 2022; Ruffin, 2005), or her ecological vision (Malvestio, 2022; Stein, 2021), few studies have explored how these dimensions interconnect. As emphasised in the literature review, most existing studies focus on a single perspective - capitalism (Phillips, 2002), community (Agustí, 2005), or eco-dystopia (Malvestio, 2022), without considering how these elements come together in Earthseed to form a holistic philosophy. This research addresses that gap by showing how Butler incorporates ecological justice, spiritual renewal, and futurist resistance into a coherent vision of utopian possibility amid dystopian realities.

This integrated reading reveals Butler's reimagining futures in crisis in terms of utopian reinvention and resistance. Rather than treating collapse as an end point, the novel reframes it as a starting point for imagining alternative futures. While Earthseed embodies utopian reinvention, Afrofuturism roots these futures in marginalised experience, and ecocriticism situates Butler's narrative within broader global conversations on climate change. The wider relevance of these findings extends beyond the literary field. The crises dramatised in the novel, including resource scarcity, climate

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displacement, privatised power, and social inequality, closely mirror conditions shaping the contemporary world. By combining ecological critique with Afrofuturist imagination, Butler's work speaks directly to global debates on climate justice, migration, and collective survival. Thus, the novel illustrates how speculative fiction can function as a global resource for thinking through adaptation and moral responsibility in times of planetary crisis.

(e). Limitations and Implications

The study is limited to a single novel and its paratexts, but broader comparative analysis across Butler's wider body of work or other climate fiction would further extend the insights developed here. Using qualitative close reading as its method, the study focusses on literary motifs and may not fully capture reader response or broader circulation. These challenges, however, point to areas for future research rather than shortcomings in the present study.

The above discussion explains why Butler's fiction is still vital to both theory and practice. Her work transforms dystopian conditions into a space of survival, centres marginalised voices within visions of futurity, and links ecological catastrophe to global justice debates. By showing how Afrofuturism, ecocriticism, and dystopian critique converge in Earthseed, this study positions Butler not only as a visionary novelist but also as a theorist of adaptability whose work encourages readers to imagine futures that are both just and sustainable.

V. Conclusion

The study demonstrates how *Parable of the Sower* reconfigures dystopia as a productive space of resistance, where survival is grounded in adaptation, collective ethics, and futurist imagination. By foregrounding Earthseed as a practical philosophy of change, Butler critiques neoliberal modernity, marked by ecological degradation, corporate control, and systemic inequality, while simultaneously offering an alternative framework for resilience. Her narrative exemplifies what Stein (2021) terms "promising pessimism", in which conditions of crisis generate ethical awareness and transformative possibility.

The analysis, in accomplishing the study's objectives, integrates dystopian studies, Afrofuturism, and ecocriticism to demonstrate that *Parable of the Sower* operates not merely as a cautionary dystopia but as a model of adaptive survival and ethical reinvention. The novel redefines dystopia as a diagnostic and generative space, aligns with Afrofuturist efforts to reclaim futurity for marginalised communities (Nelson, 2022), and situates ecological collapse within broader frameworks of justice and responsibility. In doing so, the study addresses a key gap in existing scholarship, which has often examined these dimensions in isolation (Baccolini, 2004; Phillips, 2002; Williams, 2024).

Beyond literary analysis, Butler's work holds broader relevance in contemporary global contexts. The novel's engagement with climate crisis, displacement, and inequality resonates with ongoing debates on sustainability, migration, and collective survival. As such, *Parable of the Sower* functions as a critical resource for rethinking ethical responsibility in the Anthropocene, emphasising the inseparability of ecological and social justice. Pedagogically, it offers a powerful framework for fostering critical engagement with issues of adaptation, resilience, and community formation.

Future research may extend this inquiry through comparative studies of speculative fiction across cultural contexts, including authors such as Nnedi Okorafor, Kim Stanley Robinson, and Margaret Atwood, or through interdisciplinary approaches incorporating sociology, environmental ethics, and political theory (Yusoff, 2021; Ziser & Sze, 2020). Such directions would further illuminate how speculative narratives engage with crisis, adaptation, and futurity across diverse contexts.

Finally, Butler transforms dystopia from a narrative of collapse into a framework for ethical and collective renewal. Through Earthseed and the formation of community, *Parable of the Sower* affirms that crisis is not an endpoint but a starting point for imagining just and sustainable futures. In this respect, Butler emerges not only as a visionary novelist but also as a theorist of resilience whose work continues to shape contemporary understandings of survival, justice, and possibility in the Anthropocene.

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Framing Ecological Crisis: A Multimodal Semiotic Analysis of Contemporary Environmental Posters

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***Abstract*—The study examines the semiology of language used in contemporary environmental posters and its role in creating persuasive meaning within the context of the Anthropocene. This study argues that language in environmental posters is not merely an explanatory aid, but a key semiotic instrument that interacts with images, compositions, colours and typography to shape perceptions of ecological catastrophe. This qualitative, multimodal study draws on semiotics, the pragmatic philosophy of language, text-image relations and social semiotics. The corpus consists of four modern posters: STOP Plastic Pollution, Women & Climate Change, The War for Water and Global Warming (Warning!). These posters illustrate four dominant linguistic strategies in environmental graphic discourse: commands, naming, conceptual reframing and wordplay or lexical deformation. Environmental messages that use a slogan function based on speech acts such as force, implicature, anchorage, and multimodal reinforcement are examined. The study concludes that the persuasive force of environmental posters emerges from the integrated interaction of verbal and visual signs, and that language is indispensable to understanding how ecological crisis is publicly framed in the Anthropocene.**

***Index Terms*—Anthropocene, environmental posters, linguistic semiotics, multimodality, visual communication**

I. Introduction

The Anthropocene is now frequently reconceptualised as both a geological label and a historical and epistemic condition in which human activity has emerged as a factor influencing Earth systems and the form and nature of social life. In this respect, the environmental crisis cannot be considered merely a matter of science or policy any longer. It is part of a larger social conversation and remains a topic to be contested in terms of legitimacy, responsibility, justice, and moral obligation (von Braun, 2025). Consequently, environmental communication goes beyond the dissemination of information. During its campaigning, via digital media and in printed visual forms, it hopes to convey, mobilise, and influence the public's view of ecological problems and their personal relationship with them (Doerr, 2024; Dancygier, 2023).

Viewed through this communicative lens, the environmental poster fulfils a significant role. It is designed to be instantaneous, accessible, and impactful as a condensed visual-verbal form. In this way, its communicative power appears

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to be manifested based on the interaction among different semiotic resources—image, colour, composition, symbol, typography, title, and slogan. The resources do more than function in isolation; they structure themselves to guide reading paths, organise salience, and establish ethical and political orientations for the spectator (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2021; Bateman et al., 2017). Consequently, the environmental poster is transformed from a decorative or informative construct into a multimodal site of meaning-making in public discourse.

Although prior research has generally assessed what it means to have environmental posters in relation to their linguistic components, relatively little attention has been paid to this issue, even though the language dimension alone is a valuable sign system. Language on environmental posters may also serve more than the purpose of emphasising what is already clearly visible. Titles and slogans can be used to name a public issue, create urgency, declare responsibility, and place ecological processes within the context of significant social issues. In persuasive rhetoric, however, one phrase can shift an image from neutral representation to moral accusation, from description to obligation, and from natural surroundings to civic concern.

In this understanding, language is the key instrument for the production of Anthropocene meaning. Speech act theory can inform this role. Slogans are not neutral descriptions; they are actions, performative utterances. They warn, command, accuse, urge, and mobilise. Austin's differentiation between locutionary, illocutionary, and perlocutionary force, as well as Searle's account of directive speech acts, enables us to imagine poster language as an action-focused discourse that creates social effects in the addressee (Austin, 1962; Searle, 1969; Green, 2024). This is further explained by Barthes's concept of anchorage, which shows how verbal language orients interpretation by reducing the polysemy of the image to stabilise it in perspective (Barthes, 1977).

At a pragmatic level, a short poster text also generates thick implicatures about harm, accountability, scarcity, urgency, and potential futures that render little verbal material semantically and politically potent and impactful (Grice, 1989; Korta & Perry, 2024). These matters are of particular importance at the Anthropocene level, where naming and framing are not ideologically neutral within an Anthropocene setting. To call something pollution, crisis, war, warning, or justice is to already situate it within a normative horizon. Figurative and rhetorical practices condition how audiences conceptualise ecological risk, agency, and response, as metaphors recast environmental processes as conflict, threat, or emergency (Johnstone & Stickles, 2024; Dancygier, 2023).

It is, therefore, necessary to consider how linguistic meaning in environmental posters is constructed through relations with visual hierarchy, contrast, composition, and typography. The study investigates the semiology of language across four current environmental posters adapted from Poster for Tomorrow's 2018 A Planet for Tomorrow project: STOP Plastic Pollution by Ramin Ara, Women & Climate Change by Élodie Imbert, The War for Water by Camille Anne Ferreol, and Global Warming (Warning)! by Mengxi Cui. These selected works have two functions: visually documenting and foregrounding a particular type of linguistic strategy of environmental persuasion, command, and moral urgency, naming and constituting public problems, conceptual reframing through conflict metaphor, and wordplay or lexical deformation. Together, they provide a coherent corpus to consider how language acts as more than a secondary attribute but rather as a key semiotic resource that grounds images, activates implicatures, shapes moral evaluation, and aligns design choices to produce an appealing meaning in Anthropocene discourse.

II. Linguistic Semiotics and Multimodal Meaning-Making in Anthropocene Environmental Posters

This research is based on a semiotic and philosophical assumption: the language used in the environmental poster is not an additional supplementary explanatory layer attached to the image at that time but a constitutive semiotic resource in the production, control, and circulation of meaning in a multimodal text. As a contemporary style of graphic discourse, the environmental poster operates through the interplay of at least two complementary signifying systems: the visual system (image, colour, composition, symbol, typographic organisation) and the linguistic system (title, slogan, lexical selection, and directive phrasing). Hence, the meaning is not confined to either one or the other of these systems, but rather to the whole relational system integrated into such a structured communicative event. For learners of Saussurean languages, the meaning of a slogan lies not only in what a given slogan is ascribed to in any one dictionary; it also resides in its place in a relational system (not just the environment) in the semantic domains of urgency, duty, justice, harm, and public accountability. They are strong in building cognition and normative frames through lexical choice, compression, and opposition. Thus, in this view, environmental slogans in societies like ours function as socio-historically (or rather politico-culturally) charged signifiers whose worth is based on whatever relations they instantiate within the broader social and discursive relations (Saussure, 2011).

Peirce's triadic model also assists in understanding the verbal and visual signs in poster communication. By definition, linguistic features are highly symbolic and rely on conventional meaning; visual features play an iconic or indexical role, especially since visual elements often rely upon historical markers of trouble, pollution, deprivation, and disaster. These interactions are essential for environmental posters, as vague ecological issues need visual and symbolic mediation to be interpretable to the public. A phrase such as "The War for Water" doesn't just emerge on the receiving end of its lexical metaphor; for example, it also binds symbolic language to something visual as a metaphor for conflict, poverty, and danger. Eco's stance also supports this semiotic point by showing that signs work within culturally scripted systems instead of as open-ended conveyors of information. Therefore, environmental slogans serve as much to explain as to describe, as they

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are to call into play interpretive codes, assumptions within the belief system, and collective cultural memories that we can use in making sense of environmental crises during public communication (Peirce, 1931–1958; Eco, 1976).

The second strand in the philosophical line discusses the relationship between text and image. Language does not merely accompany the visual field in environmental posters but modulates its interpretation. In our analysis of the site, Barthes's theory of anchorage is key to informing us of how printed text works to isolate the image's polysemy and attract a favourable evaluative reading of events. In persuasive design, the role is even greater: the point is semiotic orientation, not open-ended contemplation. Titles and slogans can help answer non-literal questions such as, "What is the problem? Who is affected? What is being demanded? What value position does this create? As a consequence, text has an interpretive function, anchoring its visual significance alongside drawing tension, irony, or even critical reframing.

Thus, the slogan is not only a physical object, or set of decorations, but also one of the meanings the design is supposed to achieve according to Barthes (1977). This is particularly important for the current sample. The imperative sentence "STOP Plastic Pollution" places the image in a moral and interventionist moment. In "Women & Climate Change", for instance, the language transfers interpretation from an ecological to an interpretive one that is permeated with vulnerability, justice, and social inequality. Water in "The War for Water," on the other hand, is turned into some kind of battleground, rather than a neutral natural resource. In "Global Warming (Warning)!", the linguistic form serves as a site for semiotic encounter and semiotic play, with lexical slip highlighting the affective and rhetorical stakes in the environmental argument. Furthermore, in each of these venues, text functions as identity in speech — text is not simply a way to express one's sense of identity but also a carrier of framing and ideological argumentation.

A third component of the model arises from pragmatism in the philosophy of language. Language in environmental posters is often too compressible, but it is because of this that environmental poster language is not semantic equivalence. Slogans tend to be performative and situational. Austin's theorisation around speech acts explains how utterances are not merely words that describe situations; they are deeds: cautioning, urging, charging up, commanding. Searle's description of illocutionary force is particularly helpful for poster analysis because it enables us to think of slogans as directive, assertive, or expressive acts, which aim to orient the viewer toward them in response. Environmental slogans, therefore, can become public action: they require visibility and reaction (Austin, 1962; Searle, 1969).

Pragmatics also can take into account how messages written on short poster texts have meanings above what they would otherwise mean. With implicature, truncated speech can summon networks of tacit presumptions about harm to the environment, institutional guilt, distributive injustice, group frailty, and risk in our future decades. When you look at words like "STOP Plastic Pollution", it is obvious that pollution is a serious problem – it's ongoing, it's harmful, and we have the resources to prevent it, but we cannot wait. On the other hand, "The War for Water" emphasizes the scarcity of water and how people are competing for it, which can lead to a crisis, and not everyone will have equal access to water. There's "Women & Climate Change," which explains how environmental issues affect different people, depending on who you are. And when we are greeted by "Global Warming (Warning)!" it is using a play on words to really drive home the urgency of the situation. These phrases can be super powerful and can carry the message. It's a matter of convincing people that it's time to get them to act. This is why Gricean pragmatics (along with more recent work on speech acts and communicative meaning) offers a necessary account of how less is more in public communication—that is, how the small expression of words can have dense ideological or affective implications (Grice, 1989; Green, 2024; Korta & Perry, 2024).

A fourth methodological strand is social semiotics and multimodality. As environmental posters are naturally multimodal artefacts, the analysis should consider the dynamic relationship between linguistic meaning and visual and typographic resources. The work of Kress and van Leeuwen provides an original model to be employed in explaining how composition, salience, framing, gaze, contrast, and hierarchy organise visual meaning. This approach is particularly useful because it regards verbal language itself as a semiotic resource of the overall design, as opposed to merely an external one. Bateman et al. (2017) also stress that multimodal analysis must explore how various semiotic modes work together to structure discourse. Thus, in such a view, typography, scale, placement, colour, and lexicon are not merely stylistic appendages; they are crucial to the making of the poster itself, a response, an appeal to attention, and an object positioned to the environmental assertion (Bateman et al., 2017; Kress & van Leeuwen, 2021).

It is this multimodal method that is of specific importance in Anthropocene discourse (which, to speak in a certain way, is a term of art), when environmental messages move beyond mere reporting on environmental conditions towards a discourse on responsibility, justice, risk, and the collective future. The political philosophy of language also validly reinforces this view, illustrating how language is a potential way for people to recode public sense, split up responsibility, and establish normative boundaries. For the Anthropocene, this role is especially important in environmental communication, where the ecological event itself is transformed into public assertions that must be 'known' in order to be accounted for and addressed. In practice, the environmental poster emerges as a site of convergence of semiotic, pragmatic, and political processes: it names crises, frames responsibility, structures attention, and attempts to transform its audience from recognition towards ethical or civic action.

Collectively, these theoretical threads create a holistic matrix that allows us to see the four curated posters less as visual artefacts than as multimodal acts of environmental meaning-making. It enables us to investigate modern environmental posters as they enact the use of language through four intertwined operations: calling for moral urgency; naming the public matters that concern the people; reframing ecological resources as metaphors; and activating rhetorical potency through lexical distortion or wordplay. More broadly, this enables the study to investigate the interaction of verbal and

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visual signs to develop persuasive Anthropocene discourses that do not just represent environmental crises (here, they are represented) but socially and morally shape them.

III. Integrated Analysis of Four Linguistic Strategies in Contemporary Environmental Posters

This section provides a combined multimodal examination of four modern environmental posters. In the four samples, language is not considered an accompanying caption on the image but a semiotic resource that is engaged in framing, directing, and amplifying meaning. The logic of analysis is consistent: each poster is assessed on the basis of speech act force, pragmatic implicature, anchorage, as well as multimodal reinforcement through composition, colour, typography, and visual hierarchy. This is how every poster becomes a coordinated semiotic event, where linguistic and visual signs work together to construct persuasive Anthropocene meaning (Austin, 1962; Barthes, 1977; Bateman et al., 2017; Kress & van Leeuwen, 2021).

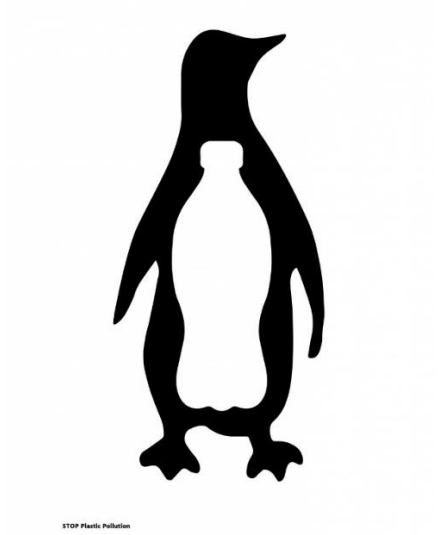


Figure 1. *STOP Plastic Pollution*. Poster by Ramin Ara, From *A Planet for Tomorrow* (Poster for Tomorrow, 2018a). From https://www.posterfortomorrow.org/en/gallery/51151

The first specimen, STOP Plastic Pollution (featured in Figure 1), is arresting; like language, it commands and imposes moral imperatives. The slogan is immediately clear and direct: STOP Plastic Pollution. This framing, rather than simply framing plastic pollution as an act of ecology, takes its cue from an act of command and situates the viewer in a morally implicated addressee who needs intervention. This type of utterance is illocutionary and therefore not descriptive, according to speech act theory, and its effect therefore is not content-linguistic and speaking, but is, indeed, linguistically meaningful. It also positions the audience as an agent, a participant in the process, not just an individual or a spectator, who therefore has a responsibility to respond rather than standing back and remaining passive. The flow of the conversation is from acceptance to response (Austin, 1962; Searle, 1969; Green, 2024).

More importantly, it uses short-structure language to make a slogan work even more effectively. It does whatever it takes to get its short words across: they condense a message into shorter, easier-to-digest statements. The phrase engages a thick, thick vein of pragmatic implicatures: plastic pollution is present and dangerous, damaging and destructive, preventable and already urgent enough that we must respond together now. So none of those assumptions is obviously stated here, but it's based on the assumption of what those things include about where and how that waste that is left behind contributes to the problem but as well, about the ecosystem impact of plastic that can be reclaimed and so on and so forth in terms of environmental degradation. Using Gricean terms, the slogan is very rarely stated, actually, more so, due to context and a perceived social assumption to persuade (Grice, 1989; Korta & Perry, 2024).

Semiotically, however, the slogan operates not as a referential field but as a normative field. The verb "stop" is not merely an interruption, it arranges the world, clarifies what is permissible and what should be stopped. Plastic pollution, likewise, is a semantically charged construct—not a neutral technical description. It also recontextualizes plastic, for the average consumer, as an emblem of pollution and public damage. This lexicon is not to say name it — all of it entails — and it opens the phenomenon itself up to the evaluative horizon of rejection. So, in another sense, the slogan provides a discourse of guidance and functions as a form of summarizing indicator of moral interpretation (Eco, 1976; Saussure, 2011).

As the graphic's visual backbone, the economical yet powerful design of the poster provides visual props for this force. The graphic in its foreground displays the shape of a black penguin body, with the inner white space becoming a plastic bottle mold. This is not just a visual pun. The bottle is not that of an animal, or, in other words, outside a particular animal's environment a kind of contaminant at all; rather it is within, inside the body of that animal. The final result is an

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incredibly image-oriented claim: plastic pollution has enclosed nature but also cut through and transformed it from within. The poster, composing in this fashion, proclaims that its effect on life's exterior is a disfigurement of its interior. The penguin represents sensitive wildlife, and the bottle represents the consumer universe with the symbol of everyday consumer material. The combined effect yields a striking visual inference that consumer waste has become "embedded" in the material becoming of life at this point (Eco, 1976; Peirce, 1931–1958).

In this respect, Barthes's notion of anchorage is particularly relevant. Even without the slogan, it could still be possible to understand it as a formal contrast between animal and object, or as an ecological metaphor, but STOP Plastic Pollution is the verbal phrase that both defines the interpretive horizon and prescribes a path for the viewer to chart. The text doesn't only describe the image; it configures its ideological position. This does not allow the image to be read as a kind of unmediated visual puzzle but instead accuses and demands intervention with it. Anchorage, therefore, is not a subsidiary and secondary component of the image but the very substance of its rhetorical potency (Barthes, 1977). The poster is also shown to possess a very effective and clever distribution of semiotic labour in terms of multimodal presentation. More of a visual style, but one that stands out because the slogan appears in small type on the bottom edge of the image, making it a focal point. This hierarchy is meaningful. The visual shock comes to the viewer first, then the verbal directive. The image calls to mind cognitive arrest; the text makes the arrest an ethical orientation. This sense of sequencing is tied closely to social-semiotic accounts of multimodal composition in which salience, placement, and path through the text inform semiotic resources for meaning (or not). This indicates that image and text are not redundant but complementary, build on one another's work. The image triggers the shock that comes with pollution; the language invokes a cry for response (Bateman et al., 2017; Kress & van Leeuwen, 2021; van Leeuwen, 2023).

Collectively, Figure 1 shows that command is more than a grammatical group. It assumes the shape of a multimodal ethical framework. The bottle becomes an object of personal accusation and the penguin a living being observing environmental violence, and the imperative, as a simple verbal act, becomes a form of public intervention. Such a poster is an example of how linguistic semiology and visual semiology join forces to produce an environmental message that is not simply informative but morally performative.

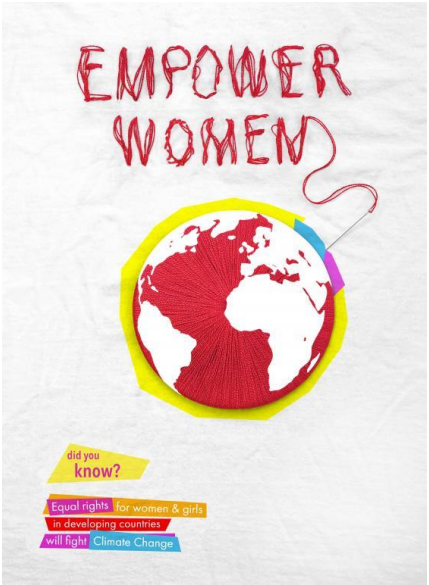


Figure 2. Elodie Imbert's *Women & Climate Change*, Selected From the *A Planet for Tomorrow* Environmental Poster Project (Poster for Tomorrow, 2018b). From https://www.posterfortomorrow.org/en/gallery/52562

The second example, Women & Climate Change (Figure 2), shows naming as a public problem-constitutive linguistic strategy. In contrast to the imperative structure of the first poster, the force of this slogan is its ability to forge a conceptual relation between two domains: gender and climate, within one discursive unit. The title of the ad isn't just some coincidence of "women" and "climate change"; it frames the two semantically to allow us to reframe climate change as a concern that, as a socially experienced condition, needs to be experienced as a question of vulnerability, social inequality, forms of social care and collective responsibility, resilience, and justice. In that sense, the title is not descriptive but has a constitutive function. It provides a space of crisis and puts it in public view (Austin, 1962; Searle, 1969). On the language level (semiotics), then, naming is, in this case, an act of framing. Women & Climate Change frames environmental discourse and discourse around different human exposures and not universal planetary processes. It shifts the interpretive axis from climate as an objective scientific occurrence to climate as a socially uneven crisis. It also involves some epistemic work; the headline specifies what is and isn't an issue—what the public should do about it. Naming here is not only referential but ideological and distributive in the sense that it decides what becomes a subject of public concern under which kinds of semantic terms (Barthes, 1977; Eco, 1976).

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The title does, in principle, evoke a smattering of small but potent implicatures. It means that climate change is not a neutral force; women are disproportionately among those who bear the brunt of ecological disruption, and women should be presented less as passive victims and more as vital players of community resilience and a state of recovery. Those implications don't need to be articulated in the name of the title itself; the title paves the way for an area in the public sphere where issues of gender inequality, environmental justice, employment, and care will begin to grapple. Meaning thus arises within that platform and under the constraint of semantic compression and contextual expansion: if one of its titles is very little, then its reference site appears to be a large social field of relevance (Grice, 1989; Korta & Perry, 2024).

The poster additionally reinforces (the naming strategy) visually via material design. The piece is stitched with lettering on white cloth, with continents cut from felt laid out on a handmade thread spool. This isn't some neutral material choice. Here, there are strong associations with labor, care, repair, embodiment, and interdependence throughout all threads, cloth, and stitching—felt, too. The earth is no loose cartography here at all, for here it's made, embroidered, and sustained by human hands. Visual semiotics are essential here, for the materiality of the image also enters the debate. The world is posed not as an abstract globe "out there," but as a frail and amendable fabric whose existence relies upon social labour and modes of embodied care.

Once again, Barthes's notion of anchorage helps us understand the interplay between text and image. Without the title, the stitching and craftsmanship can be read as aesthetics based on craft, as icons of domesticity, the visual language of human interconnection. The term Women & Climate Change serves to situate and anchor these possibilities; it pushes the viewer toward a particularly gendered reading of climate justice. Language fixes the political significance of the material form. The stitched surface is less a decorative device than semiotically connected to the argument that climate change is entwined with social reproduction, inequitable burdens, and the labour-based reconstruction of shared worlds (Barthes, 1977).

Figure 2 shows how a multimodal approach to a resource can work — not just the image and text, but texture and material processes as powerful means for meaning. The poster does not enact climate justice in words alone. It performs it through a visual language of stitching, bond, and handwork. This is wholly aligned with social-semiotic theories that make meaning spread across various resources such as typography, image, composition, and materiality. The issue is discursively constituted by the title, whereas the visual form provides that issue with embodied and affective logic. The product is a poster in which naming is indistinguishable from material meaning (Bateman et al., 2017; Kress & van Leeuwen, 2021; van Leeuwen, 2023). Figure 2 also illustrates that naming for the purposes of environmental discourse is never neutral labelling. It is a mode of discursive construction that transforms visibility, highlights who is in crisis, and reorganises the moral stakes of climate communication. By combining lexical framing with tactile visual materiality, the poster makes climate change a socially differentiated and ethically consequential issue for society to take notice of.

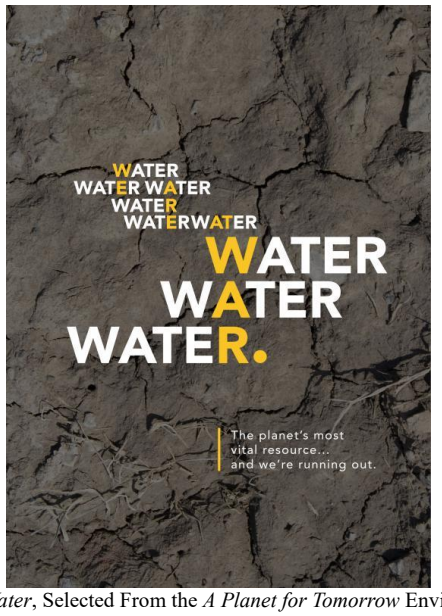


Figure 3. Camille Anne Ferreol's *The War for Water*, Selected From the *A Planet for Tomorrow* Environmental Poster Project (Poster for Tomorrow, 2018c). From https://www.posterfortomorrow.org/en/gallery/49857

The third sample (Figure 3) is "The War for Water", which reframes the concept using a conflict metaphor. Its efficacy as a language is due to its power: it reimagines water—not as a neutral natural or universal resource, nor in any sense a life-nature and life state but as a condition of scarcity, struggle, control, and geopolitical pressure. This one does more than merely lift the atmosphere of environmental conversation; it rewrites the ontology of the resource. Water, in a sense, is presented not as a given but as something to be contested, threatened, and made inextricably linked to future instability and power relations that provide the fabric of society (Eco, 1976; Dancygier, 2023). Based on speech act theory, the slogan is not perceived as a single command but nevertheless offers a major public act. It necessitates reconceptualising

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thought. The viewer is invited to reinterpret water in terms of how war frames the frame of reference. A different kind of discursive act is obtained when we investigate the context under which it may be comprehended. While its title isn't a call for rapid response—at least not in the sense of being in an imperative mode—but a kind of reordering of the status of an environmental reality—as the act of rebranding the public mind before a call to action occurs—this form of declaration employs power by reconfiguring public thinking (Austin, 1962; Searle, 1969).

At the level of pragmatic implicature, the phrase "The War for Water" implicates an elaborate entextualisation of implicit premises—scarcity, uneven access, instability, competition, territorial contestation, and ecological disaster as a driver of political and social violence. Such implications are not specified explicitly in the title but are triggered by the metaphor. "War" doesn't so much infuse this emotional tone as lay claim to an interpretive frame in which some kind of inference seems all but inevitable. To do so serves as an example of a means by which brief language can allow for broader ideological and affective definitions within a short span of time, in a single textual instance (Grice, 1989; Korta & Perry, 2024). In linguistic terms, the reason a word means so much is due to its reframing. Reframing is not just an insult on a wound; it's a semiotic ruse, one domain readable through the lens of another or as a semiotic practice, one domain acquiring the language and values of the other. Military conflict language is reframed as the language of access to resources in this instance. It causes a shift in vocabulary from ecology to politics, from necessity to struggle, from natural sustenance to social injustice.

The result is a profound moral-political change: water can now be understood in terms of an index of inequality, a space in which civic danger lurks, not merely an outcrop of nature. With respect to anchorage, the title ensures that the image is not read in an objective ecological register. While the poster has no formal visual features, "The War for Water" makes readers see this landscape through an antagonistic lens. Water cannot be conceived of as simply a picture of tranquillity, purity, and the essence of life without, all too often, bringing conflict, pressure, and competition into the picture as well. Otherwise, the text takes away the semantic freedom in this part of the visual field—it makes it politically loaded, an interpretation. In Barthesian terminology, anchorage in this sense serves not merely to explain but to increase and politicise the image (Barthes, 1977). At the level of visual semiology, the multimodal logic of the poster is used to add a sensory, as well as a compositional dimension to this repositioning. A title such as "The War for Water", for instance, pushes the visual field to understand scarcity only as tension and vulnerability only as a force.

From a social-semiotic perspective, these visual resources—contrast, spatial pressure, fragmentation, directional force, or imbalance—aren't just things we add onto the image or "ornaments" but are frameworks of actuality that materialise the metaphor and bring the abstraction of water conflict into focus so that it is immediately visible to the eye of the beholder. That's the image because the metaphor gets a body and perception on it there. The title names the crisis conflict; in design, it becomes visible (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2021; van Leeuwen, 2023). Figure 3 is important in this sense in illustrating how environmental discourse changes in a single reframing step, from descriptive to political theatre. Water is no longer something that is "passively" "about" life; it is a resource shaped by power, access, and future confrontation. The poster confirms that metaphor in environmental communication isn't decorative language so much as the semiotics of the kind necessary for rearranging urgency, for renegotiating what the public stakes are worth.



Figure 4. Mengxi Cui's *Global Warming (Warning)!*, Selected From the *A Planet for Tomorrow* Environmental Poster Project (Poster for Tomorrow, 2018d). From https://www.posterfortomorrow.org/en/gallery/52033

In the fourth example — Global Warming (Warning)! (see Fig. 4) — wordplay and lexical deformation have been the corpus's most self-reflexive linguistic strategy. The message is both language and meaning. Its power arises from a deliberate slide from 'warming' to 'warning', which makes a term about global warming (in our case climate) a wake-up call. Such declarations are not decorative but rather a semiotic labour by which disordered destabilising forces become weapons of persuasion (Saussure, 2011; Eco, 1976).

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It can be seen from a semiotic perspective, where the influence is a reaction to difference and deviation. It sounds familiar to viewers who are greeted with the expectant word "global warming" — but who are also sucked into its close variant as "global warning." Its significance depends on a shift from anticipation to fact. But precisely on that account the story works: It shows us that climate change is no longer an objective, descriptive category, but an emergency to be faced with seriousness. As pragmatic and rhetorical terms speak, the formal lexical change is, nevertheless, marginal but maximally meaningful. The latter term has a complex communicative impact in speech act form. It does not state an imperative like Figure 1, nor makes a problem space out of a name as Figure 2 does, or re-organise a metaphor as Figure 3 does. It doesn't say so; it warns, and it does it through language disruption. It's telling this tale with such force because it warns the viewer to render the language unstable. The utterance sounds an alarm, but it sounds oblique, as one has to participate in the recognition itself. However, for the warning function to fully emerge, the viewer must feel the deviation. Significance is thus co-produced through reading; for this reason, the poster has a much more potent cognitive and rhetorical impact (Austin, 1962; Green, 2024).

Pragmatically, the phrase engages several implicatures at once: that climate change can no longer be a distant descriptive matter; that the level of difference between climate conditions and a warning condition has essentially collapsed; and that the global scale of the threat cannot be separated from the urgency of response. None of these meanings is actually articulated, but their full recovery is through the lexicon of slippery semantics and a reader's awareness of the phrase itself. This is a classic case of inferential force produced with only marginal textual variation (Grice, 1989; Korta & Perry, 2024). The visual design heightens this effect through colour and placement. Red lettering wrapping the image of the Earth provides a planetary size to the warning and embodies a visual logic, reminding us of the warning's planetary scale. Here, red serves, however, as a culturally stabilised sign of peril, alarm, and emergency.

The circular structure of the text throughout the world does not merely add a touch to the composition; it creates a feeling of both encirclement and pressure. It seems that the Earth itself is not merely depicted but is also enveloped in its own warning. That is, visual semiology heightens the lexical deformation: the signifier is disrupted at the verbal level while the globe is visually enclosed at the graphic level. The result is a multimodal correspondence between linguistic instability and planetary precarity (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2021). As for anchorage, the phrase also serves a double function. In effect, it keeps our view of the Earth in an environment of danger, lest it appear to be neutral as an image of globality; and in so doing, its own witticisms are reinforced: the shift from warming to warning is not handled as a teasingly ambiguous formulation but a thunderous warning to the planet and its surroundings.

Here, language knows itself: it does not just identify the crisis, but shapes the crisis. As a result, this poster, particularly semiotically, is complex: the deformation of the signifier reflects the instability of the world it sees (Barthes, 1977). As a result, as Figure 4 suggests, wordplay in environmental communication can become a medium at which not only humour is served but also ethical and cognitive pressure. The poster does not simply document climate peril but performs it with disruptive language. Verbal diverging, chromatic alarm and planetary enclosure coalesce into a message, not only in the form of having the crisis depicted but made visible itself by how its name appears on the sign. Altogether, the four samples indicate that modern environmental posters do not depend on image alone or text alone but on the harmonious combination of linguistic and visual semiotics. In Figure 1, the imperative becomes a multimodal structure of ethical intervention. With the lens of climate change as a socially differentiated issue of justice and resilience, naming is considered in Figure 2 as climate change. But in reframing, as shown in Figure 3, water morphs from a vital resource into an arena of conflict, scarcity, and political struggle. Lexical deformation turns climate discourse itself into an act of warning (Figure 4). In all four cases, the persuasive force is achieved at the intersection of speech act force, implicature, anchorage, and multimodal composition. Typography, materiality, colour, placement, and image—they do not simply support the verbal message; they join in making it. The environmental poster thus becomes a site where language turns into action, and design turns into argument, whereas the ecological crisis is developed not only as a question of representation but as a field of ethical and civic address (Austin, 1962; Barthes, 1977; Bateman et al., 2017; Eco, 1976; Kress & van Leeuwen, 2021).

IV. Conclusion

This study has made the case that contemporary environmental posters in an Anthropocene world should not be thought of simply as visual artefacts embedded in shallow verbal overlays, but rather as multimodal discursive formations in which language emerges as the preeminent semiotic resource for the performing of persuasive meaning. The analysis has found that the environmental poster is not so much a representation of ecological crisis as the framing, organisation, and moral intensification of the crisis that go hand in hand with verbal, visual, and typographic signs. In other words, the paper suggests that language does not take a back seat to the image in environmental poster discourse, nor does it lend itself to an explanatory caption. Instead, it is a constitutive process in which crisis is named, urgency is declared, responsibility is allocated, and social response is mobilised (Barthes, 1977; Kress & van Leeuwen, 2021). Theoretically, the paper has demonstrated the theoretical model that runs throughout the study itself (semiotics, text-image relations, pragmatic philosophy of language, and social semiotics). This semiotic analysis of the text demonstrates that the salience of slogans does not derive from dictionary value alone, but rather from their presence in broader systems of difference, association, and cultural coding (Saussure, 2011; Eco, 1976).

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On a practical level, it has shown that environmental poster language is performative and inferential: slogans do not just narrate the ecosystem but warn, instruct, reconfigure, mobilise, and build dense knotted webs of implicature between harm, obligation, scarcity, injustice, and possible futures (Austin, 1962; Searle, 1969; Grice, 1989; Green, 2024; Korta & Perry, 2024). From the perspective of a multimodal analysis, the study has also shown that meaning is generated not in solitary signs, but rather through the patterned interaction between lexical choice, composition, salience, colour, spatial organisation, and typography that strengthens the persuasive power of the poster as a public communicative act (Bateman et al., 2017; Kress & van Leeuwen, 2021). The data presented here bolster the principal theorisation of the project: that the semiology of language in environmental posters is most evident when viewed through the recurring and coordinated rhetorical acts that shape public reception of environmental crisis. Language works through four strategies (among the four posters), embedded within the four selected posters. In STOP Plastic Pollution, the imperative form converts environmental discourse into a moral imperative, transitioning the viewer from recognition to ethical resistance.

In Women & Climate Change, naming constitutes a constitutive act by which climate change is discursively connected to the notion of gender-based vulnerability, resilience, and social justice. In The War for Water, the analysis has shown that metaphorical reframing moves the framing of water from a neutral natural resource to a contestable topic of conflict, scarcity, and political struggle. In Global Warming (Warning)!, lexical deformation, as well as wordplay, transforms language itself into a material sign of alarm, laying bare how the formal instability of the signifier works to intensify environmental urgency. But at bottom, the above examples illustrate that the linguistic dimensions of environmental posters are not merely the material end product of visual design: they are an ineluctably crucial terrain through which we make and disrupt public meaning. It also demonstrates that environmental posters take advantage of the persuasive impact of linguistic economy. Even the smallest slogans themselves can carry more semantic and political weight than their size indicates. For, in this moment we see not in this shortness impotence, but a rhetorical point of strength and it allows for reference to wide distances of interpretation with implication, compression, and communal cultural understanding. In this sense, our results illustrate that framing is part and parcel of the practice of language for environmental discourse. A single word can transform what appears to be a neutral landscape into a civic indictment, from a descriptive rendition to a moral duty, from a visual depiction to a call to intervene. This framing effect is especially relevant in the Anthropocene, wherein naming is never ideologically neutral, how environmental discourse represents ecological conditions affects how these conditions are socially constructed, politically interpreted, and ethically evaluated (Dancygier, 2023; Johnstone & Stickles, 2024).

At the same time, the study demonstrates that the persuasive force of this environmental poster cannot be attributed to language alone. Throughout the corpus, visual and typographic organisation was crucial as argumentative means. Hierarchy controlled attention; composition established relationships of tension, depletion, and conflict; colour established tone of feeling and semantic mood; and typography was not only a transmission of words but also a physical mode of meaning in its own right. These findings indicate that texts, images, and typography should not be viewed as parts to be combined late in the project, but as a single signifying system one would expect. The poster does best within this convergence—language shapes meaning, the image becomes sensory and symbolic proof, and typography informs rhythm, provides emphasis, and articulates the mood of the work. This meaning, therefore, is not presented as inherent to the posters from outside but rather emerges when it works together and is constructed by means of the relationships between semiotic resources that intersect in the communicative space (Bateman et al., 2017; Kress & van Leeuwen, 2021; van Leeuwen, 2023). There are two main theoretical and practical contributions of this study. In theory, it extends a line of reading in Anthropocene communication research to shift focus from visual aesthetic interpretations of environmental posters primarily to a multimodal interpretation of language as a productive sign system in ecological public conversation. It thus reinforces arguments to incorporate the use of speech act theory, anchorage, implicature, and multimodal analysis of design for environmental media.

Practically speaking, the study lends a framework for poster designers, campaign planners, and environmental communicators to be more effective at message construction. It is suggested that successful environmental posters closely coordinate slogans, visual architecture, and typographic choices to guarantee that the word-for-word message is not only readable but also ethically forceful, emotionally resonant, and visually effective. This has direct consequences for developing climate and environmental campaigns intended to alleviate uncertainty, increase public adoption, and enhance the civic benefit of graphic-based advocacy (Doerr, 2024; Kress & van Leeuwen, 2021).

While having made valuable contributions, this study is limited by the size and range of the corpus it examines. This study focused on four purposively selected posters, chosen based on their clarity of linguistic strategy and their potential for multimodal interpretation. Although this created analytical depth, the results cannot be mechanically generalised to environmental poster discourse, as it is a complex structure that necessitates diverse epistemic approaches. A similar analysis could take place in subsequent research via a larger sample, campaign, or other regional/linguistic environments in order to illustrate how identical rhetorical strategies translate across cultures, publics, and media ecologies. Experimentally interrogating audience reception in the context of command, naming, metaphor, and lexical deformation within the frames of prior beliefs, environmental literacy, and political context would be similarly worthwhile.

These extensions would expand our understanding of how multimodal ecological discourse circulates and how persuasive meaning is stabilised, resisted, or transformed in the real world. In summary, this study has shown that the environmental poster emerges in the Anthropocene as a location where language becomes action, image becomes

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argument, and design becomes an instrument of ethical address. The semiotic character of language on these posters is not only that of words; it is not only how they are used to represent crisis, the distribution of responsibility, the organisation of interpretation, and how they relate to the visual form to achieve public meaning. Environmental posters do not just record ecologies — they actively build them out of urgency, justice, and civic action. By demonstrating the symbiotic relationship between verbal and visual signs in this production process, the study adds to a more accurate portrait of environmental communication as a mode of engagement, an orientation, an operation of persuasion, and moral world-making for a time of planetary crisis.

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Interference in Oral and Written Speech of Bilinguals in Kazakhstan: Causes and Mechanisms

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Abstract*—Linguistic interference in the oral and written production of balanced Kazakh–Russian bilinguals within Kazakhstan's trilingual education context are investigated in this study. Despite extensive documentation concerned with interference phenomena, prior research has rarely systematically compared modalities or integrated structural-level, directionality, and individual-difference variables within a single empirical design. The present mixed-methods study constructed a dual-modality corpus comprising 160 essays (Kazakh and Russian) and 1,600 elicited oral utterances from 80 university students in North Kazakhstan, complemented by semi-structured interviews with a stratified subsample. All texts were annotated in ELAN for lexical, morphosyntactic, phonological, and discourse-pragmatic interference, and analysed using descriptive statistics, t-tests, effect sizes, correlation analysis, and thematic coding. The results showed that the interference was significantly more frequent in oral than written production, with spontaneous speech dominated by morphosyntactic violations and phonological assimilation. In contrast, written texts demonstrated a higher proportion of lexical-semantic calques. The directionality was asymmetrical: Kazakh→Russian transfer, especially at the lexical level, exceeded Russian→Kazakh, while Russian→Kazakh interference was more prominent in morphosyntax. The advanced English proficiency was positively associated with higher Kazakh–Russian interference, suggesting a trilingual cognitive-load effect. The metacognitive awareness was associated with large drops in morphosyntactic, but deprived of phonological errors, and the L1 dominance influenced patterns of interference. The research provided a corpus-supported, theoretically integrated explanation of interference as a dynamic process of interaction among cognitive control, sociolinguistic prestige, and structural compatibility. It provides evidence-based suggestions for trilingual pedagogy and language policy regarding explicit metalinguistic training and the strict sequencing of English in Kazakh-Russian bilingual education.

***Index Terms*—cross-linguistic interference, modality, trilingualism, error analysis**

I. Introduction

A. Sociolinguistic Context and Policy Environment

When the position of state language is taken by Kazakh and the position of interethnic communication language by Russian, it has a unique kind of functional bilingualism which exists in a diglossic relationship (Kulgildinova et al., 2018). Despite the regular attempts by the state to advance Kazakh, Russian still has communicative dominance in the

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professional, scientific, and urban popular culture (Terlikbayeva & Menlibekova, 2021). As stated by Mongilyova (2015, p. 3), several regional and generational asymmetries as empirical observations show that, in North Kazakhstan, older generations retain Kazakh proficiency, and younger generations exhibit a highly pronounced preference for Russian in social communication, establishing a new level of bilingual competence The complexity is further compounded by the national plan of trilingual education that was implemented in 2011, making English instruction with the addition of the use of the Kazakh and Russian languages (Gumarova, 2017). Although this policy is supposed to modernize human capital, it has mentally overburdened learners and, in most cases, led to semilingualism or different levels of interference instead of balanced trilingualism (Knol et al., 2024).

B. The Phenomenon of Interference

In this contact world, the linguistic interference, which is the involuntary transfer of the elements of one language to another, has become a ubiquitous characteristic of bilingual speech. According to Akynova and Bayekeyeva (2020, p. 79), interference occurs not only as random errors but as systematic deviation on the phonetic, lexical, morphological, and syntactic levels. This is psycholinguistically a symptom of the non-selective activity of the two language systems in the sense that the bilingual brain always has to suppress the non-target language (Bialystok et al., 2008). Interference is heightened when cognitive control becomes weak, especially during the high processing tasks in the trilingual classroom (Bailey et al., 2024).

C. Problem Statement and Significance

The main gap in the existing body of research is the most severe limitation of the given research: although the concept of interference is highly recognized, the existing studies are mostly split into modalities. The studies tend to study oral speech and written essays separately without comparing the ways in which the mode of production changes the interference phenomena in the same bilingual participants systematically according to Dinevich (2021) and Kenzhigozhina et al. (2020). Moreover, the special effect of the new policy of trilingualism (with English) on the existing one, which is the Kazakh-Russian dyad, is not theorized (Koptleuova, 2022). It is important to fill these gaps as, aside from furthering the theory of contact linguistics, practical policy analysis can as well be developed in this way. Without the granular data about the locations of interference most of the time, either in speech or writing or in Kazakh to Russian or vice versa, the curriculum developers do not have an evidence base on which to base their designed pedagogical interventions (Koptleuova, 2022; Zhibitayeva, 2017).

II. Literature Review

A. Structural Dimensions of Interference

The indications of interference in the language structure are widely reported. At the phonetic level, Kenzhigozhina et al. (2020), used acoustic analysis in order to report assimilation and replacements in the speech of younger generations of Kazakhstan and attributed these trends to the discrepancy between the Turkic synharmonism and the Russian phonological system. The cross-linguistic influences and phonetic accuracy spread to the perception, as Badanbekkyzy et al. (2023) compared how effectively the phonetic study can be learned in English and Kazakh languages and showed that the structural differences on the segmental level generate the systematic pattern of substitution in bilingual production. Koptleuova (2022) divided morphosyntactic mistakes made by trilingual adults into under-differentiation, over-differentiation, reinterpretation, and substitution. It allowed the idea that grammatical interference was the most difficult to get rid of, as it was based on structural divergence rooted in the morphosyntactic systems of agglutinative (Kazakh) and fusional (Russian) languages.

This linguistic incompatibility also finds its realization in the phraseological and idiomatic levels; as Akbembetova et al. (2021, p. 5) has registered, speech interference is generated systematically by proverbs and phraseological units of typologically remote languages, and interactions between the patterns of interference manifest the underlying semantic composition and communicative role differences in these languages. Akbembetova et al. (2021, p. 6) also has revealed the fact that linguacultural interference is represented in the lexicon of proverbs of English, which suggests that the cross-linguistic impact takes place not only at morphosyntactic and lexical levels but also at pragmatic-cultural contact points of divergent meaning-making conventions. Baghana et al. (2018) defined the interaction of languages as the leading contributor to the creation of linguistic interference, and the level of the latter is directly related to the structural distance and cognitive processing loads.

B. Directionality and Asymmetry

The recent literature demonstrates that interference is basically directional and asymmetrical. With the sample of 66 young people, Kuzembayeva et al. (2023, p. 104) estimated the level of this asymmetry, recording levels of 41.5% in the Kazakh-Russian direction and 13.8% in the Russian-Kazakh direction. Such an imbalance, according to Zharkynbekova et al. (2025, p. 45), suggests that the interference is not just a cognitive deficit but is determined by domains of sociolinguistic prestige and functional language distribution. Abu et al. (2024) broadened this analysis by considering both code-switching and componential analysis in conflictogeme transfer in both English, Russian, and Kazakh media contexts, to reveal the consistent patterns of directionality according to communicative domain and

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language mix. It was reported in the article by Bazarbayeva et al. (2024) that the perception and social reality in the artistic world of writers writing in two languages created different directional preferences, Russia-dominant contexts lead to greater Russian-Kazakh morphosyntactic transfer, and Kazakh-dominant contexts to greater Kazakh-Russian lexical transfer (Turaeva, 2023).

In order to understand the mediation of the directionality of code switching, Nurtazina et al. (2019) listed the linguistic and extralinguistic factors that mediated and found that the power relation, educational background, and commitment to identity influenced which language was more frequently transferred to the other. Chernyavskaya and Zharkynbekova (2024) used the concept of directionality to find methods of code-switching in the experience of Kazakh-Russian hybrid language practice, which were implemented based on the empirical approach and thus showed that directionality was not arbitrary but existed within the stratification of accessibility to structures. Academic and technical lexicons are often created in Russian, which has created asymmetries in patterns of lexical borrowing with Russian serving as the main demoted lexical donor (Zhibitayeva, 2017).

C. Modality: Oral Versus Written Production

The bilinguals are forced by the dire communicative pressure to solve the problem of modality, perhaps to compensate through compensatory measures, such as switching languages or direct borrowing upon oral production (Kinzhagaliyeva et al., 2023; Samambetova, 2024). The written production, on the other hand, allows time to plan theoretically, to monitor and correct oneself. Nevertheless, Dinevich (2021, p. 613) claims that writing has its own types of interference, especially the orthographic interference and complex syntactic calquing, which may be avoided in simple oral conversations by speakers. Nematova (2024) also points to the negative transfer of literacy skills in one language to another, that is, biliterate children whose scripts (Cyrillic/Latin) are different.

The modality difference, the oral or written communication, has a radical effect on the expression of interference. The psycholinguistic framework proposed by Grosjean (2018) proved that bilinguals engaged both language systems at the same time, and oral production puts temporary time pressure on it, decreasing the inhibition of the non-target language. This results in increased interference rates in spontaneous speech that is caused by phonological assimilation and morphosyntactic violation (Kenzhigozhina et al., 2020; Koptleuova, 2022).

Written production, in its turn, gives an opportunity to spend a long time on planning and orthographic surveillance. Nevertheless, García-Sierra et al. (2025) reported superior language acquisition phase activations in multilinguals in syntax brain regions, which suggests that it neither depends on written modality but instead transfers such activations to lexical-semantic calques and complex syntactic calquing patterns that cannot be corrected spontaneously. Polivara (2015) has discussed the method of normalized tempo-rhythmical structure of the speech in the language of foreign speakers in a bilingual child, showing that both rhythm and prosodic patterns are a special level of interference that can be manifested in the oral modality but not in writing.

D. Research Gaps and Scope

The synthesis of these results provides a single research gap: there is an absence of comprehensive and corpus-based studies that could combine these variables at the structural level, directionality, and modality in one research design. The majority of the previous research is based on self-reported questionnaires or independent observation as stated by Knol et al. (2024), which may not be a true measure of linguistic performance. As a result, the research problem of the present study is shaped by the development of a dual-modality corpus (traditional and written) and its analysis in order to empirically examine the interaction between these variables. By combining these cognitive and sociolinguistic viewpoints, a single theoretical framework, as shown in Figure 1, is taken up in the study. In this theoretical framework is presumed that the interference of bilinguals is not a fixed phenomenon but a dynamic process mediated by three interacting areas: (1) cognitive control processes (inhibition, monitoring), (2) sociolinguistic factors (prestige, identity) and (3) structural linguistic compatibility.

The current research fills these gaps through the incorporation of two-modal corpus analysis along with qualitative analysis of metacognitive awareness and identity positioning, and thus combining cognitive control, sociolinguistic context, and structural compatibility in a unified theoretical framework.

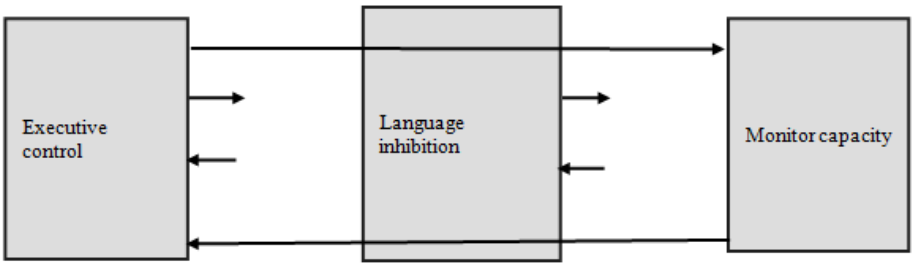


Figure 1. Theoretical Framework Model

E. Research Questions

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The research gap identified in this study will be addressed through the following questions:

RQ1: Which phonological, morphosyntactic, lexical and discourse-pragmatic forms of interference are present in the recorded speech production of balanced bilinguals (Kenzhigozhina et al., 2020)?

RQ2: Does the modality of production (oral and written) have a significant impact on the occurrence, distribution and nature of the linguistic interference (Dinevich, 2021; Samambetova, 2024)?

RQ3: Does the directionality of asymmetry of general code-mixing (Kazakh-Russian vs. Russian-Kazakh) at the general level (phonology vs. morphosyntax) remain in specific linguistic levels (phonology vs. morphosyntax)?

RQ4: To what extent do individual factors, specifically Russian L2 proficiency and trilingual English exposure, predict the severity of interference (Koptleuova, 2022; Olguin et al., 2019)?

RQ5: Is there a correlation between participants reported metacognitive awareness of their bilingualism and their observed error reduction rates (Kinzhagaliyeva et al., 2023)?

F. Hypotheses

H1: Modality Effect: Oral speech will significantly exhibit higher aggregate interference rates, driven by phonological assimilation and spontaneous code-switching, whereas written speech will show a higher prevalence of lexical-semantic calques due to conscious but erroneous lexical retrieval (Dinevich, 2021; Grosjean, 2018).

H2: Directionality Asymmetry: Consistent with sociolinguistic dominance hierarchies, Kazakh-to-Russian lexical transfer will significantly exceed Russian-to-Kazakh transfer, while Russian-to-Kazakh interference will be predominantly morphosyntactic (e.g., case errors) (Zhibitayeva, 2017; Kuzembayeva et al., 2023).

H3: Trilingual Load: Higher proficiency in the third language (English) will correlate with increased interference in the Kazakh-Russian dyad, reflecting the increased cognitive load of inhibiting two non-target languages simultaneously (Bailey et al., 2024; Zhibitayeva, 2017).

H4: Metacognitive Control: Participants demonstrating high metalinguistic awareness will show statistically significant reductions in morphosyntactic errors, but not in phonological errors, as the latter are less accessible to conscious monitoring (Bialystok et al., 2008; Samambetova, 2024).

III. Research Methodology

A comprehensive, phased mixed-methods design constructed for maximum empirical rigour and authenticity over a 3–4-month implementation period was employed in this investigation. All methodological steps and data management procedures aligned with the best practices established in corpus linguistics, multilingual discourse analysis, and sociolinguistic interference inquiry.

The investigation followed a sequential four-phase design over a 16-week period, ensuring rigorous data triangulation.

A. Phase 1: Preparatory and Piloting (Weeks 1–4)

Framework Development: The researcher developed an ELAN-compatible schema of annotations that defined coding categories in accordance with previous empirical protocols (Kinzhagaliyeva et al., 2023). Three dimensions of interference, namely, lexical (loan translations, calques, borrowings), morphosyntactic (case/agreement violations, word-order errors, verbal aspect mismatches), and discourse-pragmatic (topic-shift markers, coherence breaks, pragmatic failure), were operationalized based on the error-classification frameworks that were recorded by Knol et al. (2024). The defined annotation processes caused boundary level and phrase-level solution procedures on clause boundaries and morphological attachment.

Pilot Testing: Ten volunteers (evenly distributed by gender and languages, 18-22 years old) were administered pilot written and oral elicitation activities. In order to pilot transcripts, find a lack of clarity in category membership and operational definition, and form inter-coder reliability procedures in the process of checking intra-annotator consistency, the investigator used the first coding scheme (target: Cohen's $\kappa \geq 0.85$).

Counterbalancing and Materials: The topics used in written essays were switched randomly to reduce the effect of lexical familiarity. Image induction spurs were selected in authenticated bilingual-study sources (Samambetova, 2024) with theoretical cross-linguistic correspondence and background impartiality.

B. Phase 2: Data Collection (Weeks 5–10)

Recruitment and Screening: Eighty, 18-25-year-old bilingual Kazakh-Russian speakers (mean = 20.4, SD = 1.8, 51 percent female) were engaged through student networks in two higher-education institutions in North Kazakhstan. Inclusivity standard: (a) secondary schooling in Kazakhstan, (b) daily practices with both the Kazakh and Russian languages, if in family or academic contexts, and (c) self-reported proficiency ≥ B2 level in both languages (Nematova, 2024). They were a mixed sample in that there were 42 L1 Kazakh and 38 L1 Russian.

Written Elicitation: All the participants were made to write two essays (Kazakh version and Russian version) about a personal experience or opinion on opposing issues (e.g., describe a memorable classroom event; discuss the role of technology in education). Essays were graded (time limit was 15 minutes) and received online. Word count: 150-250 words per essay. Numbers were used to identify anonymity.

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Oral Elicitation: The subjects used Audacity software to note down descriptions of 20 accepted images in laboratory conditions. The descriptions were limited to 10-12 words in each utterance, which triggered one clause and those with multiple clauses. The oral sessions were held one-on-one; the instructions were presented in both languages based on the standardized protocols according to Samambetova (2024). The time that was recorded per participant: about 8-10 minutes per language.

Transcription: The researcher transcribed all oral recordings (N = 1,600 utterances; N = 160 minutes total) verbatim by using orthographic rules of not only Kazakh Cyrillic, but also Russian. The accuracy of transcription (10% random subsample) was checked by a trained bilingual research assistant.

C. Phase 3: Annotation and Reliability (Weeks 11–14)

Coding: Each piece of written and oral information was marked at the level of a clause and a phrase through ELAN software (version 6.2). Three passes of independent coding were accomplished: (1) lexical interference, identification and classification of occurrence (loan translations, calques, codeswitches); (2) morphosyntactic annotation, case mistakes, agreement mistakes, word-order mistakes; (3) discourse-pragmatic marking, topic shift, anaphora break, pragmatic violation. The coding of categories and definitions were based on the schemes reported by Kuzembayeva et al. (2023) and Knol et al. (2024).

Inter-Rater Reliability: One-fifth of the corpus (randomly chosen texts out of 16 participants) was coded by a second trained bilingual annotator independently, one-half through the annotation process. The kappa of Cohen was computed in every dimension: lexical dimension ($k = 0.89$), morphosyntactic dimension ($k = 0.87$), and discourse-pragmatic dimension ($k = 0.84$). The value of all the ks was above the 0.80 mark. Contentious cases were solved by consensus debate, and annotation rules were improved on the rest of the data.

Final Review: The researcher re-examined the entire annotated corpus in search of systematic consistency and recorded exceptions before extracting and analysing the data.

D. Phase 4: Quantitative and Qualitative Analysis (Weeks 15–16)

Statistical Analysis: The frequency of errors was normalized according to the amount of written data (100 words) and minutes of speech (oral data, it was assumed that 1 / total duration of utterance x 60). The mean, standard deviation, range, median of the disaggregated by language direction (Kazakh→Russian and Russian→Kazakh) and modality (oral and written) interference rates, the L1 group (Kazakh L1 and Russian L1), and linguistic level, were calculated and presented in the descriptive statistics (mean, standard deviation, range, median) and effect sizes (Cohen d). Modality effects were evaluated within the subjects by using paired t-tests ($\alpha = 0.05$). Independent t-tests were used to compare the differences in the L1-group. SPSS v.28 was used for data analysis.

Qualitative Analysis: Twenty of the chosen respondents, including 10 with high rates of interference, 10 with low rates, evenly matched between L1 and gender, took part in semi-structured interviews (20-25 minutes each) covering their attitudes toward code-mixing, perceived difficulty of interference, and self-reported strategies of managing the situation. Coding was performed on the audio of the interviews with the six-stage thematic analysis protocol developed by Grosjean (2018), which produced an emergent theme about the metalinguistic awareness and pragmatic code-switching motivation.

Triangulation: Corpus annotation outcomes, performance on elicitation, and narratives of the interviews with participants were cross-verified to determine a convergence and find out confirmatory and contradictory tendencies.

Integration: The synthesis problem of mixed methodology also allowable for empirically testing the research hypotheses on directionality asymmetry, mode-specificity, and cognitive-control mechanisms, as well as the influence of socio-pragmatics on bilingual interference (reported in research questions 1-8).

E. Ethical Procedures

Informed Consent: All 80 participants agreed to participate in the data collection and received written informed consent, with a clear indication of voluntary withdrawal.

Data Security and Confidentiality: The names of the participants were substituted with anonymous number codes. All written essays, recording files and transcripts were saved in encrypted password devices which could only be accessed by the researcher. The raw data was stored in accordance with institutional policies on data storage (5 years storage).

IV. Results and Analysis

A total of 5990 annotated occurrences of interference were detected after the empirical analysis of 160 written essays and 1,600 oral utterances. The results below were displayed with the visual structure of the study and according to the major patterns of interferences.

A. Key Finding 1: Modality Effect and Cognitive Control

One of the most fundamental differences was found between the oral mode of production and the written mode of production. There was a much higher aggregate interference rate in oral speech (M =5.7 errors per 100 words) than in the written modality (M =3.2 errors per 100 words), indicating that temporality of the spontaneous speech negatively affected bilingual inhibitory control.

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This difference was statistically significant and was proven by the application of paired t-tests ($t(79) = 4.93$, $p < .001$, $d = 0.82$). The distribution of interference types also varied depending on name and spoken language was characterised by morphosyntactic errors (e.g., errors in case agreement), phonological assimilation of word pronunciations, whereas in written text, the figure rose to lexical-semantic calques (39.2% of all written errors), that is, the conscious but inaccurate application of lexical strategies during planning.

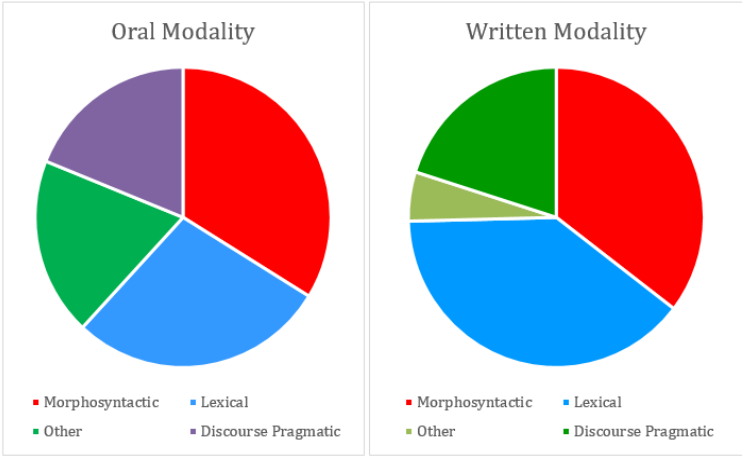


Figure 2. Distribution of Interference Types (Lexical, Morphosyntactic, Discourse-Pragmatic)

B. Key Finding 2: Directionality Asymmetry

The statistics showed that there was a high transfer asymmetry in favour of transfer, as expected in light of the sociolinguistic dominance of Russian in the academic field. Kazakh-Russian interference (M = 5.3 per 100 words) mistakes were much higher than Russian-Kazakh transfer (M = 3.8 per 100 words) mistakes. This unequal distribution was the most evident in the lexical level (ratio 3.2:1), and morphosyntactic interference in more equal measure (ratio 1.4:1), as displayed in Figure 3.

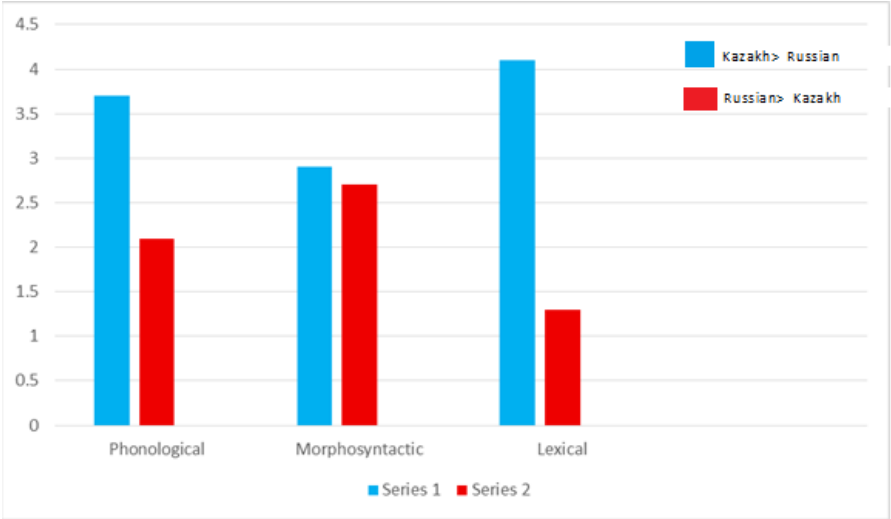


Figure 3. Directionality: Kazakh→Russian vs. Russian→Kazakh Across Linguistic Levels

C. Key Finding 3: The Trilingual Load Effect

The cognitive load that the participants had on the Kazakh-Russian dyad was due to their English proficiency. The correlation analysis showed a positive correlation ($r = 0.61$, $p < .01$) existing between the advanced proficiency in the English language (CEFR C1+) and the high levels of the Kazakh-Russian interference. Among participants who used three active systems of languages in their activities there were greater aggregate error rates, with high rates of error, 6.1 versus 4.7, with low Canadian English language and proficiency.

D. Key Finding 4: Impact of L1 Dominance

Interference patterns were very different depending on the native language (L1) of the participants. The participants with L1-Kazakh speakers, an active variety of oral language speech, L1-Kazakh speakers (N=42) experienced higher levels of Kazakh→Russian code-mixing, and L1-Russian speakers (N=38) exhibited greater morphosyntactic errors of

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the case marking type (see Figure 4). The most symmetric profiles of interference were obtained in the case of balanced bilinguals (n = 24).

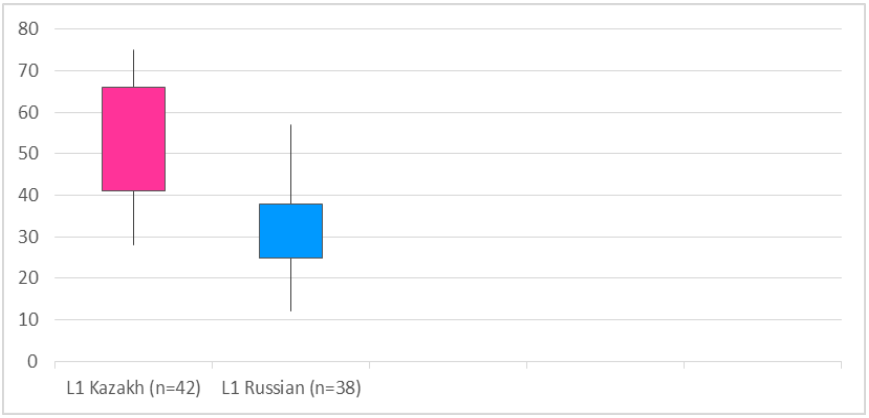


Figure 4. Comparison of L1 Kazakh vs. L1 Russian Speakers

E. Key Finding 5: Metacognitive Awareness and Error Reduction

A significant interaction between performance and awareness was discovered in the qualitative-quantitative synthesis. Morphosyntactic errors were reduced by 34% in the high metacognitive awareness group than in the low-awareness group. Table 1 illustrates this relationship as a plot of the inverse relationship between the self-reported levels of awareness and the frequency of error.

TABLE 1
ALIGNMENT OF KEY FINDINGS WITH RESEARCH FRAMEWORK

Result and Analysis	Research Question	Hypothesis	Sources
Finding 1 (Modality Effect): Oral speech had much larger aggregate rates of interference (M = 5.7 errors/100 words) than did written speech (M = 3.2), t(79) = 4.93, p < .001. The phonological assimilation and the morphosyntactic violation had dominated oral errors and the lexical-semantic calques had the highest proportion in written errors (39.2%).	**RQ2:** How does modality of production alter frequency, distribution, and type of interference?	**H1 (Supported):** Oral speech will exhibit higher aggregate rates driven by phonological/code-switching errors; the written speech will show higher lexical-semantic calques due to conscious retrieval.	Bialystok et al. (2008); Dinevich (2021); Samambetova (2024)
Finding 2 (Directionality Asymmetry): Kazakh→Russian interference (M = 5.3) significantly exceeded Russian→Kazakh (M = 3.8). Asymmetry was highest at the lexical level (ratio 3.2:1), while morphosyntactic errors (e.g., case/agreement) showed greater parity (ratio 1.4:1) in Russian→Kazakh direction.	**RQ3:** Does directionality asymmetry persist across specific linguistic levels?	**H2 (Supported):** Kazakh→Russian lexical transfer will exceed Russian→Kazakh; Russian→Kazakh interference will be predominantly morphosyntactic.	Kuzembayeva et al. (2023); Zhibitayeva (2017); Zharkynbekova et al. (2025)
Finding 3 (Trilingual Load): A significant positive correlation (r = 0.61, p < .01) was found between advanced English proficiency (C1+) and increased Kazakh-Russian interference rates (M = 6.1 vs. M = 4.7 for low proficiency), indicating cognitive strain.	**RQ4:** To what extent does trilingual English exposure predict interference severity?	**H3 (Supported):** Higher English proficiency will correlate with increased interference due to cognitive load of inhibiting two non-target languages.	Koptleuova et al. (2022); Bailey et al. (2024); Olguin et al. (2019)
Finding 4 (Metacognitive Control): High-awareness participants showed a 34% reduction in morphosyntactic errors compared to low-awareness peers. However, phonological error rates showed minimal reduction (8%), confirming differential accessibility to conscious control.	**RQ5:** Is there a correlation between metacognitive awareness and observed error reduction?	**H4 (Supported):** High awareness will reduce morphosyntactic errors significantly, but not phonological errors, which are less accessible to monitoring.	Kinzhagaliyeva et al. (2023); Samambetova (2024); Bialystok et al. (2008)
Finding 5 (Structural Patterns): Analysis identified 5,990 instances: Oral data yielded 1,443 lexical and 1,081 morphosyntactic errors; Written data yielded 1,123 lexical and 1,017 morphosyntactic errors. Discourse-pragmatic markers were frequent in oral speech (602 instances).	**RQ1:** What specific interference patterns emerge in documented speech production?	*(Descriptive Baseline for H1/H2)*: Establishes the specific phonological, morphosyntactic, and lexical error types predicted in H1 and H2.	Kenzhigozhina et al. (2020); Akynova and Bayekeyeva (2020)

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V. Discussion

A. Modality Effects: The Planning Time Hypothesis

Theories of bilingual cognitive control based on executive function have empirical evidence, which is a substantially higher rate of interference in the oral modality, 5.7 errors per 100 words, as compared to the written modality, 3.2 errors per 100 words. This result has expanded the research of Bialystok et al. (2008), who assumed that, according to their dual-control framework, bilinguals needed to have both of their language systems active and repressed the non-target language in a single experiment. The oral interactions also subjected the decision-making windows to immediate time constraints in speech production, making it difficult to select lexicon quickly before proper monitoring could be carried out. As a result, spontaneous speech is characterized by phonological assimilation-based and morphosyntactic transgression (Orazbek et al., 2025). On the other hand, in written production, there is an adequate opportunity to plan and revise longer and to have more inhibitory control on the dominant language (Baissydyk et al., 2023). Such a meaning is consistent with the documentation by Polivara (2015), who claimed that bilinguals consciously use interventions known as compensatory strategies to deal with interference, in the oral modality, such as rephrasing, the use of pauses, and the simulation of gestures.

B. Directionality: Sociolinguistic Prestige and Structural Constraints

The strong asymmetry of the directionality of code-mixing, whereby the Kazakh-Russian transfer was stronger compared to the Russian-Kazakh population overall, but by 3.2 times at the lexical level, was empirical evidence of the sociolinguistic hierarchy models. This asymmetry in the self-reported surveys on code-mixing was already described by Kinzhagaliyeva et al. (2023); this research expands their results by showing that such directionality works in dissimilar ways on linguistic subsystems. The supremacy of Kazakh-Russian lexical transfer indicated the institutional superiority of Russian in the academic and employment fields in the entirety of Kazakhstan (Dykes, 2017). Bilinguals also tended to borrow Russian technical and scientific terms, and this tendency also aligns with the results of Ospanova et al. (2024), who have reported that the spread of Russian lexical innovations into the Kazakh discourse occurs at a very high rate, especially in digital and formal dialogues.

On the other hand, morphosyntactic directionality, which had a higher symmetry in the Russian-Kazakh case errors (47% of morphosyntactic interference), was concerned with the structural, not solely sociolinguistic influences. The case system of Russian places a significant processing burden on Kazakh L1 speakers learning L2, and it is ultimately causing permanent case-marking mistakes to high-level bilinguals. The asymmetry of both syntactic and phonological levels highlights an important theoretical argument: the interferential process was not homogenous but involved various mechanisms, which worked at phonological, lexical and grammatical levels. The conditioning of lexical transfer was largely determined by sociolinguistic prestige; morphosyntactic transfer was determined by typological distance (agglutinative versus fusional systems). This difference added value to the previous theorizing work by Smagulova (2020) and Tsaryk and Rybina (2022), who listed the types of interference but did not methodically analyze their directionality variation.

C. Trilingual Effects: Cognitive Load and Executive Depletion

The large positive correlation between the competence of English and rates of Kazakh-Russian interference ($r = 0.61$, $p < .01$) is also new empirical evidence of the competitive load hypothesis of trilingualism. The three active systems managed by participants showed the interference rate 29 percent higher than on the monolingual bilingual system, indicating that shared executive resources used to repress a third non-target language (English) exceeded the capacity needed to repress Kazakh-Russian. This result builds on theoretical biases by Karabulatova and Polivara (2013), whose computer models consider that trilingual processing draws similar neural resources to the control of language. To the extent that the mechanism is implemented, it is not a matter of interference between the dyad itself, but assigning global executive load to trilingual management. Importantly, this effect was moderate, having been buffered by metacognitive awareness: participants who were highly aware in both conditions (English proficiency C1, and higher) demonstrated a lower interference rate by 26% compared to low-awareness participants who had the same level of English proficiency. This interplay implies that being explicitly aware of code-switching is what allows them to strategically allocate resources. Practically, explicit realization of switching patterns also allows bilinguals to apply anticipatory inhibition prior to interference, partially compensating for the structural weight created by the third language. The given interpretation is consistent with the concept of the work by Tsaryk and Rybina (2022), whose intervention studies have shown the labelled meta-cognition training to have lowered cross-linguistic interference in trilingual employees by 25-38%. In the current research, there is observational evidence suggesting that similarly protective effects are obtained when naturally occurring metacognitive awareness is utilised.

D. Practical Implications for Trilingual Education Policy

The implication of the modality-dependent vulnerability of various kinds of interference has a direct implication on the classroom pedagogy. In case phonological interference cannot be consciously corrected (according to the minimal decrease when high awareness is proposed), the classroom intervention must be based on the morphosyntactic and lexical areas, where the monitoring is most feasible. Concrete contrasts exercises on case systems and lexical

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disambiguation, where conscious control in bilinguals can be proved to decrease mistakes, could be used by the teachers. On the other hand, a phonological correction based on metalinguistic awareness only (e.g., pay attention to the fact that Kazakh /I/ is more front than Russian /i/) might not be effective without perceptual training or systematic exposure. The trilingual load effect observes that bilingual competence may be maximized by programming a second language in sequence and not simultaneously to achieve bilingualism. The current policy in Kazakhstan puts all three languages into use within Grade 1, which may be extremely taxing on executive resources at times when the consolidation of the Kazakh and Russian agendas is essential. The empirical result of the positive correlation of English proficiency and higher Kazakh-Russian interference indicates that policy change should imply the gradual implementation of knowledge: the establishment of the basis of the Kazakh and Russian bilinguals with Grades 1-4, and introduction to English with Grade 5+. Such sequencing would allow the assets of the executive to balance the main dyad in the premise of the triadic demands. These suggestions work well in line with Braun and Clarke (2006) and Knol et al. (2024), whose pedagogical research recommended a graded instruction in multilingualism.

E. Limitations and Boundary Conditions

With a number of limitations, the generalizability of such findings is limited. To start with, the paper has a sample of university students between the ages of 18-25, mostly from urban North Kazakhstan. It has not been tested on populations in the rural field, in older cohorts or in other post-Soviet multilingual situations. The preferences in the language differ drastically according to the region and generation, as Mongilyova (2015) reported; a detailed study would entail stratified sampling of both the geographic and age distributions. Second, a cross-sectional design does not allow tracking of the developmental pathways. Does the level of interference boost or diminish due to the continuous maturation of bilinguals? What are the forms of variation through educational evolution? The longitudinal designs monitoring participants throughout 3-5 years would shed light on the developmental issues that cannot be handled by the current study. Third, manual code annotation does not lead to high inter-rater reliability, but it eliminates high inter-rater variability and creates subjectivity among the coders ($k \geq 0.84$). Machine-learning-based computational methods based on annotation would also increase replicability and scalability, but at the possible cost of a lack of contextual sensitivity. Fourth, the researchers do not isolate the effects of the modality of instruction (immersion vs sequential bilingual education vs foreign language instruction). As Gumarova (2017) proposed, the instructional approach significantly affects the course of interference; the current sample was primarily secular school graduates, and it was not possible to test the hypothesis in terms of their ability. Lastly, the metacognitive awareness scale depended on self-report by the participants in the interviews, and this cast doubt on the construct validity. Are interview responses a true representation of spontaneous metacognition in performing actual speech production? Mechanisms of monitoring could be indexed more directly by experimental paradigms that use online reaction time or eye-tracking when performing production activities.

F. Future Directions

Future research is needed to generalize the empirical results of this study and overcome its limitations to take into account four main avenues. To begin with, longitudinal designs are needed in order to trace the developmental pathways of interference. These kinds of studies may help explain whether the effect of trilingual load, which was observed here, was a temporary processing cost or more of a permanent condition of the multilingual mental system (Mambetaliev, 2022). Second, the directionality asymmetry should be tested using comparative research in a variety of demographic settings. Moreover, it would be possible to extrapolate the comparative approach to other Turkic-Slavic contact areas (e.g., Kyrgyzstan, Tatarstan) to differentiate typological and sociolinguistic forces of morphosyntactic interference.

Third, a promising future lies in methodological invention in the form of neurocognitive methodologies. Real-time processing measures of corpus annotation, such as eye tracking during reading or event-related potentials (ERPs) during speech production would provide direct evidence of the cognitive control mechanism that it postulates. Lastly, intervention studies provide a direct way to applied impact. Depending on controlled trials that set implicit immersion versus explicit contrastive analysis instruction, the determination of optimal strategies that should be used to promote balanced trilingualism without the effects of semilingual interference could be established (Knol et al., 2024). This evidence-based pedagogy is the key to the successful implementation of the objectives of the trilingual education policy of Kazakhstan.

VI. Conclusion

This paper aimed to contribute to the empirically based description of the linguistic interference in both oral and written speech of a group of Kazakh-Russian bilinguals in the context of the recent policy on trilingualism development in Kazakhstan. Using a purpose-made dual modality corpus and structured elicitation as well as a qualitative interview, the research went beyond questionnaire-based descriptions in order to record how phonological, morphosyntactic, lexical, and discourse pragmatic interference in fact occurred in performance. It was revealed, as a result of the analysis, that the phenomenon of interference was not unitary, but rather a regular product of interacting forces of cognitive, structural, and sociolinguistic pressure.

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The results supported the fact that modality was an important mediator of mechanisms of interference. Produced under time pressure, spontaneous oral speech was most susceptible to morphosyntactic violations and phonological assimilation, whereas writing, was more controlled, exhibiting a unique pattern of semantic calques of lexical nature and syntactic calquing. Directional effects also manifested effects of transfer of Kazakh to Russian applied to lexical levels specifically, demonstrating the functional and prestige dominance of Russian in both academic and professional language, where structural accounts of Turkic-Slavic contrast predict Russian-Kazakh problems around morphosyntactic integration.

Concurrently, the importance of individual differences was pointed out in the study. The increased English proficiency was connected to higher overall interference, indicating that trilingual activation possessed some quantifiable cognitive burden on the bilingual systems of control. However, this effect was not entirely common: all participants who reported higher metalinguistic awareness showed many fewer morphosyntactic and lexical mistakes, suggesting that the influence of mindfulness on errors was not the same across the board: the effects of three language management reduced some, but not all, mistakes. The findings highlighted that the concept of interference should not be perceived as a mere lack or failure of the bilingual competence, but instead as a dynamic process that lied at the crossroads of executive control, typological distance and position on the sociolinguistic spectrum.

Collectively, the research is strong enough to be used in informing theory and practice. In the case of contact linguistics and psycholinguistics, it provides model support of non-selective activation, sociolinguistic prestige, and structural compatibility on the same explanatory basis. The findings suggest targeted maintenance of the mentioned aspects that are most vulnerable to interference to educators and policy makers, namely the oral morphosyntax and the written choice of lexicon; trilingual instruction should be sequenced in order to appreciate the extra control requirements of English in the Kazakh-Russian dyad. Although restricted in terms of age group and location, the mixed methods design and systematic triangulation will yield a transferable template for studying the interference in other multilingual contexts. It will be necessary to further the research by adding more geographical areas, age groups and teaching paradigms to the literature in a bid to have all the dynamic ecology of bilingual and trilingual communication in Kazakhstan and other areas.

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Toponymy and Shifted Identity: A Study of the Language Change in Rejang-Language Village Names

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Abstract—**This study examines the changes in village names from the Rejang language to Indonesian in Kepahiang Regency, Bengkulu, focusing on referential meanings, community perceptions, and the impact on local cultural identity. Using referential meaning analysis and thematic analysis based on interviews with both older and younger generations, the findings show that the language shift alters not only linguistic forms but also the cultural, historical, and spiritual values embedded in the original toponyms. This process weakens intergenerational cultural transmission and raises the risk of losing local identity. While some community members accept the name changes as part of adaptation to modernity, many believe the original names should be preserved to ensure historical continuity and maintain local wisdom. The study emphasizes that Rejang toponyms serve as cultural archives that record collective memory and calls for integrating education, scholarly documentation, and regional policies to sustain the cultural identity and heritage of the Rejang community.**

Index Terms—**toponymy, Rejang language, language shift, Kepahiang Regency, cultural identity**

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I. Introduction

The Rejang language is one of the regional languages spoken in Bengkulu Province. McGinn (2007) argues that Rejang is an Austronesian language spoken by the majority of the Rejang ethnic community. According to him, as a sub-branch of the Malayo-Polynesian language family, Rejang has five dialects, namely Musi, Pesisir, Lebong, Rawas, and Kebang Agung. These dialects are distributed across five regions: the Musi dialect is spoken in Rejang Lebong, the Pesisir dialect in North Bengkulu, the Lebong dialect in Lebong Regency, the Rawas dialect in Central Bengkulu, and the Kebang Agung dialect in Kepahiang Regency. The Rejang language is facing a serious decline, marked by the increasing use of Indonesian in mother–child communication within families. This shift weakens the position of Rejang, a trend also confirmed by other studies on its decreasing everyday use. Supporting this, Astuti et al. (2023) found that Rejang is rarely used among adolescents, largely due to limited language preservation efforts, including the absence of Rejang language instruction in schools within Rejang-speaking areas. In Indonesia, particularly in Bengkulu, the government has not yet issued policies that support the teaching of regional languages.

In addition to the issues discussed above, this phenomenon becomes particularly interesting as it is reflected in the naming of villages in Kepahiang Regency, where efforts have been made to translate village names from the Rejang language into Indonesian. This phenomenon can be observed in several examples of data presented below:



Figure 1. Batu Bandung Village (Buteu Banung)
Source: Kampung KB, BKKBN

Based on the researchers' initial knowledge as native speakers, later validated through consultation with family members in Batu Bandung, the name *Batu Bandung* derives from an original Rejang toponym. The original name in Rejang is *Buteu Banung*, which, when translated into Indonesian, becomes *Batu Bandung*. In Indonesian, *batu* means "stone," while *Bandung* refers to the capital city of West Java Province, widely known as the "City of Flowers." However, compared with the original Rejang meaning, *buteu* indeed means "stone," but it cannot be understood in a literal sense. In the cultural context of the Rejang community, *buteu* refers to two stones positioned side by side or symmetrically, exhibiting a similar form. Meanwhile, the word *banung* should not be equated with *Bandung*, because in Rejang, *banung* means "a pile" or "a cluster." This semantic shift illustrates how the process of changing place names in Kepahiang Regency can alter literal and cultural meanings, as place names represent local knowledge about locations and their references (Saeed, 2015).

Village names are not merely linguistic representations but also reflect the cultural and social understandings of the communities that inhabit them. They demonstrate how geography is transformed into a homeland and serve as markers of the richness and sensibility of humans in naming land (Ainabek et al., 2024). Village names that originally derive from the Rejang language were part of local cultural identity, conveying the meanings and traditional values of the Rejang community. Every nation names places through its language (Arifoğlu, 2020), often embedding historical, mythical, or origin narratives. When these names shift into Indonesian, some cultural meanings or values may be lost, reducing younger generations' understanding of their cultural roots. Changes in place names reflect shifts in identity at the personal, community, and national levels (Guyot & Seethal, 2007). On the other hand, such changes can reduce appreciation for local languages and cultures, including Rejang. They may also erode the preservation of traditions, customs, and practices closely tied to the region's original language.

Thus, it is important to understand how changes in village names from Rejang to Indonesian affect their forms, meanings, and public perceptions in Kepahiang Regency. This issue is addressed within the field of toponymy, which examines the relationship among language, culture, geography, and regional history (Ainabek et al., 2024). Toponyms have significant historical value as they reflect local values and a sense of belonging that inhabitants attach to their territory (Gálvez, 2024). Accordingly, this study formulates the following research questions:

1. What are the referential meanings of village names in Kepahiang Regency in both the Rejang and Indonesian languages?
2. How do the people of Kepahiang Regency perceive the changes in village names from the Rejang language to Indonesian?

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Research on toponymy has addressed diverse contexts, including linguistic change and socio-political dimensions of place naming. For instance, Wu and Young (2023) examine power and resistance in island renaming in the South China Sea, but pay limited attention to cultural and community meanings. In Bengkulu, several studies have documented local toponyms (Diani & Rahayu, 2024; Erliani et al., 2021; Melin et al., 2024), but they are largely descriptive and synchronic, treating local toponyms as static entities. As a result, the cultural implications of village name changes in Kepahiang Regency remain underexplored. Addressing this gap, the present study examines village names that have shifted from Rejang to Indonesian, emphasizing the cultural and historical values embedded in these toponyms (Kearns & Berg, 2002; Muscat, 2011). As an ancient Chinese proverb reminds us, *"If names are not correct, then the words spoken will not sound right"* (Wodzer, 2024, p. 28).

II. Literature Review

A. Toponymy

Toponymy, a branch of onomastics, examines the naming of places and geographical features (Mursidi & Soetopo, 2021). Beyond indicating location, place names function as repositories of collective memory and cultural identity (Reszegi, 2023). Chávez Reyes (2003) emphasizes that toponymic studies trace the history and social meanings behind naming practices, while Trapero (1995) highlights that such processes are collective in nature and reflect social consensus. Accordingly, toponymy is understood as a multidisciplinary field that integrates linguistic, historical, and anthropological perspectives (Sánchez, 2019; Winheski, 2024). Functionally, place naming reflects the relationship between humans and their geographical environment (Radding & Western, 2010; Woodman, 2014) and serves as a cultural representation of the speech community (Hough, 2016; Wilson, 1998). Place naming is shaped by social, political, and ideological forces, functioning as a site of identity construction and symbolic power (Berg & Vuolteenaho, 2009). Therefore, toponymy is not merely a linguistic symbol but also a socio-cultural construction that reflects a community's values and knowledge systems.

In this study, the theory of toponymic attachment proposed by Kostanski and Puzey (2016) is used to explain how individuals and communities develop emotional bonds and identities with places through four main elements: (1) history/memory, which connect communities to the past; (2) community, which affirms boundaries of social inclusion and exclusion; (3) emotion, as a form of affective engagement with space; and (4) actions/events, which generate the symbolic meaning of a place. This approach enables a deeper understanding of the symbolic and cultural impacts of toponymic change on local identity.

This study applies the naming typology of the Australian National Placenames Survey (ANPS) by Blair and Tent (2021) to classify village names in Kepahiang Regency based on semantic and referential criteria, including descriptive (geographical features), associative (flora, fauna, or human activities), incidental (specific events), eponymous (names of individuals or groups), borrowed (from other languages), and innovative (new linguistic forms without direct reference to local realities). The ANPS framework serves as an analytical tool for identifying shifts in meaning and cultural values resulting from language change. Combined with toponymic attachment theory, this approach provides a systematic means of examining changes in Rejang-language village toponyms.

B. Referential Meaning

The discussion of meaning is part of semantics. Semantic analysis enables the identification of cultural and geographical relationships within a region, as reflected in its toponyms (Gálvez, 2024). In linguistics, the relationship between sign and signified is a central concern of semantics (Chaer, 2002). According to Kridalaksana (2008), meaning is the relationship of correspondence or non-correspondence between language and entities outside language. Chaer (2014) classifies meaning into several types, including grammatical meaning, contextual meaning, referential meaning, non-referential meaning, denotative meaning, connotative meaning, conceptual meaning, associative meaning, word meaning, term meaning, idiomatic meaning, and proverbial meaning. Referential meaning is meaning that has a reference or an external referent, whereas non-referential meaning does not have a reference or referent (Chaer, 2014). This study applies referential meaning analysis to examine village names in Kepahiang Regency. Referential meaning relates to the concepts that exist within a community, functioning as points of reference and grounded in social reality, namely, the realities present in the social environment (Djajasudarma, 2006). This relationship arises from activities outside language, manifested in linguistic forms (symbols) such as objects, events, and other phenomena (Djajasudarma, 2006). This study provides a framework for interpreting the relationship between village names and their socio-cultural referents, as well as for comparing meanings in Rejang and their Indonesian counterparts. This analysis helps determine whether language shift preserves or obscures the original referents.

C. Perception

This study also examines community perceptions of village name changes involving a shift from Rejang to Indonesian. Such changes can influence how communities understand their identity, history, and cultural values, potentially reshaping perceptions of local heritage (Guyot & Seethal, 2007; Urbanc & Gabrovec, 2005). The Indonesian Comprehensive Dictionary or Kamus Besar Bahasa Indonesia (KBBI) defines perception as the direct reception of something. Perception can also be understood as the process by which individuals interpret sensory stimuli from the

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environment to form meaningful understandings of their surroundings. This process is not merely passive data reception but involves active interpretation influenced by past experiences, memory, and cultural context (Testa et al., 2016).

This understanding of perception underpins the analysis of how communities interpret changes in village names. Examining community responses allows this study to assess how language shifts in village names affect cultural identity, sense of belonging, and attitudes toward local heritage, making perception analysis essential to understanding their social and cultural impacts.

III. Methodology

A. Participants

This study employs a qualitative research design using a descriptive–analytical method, which involves describing empirically observable facts as they are recorded in the data and subsequently analyzing them (Ratna, 2010; Sudaryanto, 2015). The research takes the form of fieldwork involving human participants. A total of 75 participants were recruited from 18 villages in Kepahiang Regency that have experienced language shift. All participants are members of the Rejang ethnic group. This approach is consistent with recent developments in cultural studies that emphasize the importance of integrating textual analysis with empirical data collected from the target audience (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). The table below provides an overview of the demographic characteristics and distribution of the study participants.

TABLE 1
PARTICIPANT DEMOGRAPHICS

Characteristics	Category	**Number**	**Percentage**
Gender	Male	40	53%
	Female	35	47%
Age	57-75	14	19%
	40-48	25	33%
	16-30	36	48%
Ethnic	Rejang	75	100%
Educational Background	Elementary to Senior High School	39	52%
	Bachelor Degree	36	48%
	Others	0%	0%

Participants were selected using purposive sampling, based on their relevance to the research objectives. The involvement of two groups from different generations was essential to obtain intergenerational perspectives on the meanings and perceptions of village names. The number of participants was considered adequate to achieve data saturation in qualitative research (Guest et al., 2006).

B. Materials

The primary data consist of oral interviews and informant statements from semi-structured interviews conducted between September and November 2025, focusing on village name origins, cultural meanings, and community perceptions of name changes. Local informants were generally unable to explain the meanings of Indonesian village names and instead referred to the original Rejang names. To supplement this, the *Kamus Besar Bahasa Indonesia* (KBBI) was used to trace referential meanings, not as a substitute for local interpretations, but to support comparative analysis between Rejang and Indonesian toponyms.

C. Instrument

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, which allowed flexibility while maintaining a clear focus on the research questions. The interview guide was developed by the researchers and covered several key themes, including: (1) the origins and meanings of village names; (2) intergenerational knowledge, involving both younger and older generations, regarding their village names; and (3) perceptions of language shift and its impact on the community's cultural identity. This instrument enabled participants to articulate their experiences and interpretations in depth, while ensuring focus and consistency across interviews.

D. Data Collection Procedure

Data were collected through field visits and online interviews, depending on participant availability. In each village, four to five participants were interviewed for 30–45 minutes, with interviews audio-recorded, transcribed, and conducted under strict ethical standards, including informed consent and anonymity (Flick, 2020). To examine intergenerational transmission, 36 younger participants (born 1995–2009) were also included. Data were analyzed using Miles and Huberman's (1994) interactive model and thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke (2006), comprising data familiarization, coding, theme development, theme review, theme definition, and results reporting. Manual analysis and researcher triangulation were employed to ensure rigor and minimize interpretive bias.

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IV. Results

A. Village Name Changes

To trace the referential meaning in Rejang, the researchers relied on the community's collective knowledge, obtained through structured interviews with elderly and customary leaders. This approach is based on the fundamental concept that toponymy is a cultural sign formed through social consensus and collective memory, rather than a lexical unit whose meaning can be derived compositionally. Meanwhile, presenting the results using the KBBI is not intended to equate the cultural meanings derived from community interviews with dictionary definitions; rather, it serves as a normative semantic indicator. It demonstrates how village names that have undergone language shift can be understood within the general lexical system of Indonesian. Thus, the KBBI is used as a tool to analyze shifts in semantic reference, rather than as the primary source for understanding the cultural meanings embedded in village names.

The difference in sources when interpreting the meanings of village names in Rejang and Indonesian arises from the community's dual naming system: the names known and used by local people versus the official names. This results in the Indonesian names often lacking referential grounding within the community. Therefore, using different methods to explore meaning actually reveals a referential imbalance between Rejang toponyms and official Indonesian names. Consequently, village names become a space for negotiation between the community's collective memory and government policy. Village names are not merely labels devoid of meaning; they often reflect the community's cultural identity and history. For example, village names on Hainan Island in the Li language reflect the natural and cultural characteristics of the Li ethnic group, including folklore and traditional skills (Zhang et al., 2025).

Table 2
Language Shift Process From Rejang to Indonesian

Rejang Language	Referential Meaning	Indonesian Translation	Referential Meaning from the KBBI	English Translation
Tajung Balai	Office located by the water (Interview)	Sosokan Cinta Mandi	Cannot be traced	The Intimate Bath of Love
Cito Menei	The place of the legendary figure *Sepahit Lidah,* who liked to bathe (Interview)	Cinta Mandi	A strong feeling of enjoying cleaning the body (KBBI Online)	Love Bath
Cito Menei Beleu	The site of the legendary figure *Sepahit Lidah,* who liked to bathe (Interview)	Cinta Mandi Baru	A strong feeling of enjoying cleaning the body (KBBI Online)	The New Love Bath
Limuh Pet	The *Limuh* fruit, which tastes bitter, as a result of *Sepahit Lidah's* curse (Interview)	Limbur Lama	A nonstandard form of *lembur* (KBBI Online)	Old *Limbur*
Limuh Beleu	The Limuh fruit, which tastes bitter, as a result of *Sepahit Lidah's* curse (Interview)	Limbur Baru	A nonstandard form of *lembur* (KBBI Online)	New *Limbur*
Tajung Benakat	The riverside plain with a large tree, named *Benakat* (Interview)	Taba Air Pauh	*Menamba* Water *Mangga* (KBBI Online)	Taba of Air Pauh
Tajung Pajang Dahet	A vast expanse that stretches out (Interview)	Penanjung Panjang Atas	Cannot be traced	Upper Long Penanjung
Tanjung Pajang Bes	A wide expanse that stretches out (Interview)	Penanjung Panjang Bawah	Cannot be traced	Lower Penanjung Panjang
Dan Bijea	A place where people from various regions stop under the *binjai* tree (Interview)	Peraduan Binjai	Place where binjai trees meet (KBBI Online)	Binjai Resting Place
Ujen Mas Kauk	A drop of water that turned into gold (Interview)	Ujan Mas Bawah	A nonstandard form of *rains* (KBBI Online)	Lower Ujan Mas
Buteu Banung	Clustered stones (Interview)	Batu Bandung	A hard object in Bandung City, West Java	Bandung Stone
Tehtik	A *Tehtik* River (Interview)	Tertik	Cannot be traced	Tehtik
Bioa Hamen	A *Hamen* River (Interview)	Air Raman	Shredded meat in liquid form (KBBI Online)	Raman River
Tabah Beleu	Wood that was cut as a sign of the way home (Interview)	Taba Baru	New *Menaba* (KBBI Online)	New Taba
Buteu Kalung	A person who hangs a stone around their neck (Interview)	Batu Kalung	Stone and flower arrangement (KBBI Online)	Necklace Stone
Buteu Belehek	A person who turned into stones arranged in a line (Interview)	Batu Belarik	Cannot be traced	Striped Stone
Muaro Lakap	A *Lakap* River (Interview)	Muara Langkap	The place where a river ends and a *langkap* tree stands (KBBI Online)	Langkap Estuary
Kemang Serei	A pool called *Kemang Serei* (Interview)	Kembang Seri	Cherry landscape (KBBI Online)	*Seri* Flower

Table 2 above shows the phenomenon of the language shift in village names from Rejang, the native language of the ethnic group in Kepahiang Regency, to Indonesian. Field research results obtained through interviews with customary

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leaders in each village, and compared with the KBBI, indicate differences in meaning, structure, and the influence of the origins of village names in Rejang when translated into Indonesian. For example, several village names show a shift in referential meaning due to the language shift into Indonesian. One example is the translation of *Buteu Banung* into *Batu Bandung*. Another example is the village of *Tanjung Balai*, which was originally called *Sosokan Cinta Mandi*; its meaning is lost when translated into Indonesian. Furthermore, the village name *Cito Menei* in Rejang originally held cultural and historical significance, referring to a figure regarded as magical by the community. However, its meaning in the KBBI is entirely different, changing to "a feeling of enjoying cleaning the body".

An interesting phenomenon occurs when the Indonesian Translations of village names that are classified as untraceable. This is because the Indonesian language does not accommodate names derived from rivers or other specific geographical features. For instance, the village name *Tehtik* is derived from the name of a river. However, when compared to its Indonesian form, *Tertik*, no corresponding meaning can be found. This issue cannot be resolved, even when asked of the informants, because they assume that *Tertik* is the Indonesian form of *Tehti*k, whereas no standard entry exists in the KBBI for *Tehtik*.

These changes in village names indicate that the language shift from Rejang to Indonesian is not limited to lexical changes; it can also alter aspects of cultural identity and the community's collective memory. Name changes also affect meaning in a highly visible way, thereby eroding the local values embedded in traditional village names for the community.

B. Toponym Categorization

Rejang-language village names in Kepahiang Regency show diverse toponymic categories and embody rich cultural values and customary practices. Interview data indicate that these categories reflect local knowledge, folklore, and community history embedded in traditional names. In toponymic analysis, linguistic patterns and cultural narratives are inseparable, as each category represents collective memory and cultural identity. Therefore, understanding Rejang village names requires an integrated interpretation of linguistic and cultural dimensions, as illustrated in Table 3:

TABLE 3
CATEGORIZATION OF VILLAGE TOPONYMS IN KEPAHIANG REGENCY

Rejang Language	Toponym Categorization	Indonesian Language	Toponym Categorization	English Translation
Tajung Balai	History/Memory	*Sosokan Cinta Mandi*	Descriptive	The Intimate Bath of Love
Cito Menei	History/Memory	*Cinta Mandi*	History/Memory	Love Bath
Cito Menei Beleu	History/Memory	*Cinta Mandi Baru*	History/Memory	The New Love Bath
Limuh Pet	History/Memory	*Limbur Lama*	History/Memory	Old Limbur
Limuh Beleu	History/Memory	*Limbur Baru*	History/Memory	New Limbur
Buteu Kalung	History/Memory	*Batu Kalung*	History/Memory	Necklace Stone
Buteu Belehek	History/Memory	*Batu Belarik*	History/Memory	Striped Stone
Buteu Banung	History/Memory	*Batu Bandung*	History/Memory	Bandung Stone
Tehtik	Association	*Tertik*	Association	Tehtik
Bioa Hamen	Association	*Air Raman*	Association	Raman River
Muaro Lakap	Association	*Muara Langkap*	Association	Langkap Estuary
Kemang Serei	Association	*Kembang Seri*	Association	Seri Flower
Tajung Benakat	Descriptive	*Taba Air Pauh*	Descriptive	Taba of Air Pauh
Tajung Pajang Dahet	Descriptive	*Penanjung Panjang Atas*	Descriptive	Upper Long Penanjung
Tajung Pajang Bes	Descriptive	*Penanjung Panjang Bawah*	Descriptive	Lower Penanjung Panjang
Dan Bijea	Actions/Events	*Peraduan Binjai*	Actions/Events	Binjai Resting Place
Ujen Mas Kauk	Actions/Events	*Ujan Mas Bawah*	Actions/Events	Lower Ujan Mas
Tabah Beleu	Actions/Events	*Taba Baru*	Actions/Events	New Taba

The table above provides an overview of the distribution of toponymic categorization, which has been grouped according to Blair and Tent's (2021) theory of toponymic attachment and Kostanski and Puzey's (2016) typology of toponymy. Based on this grouping, Rejang-language village names serve as the primary reference for the community in interpreting the meanings of Indonesian-language village names. This is supported by interview data, which indicates that the community lacks an understanding of Indonesian names; they often assume that Indonesian village names are equivalent to Rejang names. As illustrated in the interview excerpt: "The meaning does not change with the name change; the meaning remains from the Rejang language". This statement demonstrates that the community's knowledge of meanings in Indonesian is not a living, actively used knowledge within the community, unlike their understanding of village names in Rejang, which they comprehend deeply. Therefore, the researchers will discuss in greater detail the toponymic categorization in the Rejang language, as the field data from interviews primarily reflect the community's understanding of their village names in Rejang. The Rejang-language toponymic categorization is as follows:

Historical Category

The identity of a place or region plays a crucial role in helping communities connect with their territory, as toponyms function not only as geographical markers but also as symbols of layered historical, cultural, and spiritual identities. In Kepahiang Regency, several village names in the Rejang language fall within the historical–legendary toponymic category and are closely associated with oral traditions and the legendary figure *Sepahit Lidah*. *Tajung Balai* Village,

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for instance, was named by *Rio Besei*, a figure regarded as a symbol of justice, after a riverside village office, and is believed to provide ancestral protection to descendants of the original inhabitants. Similarly, *Cito Menei* and *Cito Menei Beleu* derive their names from *Sepahit Lidah's* fondness for bathing in the local river, while *Limuh Pet* and *Limuh Beleu* originate from a story in which *Sepahit Lidah* cursed sweet *limuh* fruit to become bitter (pet) after his unspoken request was ignored. *Buteu Kalung* Village recounts a bride and groom who were cursed to be turned to stone while wearing necklaces, and Buteu Belehek refers to a family resting in a circular formation (belehek) who were transformed into aligned stones, thereby reinforcing the story through visible physical formations. *Buteu Banung* likewise commemorates an individual who was cursed to be stoned after failing to respond to *Sepahit Lidah*. Collectively, these village names demonstrate that Rejang toponyms function as cultural archives, preserving folklore, moral teachings, spiritual beliefs, and social values, and highlighting language as a medium for transmitting collective memory and cultural identity across generations.

Association Categorization

Place naming often reflects features associated with a location (Blair & Tent, 2021). In Kepahiang Regency, Rejang-language village names in the associative category commonly derive from environmental elements, particularly rivers. Villages such as *Tehtik, Bioa Hamen, Muaro Lakap*, and *Kemang Serei* are named after nearby rivers that support daily community activities. These naming practices show that, in Rejang culture, village names function not only as geographical labels but also as expressions of local ecological knowledge, positioning rivers as central to both livelihood and cultural life.

Category of Descriptive

Place naming that reflects inherent characteristics of a location constitutes the descriptive toponymic category, which encompasses topographical, relational, locational, and functional aspects. In Kepahiang Regency, several Rejang-language village names illustrate this pattern. *Tanjung Benakat* Village, for example, derives its name from the community's observation of their environment: *tajung* refers to a flat riverside area that is important for daily activities and settlement boundaries, while *benakat* denotes a prominent tree that serves as a recognizable local landmark. The combination of these features produces a unified toponymic meaning that reflects how the community interprets and relates to its living space, indicating that village names function not only as geographic references but also as expressions of collective environmental experience (Direct interview, 13 September 2025). Similarly, the villages of *Tajung Pajang Dahet* and *Tajung Pajang Bes* were originally part of a single area known as *Tajung Pajang,* where *tajung* refers to a stretch of land and *pajang* denotes something wide or extensive. This name reflects the area's geography, characterized by vast rice fields that historically served as the community's main farmland and primary source of livelihood. Agricultural activities shaped the community's socio-economic identity, with daily life closely tied to cultivation cycles. Within the descriptive toponymic category, these naming practices demonstrate that Rejang village names are deeply connected to language, natural landscapes, and local culture, embodying cultural values, local wisdom, and the community's worldview regarding the relationship between humans and nature.

Category of Action/Event

In remembering past events or actions, place names serve as one means by which local communities preserve collective experience, and village names in the Rejang language reflect a clear pattern of formation based on such events or actions. This is evident in villages such as *Dan Bijea, Ujen Mas,* and *Taba Beleu*. *Dan Bijea* derives from *dan*, meaning to stop or rest briefly, and *bijea*, referring to the *binjai* fruit; according to local accounts, the area once functioned as an important resting point for residents and traders engaged in socio-economic activities, marked by the presence of a large *binjai* tree that provided shade and served as a natural landmark. *Ujen Mas* originates in an orally transmitted account of Haji Agus Malik and his wife, in which a drop (ujen) falling from a spout was believed to be made of gold (mas), an experience regarded as sacred and later institutionalized as the village name. Meanwhile, *Taba Beleu* reflects land-clearing practices, where *taba* means "to cut or slash" and *beleu* means "new," referring to newly opened land for livelihood and highlighting human activity as the basis of place naming. Within this event/action category, Rejang village names such as *Dan Bijea*, *Ujen Mas,* and *Taba Beleu* demonstrate how historical actions and experiences are embedded in language and preserved through toponyms, functioning not only as geographical labels but also as markers of collective identity, social memory, cultural values, and the community's enduring connection to their living space.

C. Loss of Cultural and Historical Heritage of the Village

Based on interviews with informants from both younger and older generations, including customary leaders from each village in Kepahiang Regency, there is evidence of a potential decline in the transmission of cultural heritage and village history among the younger generation of native Rejang speakers.

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TABLE 4
MAPPING OF THE POTENTIAL LOSS OF VILLAGE CULTURE AND HISTORY

Potential Loss	Age	Quotes	Youth Involvement
Positive	*58*	*"Young people do not know" (Interviewee CD)*	Low
Positive	*75*	*"I no longer know. Even though it is important for us to know the village's history" (Interviewee S)*	Low
Positive	*60*	*"In general, they only know what is happening now, but they do not know what actually happened" (Interviewee K)*	Low
Positive	*27*	*"I'm not very familiar with it, because I rarely hear the story directly." – Interviewee L*	Low
Positive	*24*	*"I feel that the village names are no longer very familiar among the younger generation." – Interviewee I*	Low

Based on Table 4, informants from the older generation, particularly customary leaders, highlighted difficulties in preserving and transmitting the history and culture embedded in village names. Statements such as *"The young do not know"* (Interviewee CD, September 2025) and *"Generally, they know something now, but they do not know what it actually is"* (Interviewee K, September 2025) indicate low engagement of the younger generation in understanding the origins and meanings of village toponyms. Similar perceptions were also expressed by younger informants, for example, *"I'm not very familiar with it, because I rarely hear the story directly"* (Interviewee L, December 2025), suggesting limited exposure to intergenerational storytelling. This condition reflects a shift in cultural values and patterns of knowledge transmission, in which oral tradition is no longer the primary medium for passing down local history and culture. Social change, modernization, and the renaming of villages from Rejang to Indonesian further intensify this disruption. *From a toponymic perspective, the loss of understanding of place-name meanings weakens collective identity*, as village names encapsulate historical memory, cultural values, and local worldviews. The situation becomes more complex due to the language shift in village naming practices, which is not merely administrative but also reduces younger generations' interest in engaging with their cultural heritage. *This phenomenon aligns with* Fishman's (1991) *concept of language and cultural attrition*, whereby the weakening of a local language's function leads to the gradual erosion of linguistic identity and cultural continuity.

D. Community Perception

The interview data were transcribed and analyzed using thematic analysis, following the six steps proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006) to identify recurring patterns and themes related to community perceptions of village name changes from Rejang to Indonesian. Participants were recruited from each village, with four to five individuals representing both younger (16–30 years) and older generations (40–75 years), ensuring intergenerational perspectives. This sample size is consistent with qualitative research standards for achieving data saturation (Guest et al., 2006). Based on this analytical framework, community perceptions were categorized into three main perspectives: (1) cultural identity as inherited through lineage, (2) village names as markers of ecological and cultural identity, and (3) a pragmatic perspective that views Indonesian as a more effective language for social and administrative communication.

TABLE 5
COMMUNITY PERCEPTIONS

Quotes	Interpretation
"Although the name has changed, its sacred power will continue to be passed down from generation to generation to the descendants of Tanjung Balai." — Interviewee A	The community responded to this name change by stating that it does not affect the values held by the village.
"Because remembering the origin of the village name greatly influences customs and history, and successors are needed for the continuity of culture." — Interviewee L	The importance of remembering the original name of a village lies in the fact that by recalling its history, customs, and cultural continuity can be preserved for the future.
"I agree if the village name is restored to its original form. Because with the original name, the community will be united with the nature of the village." — Interviewee D	The community considers it important to preserve the village name as a form of identity and to protect the natural environment in which they live.
"If the name of this village changes, then its identity will automatically be lost." — Interviewee M	The view of the village name as an identity is strong within the community, underscoring the importance of preserving the area's original name.
"However, village names do not necessarily have to use the Rejang language, because Indonesian is already widely understood by people." — Interviewee Q	Another perspective within the community holds that the original language is less important than the national language, Indonesian.

The first perspective, held by traditional leaders, maintains the belief that sacred powers or ancestral values will continue to be inherited. This reflects the Rejang community's cosmological view, which places cultural identity as a genealogically transmitted entity. Such identity is not only associated with the linguistic symbol of the village name in the Rejang language but is also transmitted across generations of descendants of *Tajung Balai* Village.

The second perspective shows that the village name functions as a cultural and ecological identity marker. For this group, preserving the village name is equivalent to maintaining collective memory and keeping it connected to history, place, and inherited value systems. Maintaining the original village name in the local language is vital to cultural preservation and to sustaining residents' sense of identity.

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The third perspective represents a new direction in understanding identity, where informants exhibit a more pragmatic and modernist attitude. They demonstrate different language behaviors, viewing the use of Indonesian as more effective in social and administrative contexts. This view indicates that, socially, the Rejang language is no longer seen as an effective medium for conveying broader purposes or intentions.

In general, Rejang traditional leaders demonstrate a point of negotiation between preserving local identity and adapting to modernity. For some, maintaining the village name in the Rejang language remains essential as a marker of identity, while others regard the change of village names as natural and part of integrating into a wider social system.

V. Discussion

This study critically examines the shift in village names in Kepahiang Regency from Rejang to Indonesian, focusing on referential meanings and community perceptions. The findings show that these changes have significantly affected linguistic, cultural, and social dimensions, positioning toponymy as a site of social change shaped by language policy and modernization (Putra & Winarti, 2025). By integrating semantic and thematic analyses with cross-generational interview data, this study demonstrates that village names function not merely as administrative labels but as cultural signs that preserve historical values and the Rejang worldview. These findings align with previous studies showing that place names reflect local landscapes and cultural identities, such as those observed in the Li language of Hainan Island (Zhang et al., 2025). Similarly, in Indonesia, village names in Aceh often derive from geographical features, heritage structures, ancestral origins, and historical events, all of which reflect a rich cultural identity (Aziz et al., 2025). Meanwhile, in Cape Coast, Ghana, indigenous place names reveal the complex dynamics of culture, geography, identity, and power, turning the city into a living archive with historical relevance (Nkansah & Bonsu, 2024).

The findings of this study clearly demonstrate that language shift can directly alter the referential meaning of Rejang-language village toponyms. Village names in Rejang often reference natural elements, historical events, legendary figures, and shared experiences of the Rejang community. However, when these names are translated into Indonesian, their original referents are often lost, and some names undergo lexical simplification. These findings align with the view that place names represent local knowledge and human relationships with space (Ainabek et al., 2024; Cacciafoco & Cavallaro, 2023) and reinforce the argument that changes in toponymy can sever the connection between language, history, and cultural identity (Seethal, 2007; Gálvez, 2024).

The meaning shift also reflects intergenerational differences in perception. Older generations view village names as representing ancestral and genealogical identity, while younger generations increasingly lack understanding of their origins and historical meanings. This indicates a weakening of intergenerational cultural transmission, consistent with language and cultural attrition (Fishman, 1991) and supports findings that national language dominance can displace local languages and affect cultural identity (Abtahian et al., 2022).

The implications of this study can be divided into three areas: linguistic, cultural, and policy. Linguistically, the shift of village names from Rejang to Indonesian is not neutral, as it obscures semantic references and diminishes cultural meaning. Culturally, these changes weaken collective memory and the local sense of belonging. From a policy perspective, toponymy should be managed in a participatory manner, involving indigenous communities and recognizing local languages within administrative systems, with support for education to ensure cultural continuity. In addition, the theoretical implications of such research can enrich studies in sociolinguistics and toponymy, as well as areal linguistics. The findings can also be integrated into courses on historical geography, linguistic geography, and comparative linguistics (Konyratbayeva et al., 2025). Furthermore, they can be applied in language teaching and social sciences to foster a deeper awareness of cultural identity and linguistic worldviews (Zhunussova et al., 2025).

VI. Conclusion

This study concluded that the change of village names in Kepahiang Regency from Rejang to Indonesian was not merely an administrative adjustment but also a sociolinguistic transformation, particularly with respect to semantics, culture, and intergenerational aspects. When the names of villages in the Rejang language in Kepahiang Regency were translated into Indonesian, most meanings related to ecology, historical experiences, legends, and even the community's collective memory were simplified or lost. This research also identified a generational gap: the older generation tends to interpret village names as symbols of ancestral identity, whereas the younger generation has less understanding of their historical meanings. This situation certainly indicates a weakening of cultural transmission amid the community’s efforts to negotiate local identity with the demands of modern governance.

More broadly, this study confirms that toponymy is a dynamic social practice shaped by language policy, modernization, and power relations. In other words, preserving Rejang toponymy is important for maintaining the community's cultural identity and collective memory. These findings also emphasize the existence of place-naming policies capable of preserving culture, ensuring that local languages and the traditional values they carry remain recognized and sustainable. Thus, further research is expected to deepen the study of the role of government policy and administrative practices in assisting changes in Rejang language toponymy. In addition, involving a larger, more diverse sample will provide a deeper understanding of how village name changes are interpreted in everyday life. Comparative

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studies of regions that still preserve regional language toponymy are also very important for evaluating policy directions and their implications for social and cultural justice in Indonesia.

Declaration of the Use of AI

In preparing this article, the authors used ChatGPT (version 4.0) solely to assist with language polishing, including improving grammar, correcting spelling, and adjusting the text to an academic style. The authors also used AI tools for English translation under the strict supervision of the author team. In addition, AI-based tools, such as Scopus AI, were used to identify relevant literature on the research topic. All analyses and the preparation of the academic manuscript were conducted entirely by the authors, with careful attention to academic standards and ethical guidelines.

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Conceptual Metaphors of Knowledge in *The Names* by Don DeLillo

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***Abstract*—This study examines the conceptualization of knowledge through metaphors in *The Names* (1982) by Don DeLillo, drawing on the framework of Lakoff and Johnson (1980). Focusing on ontological and structural metaphors, it investigates how metaphorical patterns construct the author's perspective on knowledge. The study employs a primary qualitative mixed-method approach to analyze metaphorical expressions in the novel. The findings identify nine major conceptual metaphors of knowledge, including: (1) KNOWLEDGE IS AN OBJECT; (2) KNOWLEDGE IS A CONTAINER; (3) KNOWLEDGE IS A SUBSTANCE; (4) KNOWLEDGE IS AN ENTITY; (5) KNOWLEDGE IS A POSSESSION; (6) KNOWLEDGE IS A SYSTEM; (7) KNOWLEDGE IS A CODE; (8) KNOWLEDGE IS A STRUCTURE; and (9) KNOWLEDGE IS A NETWORK. These results contribute to a deeper understanding of how knowledge is linguistically and conceptually structured in literary discourse.**

***Index Terms*—conceptual metaphors, knowledge, ontological metaphors, structural metaphors, literary discourse**

I. Introduction

Cognitive linguistics is an interdisciplinary field that investigates the relationship between language, thought, and human cognition. Emerging in the late twentieth century as a reaction against formalist and structuralist approaches, this field emphasizes that language is deeply rooted in human experience and the conceptualization of the world. Scholars such as Lakoff (1987), Beknazarova et al. (2021), and Hicke and Kristensen-McLachlan (2024) argue that linguistic structures reflect general cognitive processes rather than functioning as autonomous grammatical rules. Consequently, cognitive linguistics has significantly impacted disciplines such as semantics, discourse analysis, translation, and literary studies, and has progressively solidified its status in linguistic research in Vietnam, especially in the examination of metaphors and meaning constructions.

Within this framework, metaphor is no longer regarded as merely a rhetorical device but as a fundamental mechanism of thought. Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT), proposed by Lakoff and Johnson (1980), revolutionized the traditional view by defining metaphor as a cognitive process in which one conceptual domain is understood in terms of another. As Kövecses (2010) explains, conceptual metaphors are systematic and grounded in embodied experience, enabling individuals to understand abstract concepts through more concrete domains, as reflected in everyday expressions such as "grasping an idea" or "acquiring knowledge".

In contemporary literature, Don DeLillo is notable for his profound exploration of the relationship between language and cognition. His novel, *The Names* (1982), demonstrates that language not only reflects but also constructs how people understand and interpret the world. In this context, knowledge is considered a complex, abstract, and multifaceted concept. According to Gibbs (2008), knowledge can be defined as "justified true belief", while more recent studies such as Manerko (2019), Muis et al. (2021), and St Amant (2022) emphasize its dynamic and context-dependent nature in processes of reasoning and cognition. Furthermore, research in developmental psychology (Dasen, 2022; Gunawardena et al., 2025) highlights that knowledge is constructed through social interaction and is shaped by language, culture, and environmental factors.

This study suggests that understanding knowledge cannot rely on a single definition. Instead, conceptual metaphor provides a useful analytical framework for explaining how individuals conceptualize and structure knowledge through more concrete domains. Therefore, investigating conceptual metaphors of knowledge in *The Names* not only helps clarify how this concept is represented in literature but also extends the application of cognitive linguistics in textual analysis. Simultaneously, the study provides interdisciplinary benefits, aiding learners in cultivating analytical thinking, improving interpretive abilities, and acquiring a more profound understanding of the function of language in knowledge construction. Thus, the current study aims to answer the following questions:

(1) What conceptual metaphors of knowledge can be found in *The Names*?

(2) What do the conceptual metaphors of knowledge utilized in *The Names* imply?

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II. Theoretical Background

A. Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT)

Since its introduction by Lakoff and Johnson (1980), CMT has highlighted the role of metaphor as a cognitive mechanism through which individuals understand and experience one conceptual domain in terms of another. Within this framework, a more concrete and experientially grounded source domain provides the structural and inferential basis for conceptualizing a more abstract target domain. This relationship is typically expressed in the form TARGET DOMAIN IS SOURCE DOMAIN, or more generally as A IS B. A commonly cited example is TIME IS MONEY, in which the abstract notion of time is structured through concepts associated with economic value, such as spending, saving, or wasting. As Carston and Yan (2023) argue, such instances reveal that conceptual metaphors rely on experiential associations that are cognitively natural and culturally reinforced.

In addition to these fundamental operations, contemporary research in cognitive linguistics has broadened the scope of CMT by investigating the intricacies of metaphor networks, the influence of culture, and the interplay between metaphor and other cognitive processes. Studies recently have shown that conceptual metaphors often form multilayered systems, in which primary metaphors rooted in bodily experience combine to generate more abstract or culturally specific metaphorical structures. Moreover, empirical findings from psycholinguistics, cognitive psychology, and neurolinguistics increasingly support the claim that metaphor is embodied, demonstrating that metaphor comprehension activates perceptual and motor areas of the brain (Gibbs, 2008; Ospina et al., 2024). These results bolster the idea that metaphors are not mere superficial embellishments of language but essential elements of the conceptual framework that facilitates our comprehension of abstract notions, including emotion, morality, time, and knowledge.

B. Ontological Metaphors

Ontological metaphors provide a cognitive mechanism through which abstract, intangible, or diffuse experiences are conceptualized as concrete objects, bounded entities, or substances. Through this process, non-physical phenomena, such as emotions, thoughts, time, or social interactions, are treated as if they possess physical form, clearly defined boundaries, and perceptual stability. This enables individuals to refer to, quantify, and reason about otherwise elusive experiences. As Gibbs et al. (2004) point out, such metaphors are grounded in recurring patterns of bodily movement, spatial interaction, and perceptual experience, which fundamentally shape the organization of conceptual systems. Recent research further suggests that ontological metaphors extend beyond purely linguistic conventions and are deeply rooted in embodied cognition. Ospina et al. (2024) argue that these metaphors are supported by embodied simulation, reflecting how individuals mentally recreate physical experiences when conceptualizing abstract ideas. Similarly, findings from developmental and gesture studies by Özçalışkan and Goldin-Meadow (2025) indicate that children's early metaphorical expressions often emerge from gestures that treat abstract concepts as physical entities. This provides strong evidence that ontological metaphors originate from embodied interaction and may develop prior to their full realization in verbal language.

C. Structural Metaphors

Structural metaphors involve the mapping of an entire conceptual framework from one domain onto another. Rather than focusing on isolated features, these metaphors transfer complex relational structures, allowing individuals to understand and reason about abstract concepts through the internal organization of more familiar and concrete domains. Lakoff and Johnson (1980) argue that systematic cross-domain mappings fundamentally shape human thought through structural metaphors. Contemporary studies continue to reinforce this perspective. Gibbs (2004) highlights that structural metaphors reveal the deep interconnection between bodily experience and conceptualization, emphasizing their central role in everyday cognition. Likewise, Alduais et al. (2022) argue that the consistency of metaphorical mappings across different discourse genres demonstrates that such patterns are not incidental linguistic habits but rather entrenched conceptual structures shaped by embodiment, cultural context, and communicative practices. These findings underscore the stability, pervasiveness, and cultural significance of structural metaphors in human thought and language.

III. Methodology

A predominantly qualitative mixed-method approach is used in the present study. The qualitative component involves descriptive analysis, aiming to explore and explain how conceptual metaphors of knowledge are represented in *The Names* by Don DeLillo. Meanwhile, the quantitative figures support the study by identifying the frequency and distribution of different types of conceptual metaphors, thereby providing a clearer overview of their patterns of use within the text. This approach allows for a more comprehensive understanding of metaphorical structures in the novel.

In addition, a documentary research method is employed for data collection. The researcher systematically selects and compiles relevant excerpts from *The Names* that contain metaphorical expressions related to the concept of knowledge. The collected data are then analyzed by identifying the source and target domains involved in each metaphor, as well as interpreting their meanings within the context of the text. The analysis focuses on uncovering how these metaphorical expressions contribute to the construction of knowledge in the novel. The primary data source for this research is *The Names*, which serves as the basis for all analytical procedures.

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IV. Results

A. Ontological Metaphors of Knowledge

In this study, there are five ontological metaphors of knowledge identified. Table 1 provides information about five source domains that clarify knowledge. Overall, it can be observed that the most frequent usage is KNOWLEDGE IS AN OBJECT with 41.18%, and the second position is KNOWLEDGE IS AN ENTITY with 23.53%. KNOWLEDGE IS A CONTAINER keeps the third position with 17.65%. KNOWLEDGE IS A POSSESSION has a percentage of 11.76% of usage in the novel. Finally, the conceptual metaphor KNOWLEDGE IS A SUBSTANCE has a percentage of 5.88%.

Table 1
Frequency of Ontological Metaphors of Knowledge in "*The Names*"

No.	Ontological metaphors of knowledge	Number of metaphorical expressions	%
1	KNOWLEDGE IS AN OBJECT	7	41.18
2	KNOWLEDGE IS AN ENTITY	4	23.53
3	KNOWLEDGE IS A CONTAINER	3	17.65
4	KNOWLEDGE IS A POSSESSION	2	11.76
5	KNOWLEDGE IS A SUBSTANCE	1	5.88
Total		17	100

(a). Knowledge Is an Object

The conceptual metaphor KNOWLEDGE IS AN OBJECT conceptualizes knowledge as a tangible entity that can be obtained, held, transferred, or lost. This metaphor is grounded in everyday physical experiences with objects that can be possessed and manipulated. When mapped onto the abstract domain of KNOWLEDGE, it allows people to understand it as something that individuals can acquire, store, or exchange. Linguistic expressions such as "grasp an idea", "acquire knowledge", or "lose information" reflect this conceptualization.

Table 2
Metaphorical Examples Representing "Knowledge Is an Object"

No.	Metaphorical examples	
	OBJECT	KNOWLEDGE
1	"We thought we *knew this setting.*" (p. 83)	Knowledge is treated as something one can possess or hold mentally.
2	"The secret…It meant something to me…I wasn't in a hurry *to pass it on*." (p. 120)	Knowledge is transferable, like a physical item passed between individuals.
3	"I am interested in *knowing*…" (p. 127)	Knowledge becomes something one can seek or acquire, like a desired object.
4	"My life is going by, and I can't get *a grip on it.*" (p. 146)	Understanding is conceptualized as physically grasping something.
5	"It was *necessary to remember*, to dream of the pristine earth." (p. 148)	Knowledge is treated as something that can be retrieved and mentally handled like a tangible entity.
6	"They mock our need to *structure and classify*,…" (p. 150)	Knowledge is conceptualized as something that can be organized, categorized, and systematized.
7	"He could *read it like a book.*" (p. 165)	Knowledge is structured and accessible like a readable object.

(b). Knowledge Is an Entity

The conceptual metaphor KNOWLEDGE IS AN ENTITY conceptualizes knowledge as something that grows, evolves, or develops over time. This metaphor draws on human experience with living organisms that undergo processes of growth, adaptation, and change. When mapped onto the domain of KNOWLEDGE, it allows people to perceive it as dynamic rather than static. Expressions such as "knowledge grows", "ideas evolve", or "knowledge develops over time" illustrate this conceptualization.

Table 3
Metaphorical Examples Representing "Knowledge Is an Entity"

No.	Metaphorical examples	
	ENTITY	KNOWLEDGE
1	"Everything he reads and learns is made to *serve.*" (p. 142)	Knowledge is controlled and directed like a subordinate agent.
2	"This knowledge has managed to *elude me.*" (p. 146)	Knowledge acts autonomously, capable of movement or avoidance.
3	"It *eludes me*, it *defeats me.*" (p. 146)	Knowledge is an adversary that resists comprehension.
4	"He wanted a design that will make this array… *speak to him*." (p. 147)	Knowledge is given communicative ability, acting like a human speaker.

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(c). Knowledge Is a Container

The conceptual metaphor KNOWLEDGE IS A CONTAINER conceptualizes knowledge as a bounded space that can hold, store, or enclose information. This metaphor is grounded in everyday physical experience with containers such as boxes, rooms, or vessels, which have clear boundaries and can be filled, emptied, or accessed. When mapped onto the abstract domain of KNOWLEDGE, this metaphor allows individuals to understand knowledge as something that exists within definable limits and can be entered, accumulated, or organized within conceptual boundaries.

TABLE 4
METAPHORICAL EXAMPLES REPRESENTING "KNOWLEDGE IS A CONTAINER"

No.	Metaphorical examples	
	CONTAINER	KNOWLEDGE
1	"A knowledge *bounded by emptiness and fear.*" (p. 83)	Knowledge exists within limits or boundaries shaped by emotional constraints.
2	"…although I tried my damnedest to *pry it out* of them, *wheedle it out* by whatever means." (p. 146)	Knowledge is conceptualized as being inside a person and extractable.
3	"The thing that *encompasses* these." (p. 146)	Knowledge functions as a space that includes and organizes elements.

(d). Knowledge Is a Possession

In the conceptual metaphor KNOWLEDGE IS A POSSESSION, knowledge is conceptualized as something that individuals can own or control. This metaphor is closely related to the experience of owning physical property, where possessions signify value, status, and power. When applied to the domain of KNOWLEDGE, this metaphor highlights the social dimension of knowledge as a resource that can distinguish individuals or groups.

TABLE 5
METAPHORICAL EXAMPLES REPRESENTING "KNOWLEDGE IS A POSSESSION"

No.	Metaphorical examples	
	POSSESSION	KNOWLEDGE
1	"We had our *proof.*" (p.103)	Knowledge is something owned collectively, indicating certainty and authority.
2	"The knowledge is *special…you find yourself protective of it*." (p.120)	Knowledge is treated as valuable property requiring protection.

(e). Knowledge Is a Substance

In the conceptual metaphor KNOWLEDGE IS A SUBSTANCE, knowledge is understood as a material entity that can accumulate, flow, or be absorbed. This metaphor draws on human experience with physical substances such as liquids or gases, which can fill spaces, spread across environments, or be contained within boundaries. When applied to the abstract concept of KNOWLEDGE, this metaphor allows people to conceptualize knowledge as something that can gradually increase, circulate among individuals, or permeate social contexts.

TABLE 6
METAPHORICAL EXAMPLES REPRESENTING "KNOWLEDGE IS A SUBSTANCE"

No.	Metaphorical examples	
	SUBSTANCE	KNOWLEDGE
1	"A *frenzy of knowing*, of terrible confirmation." (p. 102)	Knowledge behaves like a substance that can intensify or accumulate.

B. Structural Metaphors of Knowledge

Table 7 provides information about four source domains that clarify knowledge. Overall, it can be observed that the most frequent usage is KNOWLEDGE IS A SYSTEM with 42.85%; the second position is KNOWLEDGE IS A STRUCTURE (23.80%); and the third position is KNOWLEDGE IS A CODE (19.04%). Finally, KNOWLEDGE IS A NETWORK is the least frequent usage, with 14.28%.

TABLE 7
FREQUENCY OF STRUCTURAL METAPHORS OF KNOWLEDGE IN "*THE NAMES*"

No.	Structural metaphors of Knowledge	Number of metaphorical expressions	%
1	KNOWLEDGE IS A SYSTEM	9	42.85
2	KNOWLEDGE IS A STRUCTURE	5	23.81
3	KNOWLEDGE IS A CODE	4	19.05
4	KNOWLEDGE IS A NETWORK	3	14.29
Total		21	100

(a). Knowledge Is a System

The structural metaphor KNOWLEDGE IS A SYSTEM conceptualizes knowledge as an organized network of

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interconnected elements that function together according to internal rules or structures. This metaphor draws on human experience with complex systems such as technological networks, bureaucratic institutions, or computational frameworks, where multiple components interact to produce coordinated outcomes. When mapped onto the abstract domain of KNOWLEDGE, this metaphor frames it not as isolated pieces of information but as part of an integrated structure in which ideas, data, and interpretations are interconnected.

TABLE 8
METAPHORICAL EXAMPLES REPRESENTING "KNOWLEDGE IS A SYSTEM"

No.	Metaphorical examples	
	SYSTEM	KNOWLEDGE
1	"He wants a *design* that will make this array of characters speak to him." (p. 40)	Knowledge is organized like an interconnected system where meaning emerges from structured arrangement of elements.
2	"With his *grids and lists* the decipherer searches out relationships,…" (p. 40)	Knowledge acquisition is framed as analytical processing within a structured system of relationships and categories.
3	"…*broken down* to these wedge-shaped marks." (p. 40)	Knowledge is conceptualized as decomposable into smaller units, like elements within a structured analytical system.
4	"Working outward from some *private screen*,…" (p. 83)	Cognition is framed as a processing system that organizes and projects internal representations outward.
5	"…the perception that the *program must end this way*." (p. 102)	Knowledge is deterministic, functioning like a programmed system with predictable outcomes.
6	"Everything… is made to *serve as a personal philosophy, an explanation*,…" (p. 142)	Knowledge functions as an integrated system that organizes experience into coherent explanatory frameworks.
7	"They mock our need to structure and classify, to build *a system…*" (p. 150)	Human understanding depends on constructing ordered systems to make sense of reality.
8	"They make the *system equal to the terror.*" (p. 150)	Knowledge systems are constructed to match and control complex or chaotic phenomena.
9	"Let the investigators work up *chronologies, trace routes*,…" (p. 161)	Understanding is achieved by mapping sequences and connections like system pathways.

(b). Knowledge Is a Structure

The metaphor KNOWLEDGE IS A STRUCTURE conceptualizes knowledge as a constructed entity composed of interconnected parts arranged in an organized and stable configuration. This metaphor is grounded in human experience with physical structures such as buildings or architectural frameworks, where individual components are arranged systematically to create a coherent whole. When mapped onto the domain of KNOWLEDGE, this metaphor allows knowledge to be understood as something that is built, organized, and supported by underlying frameworks.

TABLE 9
METAPHORICAL EXAMPLES REPRESENTING "KNOWLEDGE IS A STRUCTURE"

No.	Metaphorical examples	
	STRUCTURE	KNOWLEDGE
1	"He wants a design…*parallel structures*." (p. 40)	Knowledge is constructed like an architectural form with internal organization.
2	"Owen and I had spent several hours *building theories,…*" (p. 105)	Theories are constructed objects, assembled piece by piece.
3	"…surrounding the bare act with desperate *speculations*, mainly to comfort ourselves." (p. 105)	Knowledge is layered and expanded through conceptual additions.
4	"The victim and the act are *theory now.*" (p. 142)	Reality is reconstructed into abstract conceptual frameworks.
5	"They form *the philosophical base* he relies on for his sense of self." (p. 142)	Knowledge serves as a foundational structure supporting identity.

(c). Knowledge Is a Code

The conceptual metaphor KNOWLEDGE IS A CODE frames knowledge as a system of symbols, signs, or encoded messages that require interpretation and decoding. This metaphor is grounded in human experience with linguistic systems, cryptography, and digital encoding, where meaning is not immediately transparent but must be accessed through processes of interpretation. When mapped onto the abstract domain of KNOWLEDGE, this metaphor suggests that knowledge is not directly accessible but is instead embedded within layers of representation that must be deciphered.

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TABLE 10
METAPHORICAL EXAMPLES REPRESENTING "KNOWLEDGE IS A CODE"

No.	Metaphorical examples	
	CODE	KNOWLEDGE
1	"The entire *code* is done this way." (p. 11)	Knowledge is encoded information that must be deciphered to be understood.
2	"…how far men will go to satisfy a *pattern*, or find a *pattern*, or fit together the elements of a *pattern*." (p. 39)	Understanding arises from decoding patterned elements into meaningful wholes.
3	"All the noise and babble and spit of three spoken languages had been *subdued and codified*…" (p. 40)	Knowledge is stabilized through symbolic encoding systems like language.
4	"We track *static letters* when we read." (p. 142)	Reading is conceptualized as decoding fixed symbolic units.

(d). Knowledge Is a Network

The metaphor KNOWLEDGE IS A NETWORK conceptualizes knowledge as a web of interconnected nodes through which information flows and relationships are established. This metaphor is grounded in human experience with networks such as communication systems, social connections, and digital infrastructures, where elements are linked together in dynamic and often decentralized ways. When mapped onto the abstract domain of KNOWLEDGE, this metaphor frames it as a distributed system in which meaning emerges from the relationships among multiple pieces of information.

TABLE 11
METAPHORICAL EXAMPLES REPRESENTING "KNOWLEDGE IS A NETWORK"

No.	Metaphorical examples	
	NETWORK	KNOWLEDGE
1	"…some alphabetic *link* between the victim's name and the place where he or she was killed." (p. 83)	Knowledge emerges through connections between discrete elements.
2	"Learn their names…*connect things*." (p. 161)	Understanding is the act of linking information nodes.
3	"Eliades, Rowser, Hardeman, all the tenuous *connections*." (p. 161)	Knowledge is fragile and contingent upon associative links.

In summary, the examples discussed above provide further support for the CMT by Lakoff and Johnson, in which knowledge functions as the target domain and is understood through various source domains. The analysis indicates that a total of nine source domains are employed to conceptualize knowledge in the novel *The Names*. The findings also reveal that these metaphorical representations are realized through a total of nine overarching conceptual metaphors. In terms of distribution, the data consist of 21 instances of structural metaphors and 17 instances of ontological metaphors. This distribution highlights the prominence of structural metaphors in shaping the conceptualization of knowledge, while ontological metaphors also play a significant role in representing knowledge as concrete and bounded entities.

V. DISCUSSION

The analysis of knowledge metaphors in *The Names* demonstrates that knowledge is conceptualized through a network of diverse ontological and structural metaphors, reflecting the complexity and richness of cognitive representation in the text. Among ontological metaphors, KNOWLEDGE IS AN OBJECT is the most prevalent (41.18%), framing knowledge as a tangible entity that can be acquired, held, or transferred. This representation positions knowledge as both a personal asset and a medium for social interaction, aligning with traditional views of it as a stable resource. Complementary metaphors, such as KNOWLEDGE IS A CONTAINER and KNOWLEDGE IS A SUBSTANCE, further illustrate that knowledge can be contained within boundaries while simultaneously circulating and evolving like a material substance. Metaphors including KNOWLEDGE IS AN ENTITY and KNOWLEDGE IS A POSSESSION highlight the dynamic and social dimensions of knowledge. Knowledge is depicted not as static but as capable of growth, mobility, and interaction, emphasizing the complex relationship between humans and knowledge. These conceptualizations suggest that knowledge in the novel functions as a living phenomenon, shaped by and shaping both characters and social context. Regarding structural metaphors, KNOWLEDGE IS A SYSTEM emerges as the most frequent (42.85%), portraying knowledge as an organized network of interconnected elements. KNOWLEDGE IS A STRUCTURE and KNOWLEDGE IS A CODE underscore the organized and symbolic nature of knowledge, while KNOWLEDGE IS A NETWORK emphasizes interconnectivity and decentralization, illustrating that knowledge arises from relational linkages rather than existing in isolation.

The interaction of ontological and structural metaphors constructs a conceptualization of knowledge that is simultaneously stable and flexible, concrete and abstract, resonating with postmodern perspectives in which knowledge is complex, fragmented, and context-dependent. Quantitative analysis and textual evidence indicate that while concrete metaphors dominate, structural metaphors play a crucial role in representing how knowledge is organized, interconnected, and interpreted. These findings not only support Lakoff and Johnson's CMT but also show that *The Names* employs metaphor to convey the multidimensionality of knowledge: as a possessable object, a network of relationships, and a structured system. From a theoretical perspective, the study demonstrates the applicability of conceptual metaphor

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analysis in literary studies, revealing both how characters comprehend knowledge and how authors structure and communicate complex cognitive content. Practically, these insights can enhance education and knowledge communication, as metaphors such as "knowledge is an object" or "knowledge is a network" provide intuitive ways for learners to visualize and engage with knowledge as a dynamic, relational, and culturally embedded phenomenon. Overall, the diversity of metaphors underscores the flexible, interactive, and context-sensitive nature of knowledge, encouraging critical and creative approaches to its study, dissemination, and application in contemporary life and literature.

VI. Conclusion

The findings of this study provide further support for the CMT proposed by Lakoff and Johnson (1980), particularly in relation to KNOWLEDGE as a target domain. The analysis reveals that nine distinct source domains are employed to conceptualize knowledge in *The Names*. These include KNOWLEDGE IS AN OBJECT, KNOWLEDGE IS A CONTAINER, KNOWLEDGE IS A SUBSTANCE, KNOWLEDGE IS AN ENTITY, KNOWLEDGE IS A POSSESSION, KNOWLEDGE IS A SYSTEM, KNOWLEDGE IS A CODE, KNOWLEDGE IS A STRUCTURE, and KNOWLEDGE IS A NETWORK. Together, these metaphorical patterns demonstrate the richness and diversity of ways in which knowledge is constructed and represented in the novel. The study also concludes that metaphor extends far beyond its traditional role as a purely linguistic or stylistic device. Instead, it reflects a fundamental aspect of human cognition, whereby individuals naturally form connections between different conceptual domains. In this sense, metaphor serves as a cognitive mechanism that shapes how ideas are organized and understood. Consequently, literary texts such as novels offer valuable insights into how authors perceive, interpret, and relate their experiences of the world.

Moreover, the use of metaphor enables readers to approach the narrative from multiple perspectives. Through specific linguistic devices, particularly conceptual metaphors, abstract ideas are systematically structured in ways that contribute to the development of narrative elements such as characters, settings, and thematic meanings. These metaphors are not arbitrary; rather, they are grounded in everyday cognitive processes, making them both meaningful and accessible to readers. As a result, language in literary works often shifts from literal to figurative expression depending on how concepts are understood within human cognition. The construction of meaning in *The Names* therefore goes beyond mere rhetorical ornamentation or stylistic effect. Instead, it reflects a deeper process of meaning-making, in which conceptual metaphors play a central role. The application of CMT demonstrates that the meanings embedded in the novel can be systematically uncovered and interpreted. This confirms that metaphor is not only a tool for artistic expression but also a key to understanding how knowledge is conceptualized and communicated in literary discourse.

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Reconstructing Meaning Across Cultures: The Kazakh and English *Kutadgu Bilig* in Comparative Perspective

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***Abstract*—This study offers a comparative examination of the Kazakh and English translations of *Kutadgu Bilig*, an eleventh-century didactic poem composed by the Turkic scholar Yusuf Balasaguni. Grounded in Descriptive Translation Studies and current frameworks of cultural translation, the research approaches both translations as autonomous interpretive texts shaped by the norms and expectations of their respective target cultures, rather than measuring them against the medieval source. The analysis centers on core philosophical and ethical concepts – justice, fortune, intellect, the ultimate purpose of human life, law and custom (törü), modesty as a guardian of personhood (uyat), and active virtue (edgülük) – alongside Qur'anic allusions and culturally specific idiomatic expressions. The results reveal that the English translation tends toward the universalization of philosophical content and the segmentation of unified Turkic-Islamic concepts into clusters of narrower, register-specific terms, situating the work within an ethical framework accessible to a global readership. The Kazakh translation, by contrast, preserves these concepts as unified conceptual nodes and sustains religious depth and culturally embedded meaning, maintaining the text's connection to the Turkic-Islamic intellectual heritage. The study concludes that translation constitutes an act of cultural interpretation rather than mere linguistic transference, fundamentally reshaping the philosophical and ideological dimensions of classical works.**

***Index Terms*—*Kutadgu Bilig*, Robert Dankoff, Askar Yegeubayev, meaning reconstruction, Turkic literary tradition**

I. Introduction

Kutadgu Bilig, composed in the eleventh century by the Turkic poet and thinker Yusuf Balasaguni, represents one of the most significant works in the intellectual heritage of the Turkic world. Weaving together ethical reflection, political thought, and poetic form, the text elaborates a comprehensive vision of justice, wisdom, moderation, and moral responsibility that exerted considerable influence on early Turkic conceptions of governance and societal order. The philosophical density and cultural specificity of the work, however, render its transmission into other languages an inherently complex undertaking, one that inevitably involves choices about how meaning, values, and cultural identity

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are represented across linguistic boundaries.

The translation history of *Kutadgu Bilig* reflects the diversity of contexts in which the text has been received and reinterpreted across different scholarly and cultural traditions. The Kazakh translation by Askar Yegeubayev represents a culturally motivated effort to restore the medieval text to contemporary Kazakh literary consciousness and to affirm its place within the living intellectual tradition of the Turkic-speaking world. Robert Dankoff's English translation, by contrast, prioritizes scholarly accessibility and interpretive transparency for an international academic audience. These divergent translation objectives inevitably produce distinct textual outcomes, yet no systematic comparative study has thus far examined the nature and implications of these differences.

Existing scholarship on *Kutadgu Bilig* has largely concentrated on questions of philology, historical context, and philosophical content, leaving underexplored the ways in which the translation process reshapes the text's conceptual architecture and cultural meanings. The reformulation of philosophical categories, the handling of Qur'anic allusions, and the adaptation of culturally specific expressions across linguistic boundaries have not yet received adequate scholarly attention.

This study addresses the identified gap by examining how culturally embedded meanings in *Kutadgu Bilig* are reconstructed in the Kazakh and English translations from a comparative perspective. Through the analysis of selected textual examples, it explores the interpretation of philosophical concepts, ethical terminology, religious references, metaphorical expressions, and culture-specific lexical units across two linguistic and cultural contexts. Rather than focusing solely on linguistic equivalence, the study investigates how translation functions as a process of cultural interpretation and meaning reconstruction. The findings contribute to comparative literature, intercultural communication, and translation studies by providing deeper insights into the cross-cultural reinterpretation of classical literary heritage.

II. Literature Review

The past several decades have seen a fundamental shift in translation studies, moving away from source-text equivalence toward a broader concern with the cultural and ideological conditions governing translated works. A pivotal contribution to this reorientation was made by Toury (1995), whose work in Descriptive Translation Studies redirected scholarly attention toward translations as norm-governed products of target cultures rather than secondary approximations of an original. This perspective was complemented by Even-Zohar's (1990) polysystem theory, which situates literary translation within a dynamic network of interacting cultural subsystems, where translated texts may assume central or marginal positions contingent upon prevailing historical and cultural circumstances. Within this framework, translation is reconceived not as derivative reproduction but as active literary repositioning within a receiving system.

The cultural turn in translation studies, advanced by Bassnett (2014) and further elaborated by Snell-Hornby (2006), broadened this orientation by drawing attention to the embeddedness of translation within structures of power, ideology, and literary convention. Translation thereby came to be understood as an interpretive practice shaped by cultural and historical forces rather than a purely linguistic procedure. Hermans (1999) reinforced this view, arguing that translated texts function as active participants in the consolidation or transformation of literary norms, exercising agency in the formation of interpretive paradigms within receiving cultures.

Building on these foundations, translation has increasingly been theorized as a form of rewriting. Lefevere (1992) contended that translations are conditioned by patronage systems, dominant poetics, and ideological frameworks, actively participating in processes of canon formation. Venuti (1995, 2012) extended this argument by demonstrating how the opposing strategies of domestication and foreignization encode asymmetrical cultural relations and divergent assumptions about readership. Baker (2006) further enriched this perspective by conceptualizing translation as narrative construction, wherein translators actively configure interpretive frameworks rather than passively conveying pre-existing meaning. These theoretical orientations carry particular weight in the analysis of pre-modern philosophical and religious texts, where lexical decisions may substantially alter theological and epistemological registers.

From a systemic standpoint, recurring translational patterns may be understood through Chesterman's (1997) notion of "translation memes" – culturally embedded and reproducible strategies of meaning transfer that circulate within and across translation traditions. This framing suggests that translation is shaped not only by normative constraints but also by transmissible models of practice that condition how concepts are reformulated across languages. Rather than assessing translations against criteria of correctness or formal equivalence, the present study adopts a functional orientation consistent with House (2015), attending to how meaning operates within the target context and how communicative functions are reconfigured in the process.

Alongside these theoretical developments, scholarship on medieval intellectual history has consistently underscored the centrality of translation as a vehicle of civilizational exchange. Research by Burnett (2009), Gutas (1998), and Hasse (2016) on the Arabic–Latin translation movement establishes that medieval translation functioned as conceptual transformation rather than mere linguistic transfer, enabling cross-cultural transmission and reinterpretation of philosophical traditions. Taylor (2012) similarly highlights translation's formative role in shaping the conceptual vocabulary of medieval Islamic philosophy, where meaning was regularly rearticulated across linguistic and intellectual boundaries. Studies by Hodgson (1974), Nasr (2006), and Rahman (1982) further illuminate the integrative relationship

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between theology, ethics, and political philosophy in classical Muslim thought, revealing the semantic richness embedded within key ethical categories.

Tymoczko (2007) contributes an important dimension to these discussions by foregrounding translation as a site of cultural positioning and identity construction, particularly in contexts marked by historical power asymmetries. Her perspective is especially relevant to the analysis of how translations of classical texts may serve as instruments of intellectual continuity or cultural reaffirmation. Methodologically, the comparative dimension of the present study draws on the approach advocated by Pym (2010), who argues for the value of examining multiple translations to identify systematic divergences in meaning production across cultural systems. For a comprehensive overview of contemporary translation paradigms, see also Munday (2016).

Notwithstanding the extensive body of research on medieval translation movements and contemporary translation theory, the translational recontextualization of classical Turkic didactic literature – and of *Kutadgu Bilig* in particular – has attracted comparatively limited scholarly inquiry. Existing philological studies have tended to privilege manuscript traditions, linguistic features, and historical commentary, while systematic comparative analyses of modern translations remain scarce. The question of how distinct linguistic environments reshape the philosophical and theological architecture of the text has yet to be adequately addressed.

The present study responds to this gap by situating the Kazakh and English translations of *Kutadgu Bilig* within contemporary debates on translation ideology, literary system dynamics, and cultural mediation. Drawing on Descriptive Translation Studies, polysystem theory, and scholarship on medieval intellectual transmission, the research approaches translation as a process of epistemological and cultural repositioning. Rather than treating the target texts as derivative approximations of a stable original, the study conceptualizes them as distinct interpretive constructions embedded within different semiotic and intellectual horizons, through which the philosophical and ethical dimensions of a classical Turkic text are reshaped in accordance with the normative structures and cultural expectations of the receiving culture.

III. Materials and Methods

A. Research Design

Against this broader historical and theoretical background, the present study conducts a focused comparative analysis of two modern translations of *Kutadgu Bilig*. If medieval translation movements reveal that cross-cultural transfer necessarily entails conceptual restructuring, it follows that contemporary translations may similarly be expected to embody distinct epistemological orientations. The Kazakh and English versions of the text offer a particularly productive basis for such inquiry, given that they emerge from markedly different linguistic, literary, and intellectual traditions.

To identify recurring divergences in semantic density, cultural marking, and theological explicitness, the study employs a qualitative comparative methodology grounded in Descriptive Translation Studies. The analytical framework is further shaped by selected principles drawn from polysystem theory and culturally oriented approaches to translation. Rather than measuring the target texts against the medieval source in terms of fidelity, the study treats both versions as culturally embedded interpretive constructions in their own right. This perspective enables a systematic investigation of how core ethical concepts, Qur'anic resonances, and idiomatic expressions are reconstituted within different semiotic and cultural environments.

B. Corpus and Units of Analysis

The corpus consists of selected parallel passages from the Kazakh and English translations of *Kutadgu Bilig*. The passages were selected according to their conceptual, cultural, and philosophical significance rather than their position within the narrative structure.

The units of analysis include:

- core philosophical and ethical concepts, including justice, fortune, intellect, the ultimate purpose of human life, law and custom (*törü*), moral conscience and modesty (*uyat*), and active virtue (*edgülük*);
- Qur'anic allusions and religiously marked expressions;
- culture-specific lexical items and metaphorical expressions.

The analysis focuses on semantically and culturally significant elements that illustrate how meaning is reconstructed across the two translations. Rather than examining formal linguistic equivalence or syntactic correspondences, the study investigates how these philosophical concepts, ethical values, and culturally embedded expressions are interpreted, adapted, and represented within different linguistic and cultural contexts.

Although Yegeubayev's Kazakh translation preserves the poetic form of the original text, Dankoff's English version presents the work in prose. This formal distinction is acknowledged but is not central to the present analysis, which concentrates on the reconstruction of meaning and the cross-cultural representation of the source text rather than on its poetic structure.

C. Analytical Procedures

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The study adopts a qualitative comparative approach integrating lexical-semantic, cultural, and intertextual methods of analysis. Central focus is placed on conceptual shifts within the two translations, including tendencies toward abstraction, specification, and semantic rationalization. Alongside this, the analysis attends to the ways in which culturally embedded meanings are either retained, neutralized, or recontextualized within distinct interpretive frameworks.

The discussion draws on selected textual fragments treated as representative illustrations of broader translational tendencies. Rather than pursuing comprehensive textual coverage, the study aims to uncover recurring patterns of semantic and cultural transformation across the two target versions.

IV. Results and Discussion

A. Conceptual Translation of Philosophical Categories

The first concept examined here is *törü*, rendered by Dankoff (1983) descriptively as *law* within the compound formula "Justice and law are the pillars of heaven: if the law decayed, heaven would not stand up; and if there were no just princes alive, God would destroy the seven-tiered earth" (p. 153), and by Yegeubayev (2007) as *әділ төрелік* in «Көк тірегі – тура, әділ төрелік, Тірек тайса – шайқалғаны төбенің, Болмаса бек тірлікте адал сыйласар, Жеті қабат жерді Алла қиратар» (p. 312) (English gloss by authors: "The pillar of heaven is true, just governance; if this pillar wavers, the celestial dome will tilt. And if there are no honest [rulers] in life who respect one another, Allah will destroy the seven-layered earth"). In English, *Justice* and *law* are presented as two distinct, though cooperating, pillars – a division consistent with the Western philosophical separation of ethical principle from institutional norm. The Kazakh *әділ төрелік*, by contrast, fuses both into a single composite formula in which justice and law are not two supports but one indivisible concept, reflecting the Turkic understanding of *törü* as an attribute inseparable from the ruler's own righteousness rather than an autonomous institution standing apart from him. From the perspective of Descriptive Translation Studies (Toury, 1995), the English translation reflects a norm of conceptual segmentation drawn from Western political thought, whereas the Kazakh rendering preserves the original unity of *әділдік* (justice) and *төрелік* (judgment/adjudication) as a single, indivisible ground of legitimate rule. In Venuti's terms, this is domestication through philosophical categorization: the Turkic concept is reshaped into a binary familiar to the Western reader, while the Kazakh version, in Tymoczko's terms, retains the cultural location of the source by keeping law and justice ontologically fused.

A comparable narrowing occurs in the rendering of *ұят*, translated in English through a cluster of separate terms – *modest, shame, honor, self-respect* – in the passage "The modest man is the choicest of mankind... and with modesty he shuts the door to shame... his face is bright with the water of honor, and his eyes sparkle with the water of self-respect" (Dankoff, 1983, p. 112), corresponding to the Kazakh «*Ұяты бар, көзі де тоқ ер керек... Кісілікті ұят сақтап қалады, Ұяты бар кісі – адамның адамы*» (Yegeubayev, 2007, p. 222) (English gloss by authors: "A man is needed who possesses ұят [shame/modesty] and a contented, undemanding gaze... Ұят safeguards кісілік [personhood, human dignity]; a man who possesses ұят is a true man among men"). Where English distributes the concept across four lexemes belonging to distinct ethical registers – character trait, emotion, social status, and psychological state – Kazakh compresses them into a single terminological core, *ұят*, which functions simultaneously as cause, attribute, and precondition of full personhood (*кісілік*). The pivotal line «*Кісілікті ұят сақтап қалады*» establishes a causal chain – *ұят* safeguards *кісілік*, which in turn constitutes *адам* (the complete human being) – a logical sequence the English version replaces with a descriptive enumeration of modesty's effects rather than reproducing its underlying causal architecture. In Toury's terms, the English translation follows a norm of lexical fragmentation, splitting a unified ethical concept into functionally specialized terms of the target moral vocabulary; in Venuti's terms, this constitutes domestication through categorical segmentation, distributing a single Turkic ethical category across several non-equivalent English concepts.

The third concept, *ізгілік* (the modern Kazakh reflex of the Old Turkic *edgü/edgülük* ('goodness, virtue')) is rendered in English through five separate forms of a single root within one short passage – "wealth is the guide to every good and the cure for every ill... you may well acquire merit and goodness... the good things of the world... every good deed... why do you renounce these goods" (Dankoff, 1983, pp. 169–170) – against the Kazakh «*Мал-дүние жол басы ізгіліктің, Мал-дүние дауасы күллі дерттің... Ізгілік жоқ, қайран жоқ қолдан келер!* » (Yegeubayev, 2007, pp. 347–348) (English gloss by authors: "Wealth is the source of every good deed, wealth is the cure for every ailment... Without ізгілік [goodness/virtue], nothing worthwhile can be accomplished by hand!"). In Kazakh, *ізгілік* remains a single, terminologically consistent concept throughout. It denotes a virtue realized through action and conditioned by material prosperity rather than an abstract ethical value, and is grammatically conceptualized as a resource that can be present or absent (*ізгілік жоқ* 'ізгілік is lacking'). English, lacking a single word capable of covering abstract virtue, concrete good deed, and general benefit at once, must reassign a new form of *good* at each turn, producing an appearance of lexical richness that in fact signals the absence of one stable conceptual equivalent. Following Lefevere, this is a case of rewriting in which a unified ethical category dissolves into a broader, less determinate field of English moral vocabulary; in Even-Zohar's polysystem terms, ізгілік occupies a central, terminologically fixed position within

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the Kazakh system, recurring elsewhere in the text in the same form, while its English counterpart is re-dispersed contextually each time it appears, never consolidating into a stable term.

Taken together, these three examples reveal two different translational orientations. The English version prioritizes accessibility and conceptual universality for an international readership, dissolving single, multivalent Turkic-Islamic philosophical categories into either broader universalizing abstractions or clusters of specialized, register-bound terms. The Kazakh translation, by contrast, preserves these categories as unified conceptual nodes – law fused with justice, shame fused with personhood, virtue fused with material agency – sustaining the multilayered, culturally embedded epistemology of the source text. In this sense, translation functions not simply as linguistic transfer but as an interpretative act shaped by the cultural expectations and ideological frameworks of the receiving environment.

B. Qur'anic Allusions and Theological Semantics in Translation

This passage, spoken by Ögdülmish in praise of the king, contains a further Qur'anic-inflected allusion embedded within a didactic proverb structure. The English translation renders it as: "To whomever God grants His favor as his portion, that one accomplishes his desire and achieves good repute... By God's grace a man grows great, by God's favor he achieves his goal and his affairs prosper" (Dankoff, 1983, p. 98). The Kazakh original reads: «*Алла кімге ризық, ниет қылады, Сол тілекке жетіп, аты шығады... Ұлылығың – бұйрығы бір Алланың*» (Yegeubayev, 2007, p. 193) (English gloss by authors: "To whomever Allah grants rizyq [divinely apportioned sustenance/fortune] and niyet [intention/purpose], that one reaches his wish and his name becomes renowned... Your greatness is the command of the One Allah alone").

The theological core of this passage rests on two Islamic conceptual terms that the English translation renders through generalized vocabulary. The word *ризық* (rizyq, from Arabic *rizq*) is a specifically Islamic theological concept denoting the divinely predetermined portion of sustenance, fortune, and provision allotted to each individual by God – not merely material wealth in a secular sense, but a fixed, providentially assigned share of worldly good that no human effort can increase or diminish beyond what is decreed. Dankoff renders this as *favor* and later as *grace*, terms drawn from a more general Christian-inflected theological vocabulary of divine benevolence. While *favor* captures the sense of unmerited divine gift, it loses the specifically deterministic, apportionment-based logic of *rizyq* – the idea that each person's share is fixed in advance, rather than granted variably according to divine pleasure in the moment. Based on Descriptive Translation Studies (Toury, 1995), this substitution reflects a target-oriented norm that favors theologically neutral, broadly Christian-compatible vocabulary (favor, grace) over the precise Islamic jurisprudential-theological terminology of the source.

The second term, *ниет* (niyet, from Arabic *niyyah*, intention), is likewise theologically loaded in Islamic ethical thought, where the validity and moral worth of any act depend foundationally on the sincerity and rightness of one's *niyyah* – a concept famously central to Islamic legal and spiritual doctrine (as in the hadith "Actions are judged by intentions"). In the Kazakh text, God grants both *rizyq* and *niyet* together, suggesting that not only material fortune but the very capacity for rightly-oriented intention is itself a divine gift. This pairing is entirely absent from the English rendering, where *favor* alone stands in for both concepts, collapsing a theologically precise dyad (providential portion + rightly-guided intention) into a single generalized notion of divine goodwill.

The line «Ұлылығың – бұйрығы бір Алланың» ("your greatness is the command of the one Allah") – addressed to the king – makes the theological hierarchy explicit: royal greatness is not autonomous merit but a direct execution of divine decree. Although Dankoff's English text conveys a structurally similar idea ("By God's grace a man grows great"), the Kazakh formulation's use of *бұйрық* (command, decree) frames greatness as the direct enactment of an authoritative divine order, closer to the vocabulary of *qadar* (predestination) than to *grace*, which implies a gentler, more elective divine favor.

The framing device is also worth noting: both versions present the statement as an inherited proverb ("an experienced graybeard quoted the following Turkish proverb" / «Көпті көрген ақсақалды қария, Айтқан мақал түркілерге жария»), which situates the theological claim within a communal, orally transmitted wisdom tradition rather than as direct authorial assertion. This framing is preserved equivalently across both translations and does not show significant divergence – the difference lies specifically in the lexical rendering of the theological content itself, not in its narrative packaging.

In Venuti's terms, the English translation again performs domestication through cultural neutralization: *favor* and *grace* are lexical choices legible to a broad, denominationally unmarked Western readership, but they abstract away from the specifically Islamic doctrinal architecture of *rizq* and *niyyah* that structures the Kazakh text's theological logic. In Tymoczko's terms, the Kazakh rendering preserves the cultural and doctrinal location of the original – retaining the precise conceptual vocabulary through which Turkic-Islamic thought articulates the relationship between divine decree, human intention, and worldly outcome – while the English version relocates the same idea into a more universally accessible, doctrinally unmarked register of providential benevolence.

The divergence is not one of propositional content (both texts affirm that greatness and success come from God) but of *theological precision*: the Kazakh text names the specific mechanisms (apportioned rizyq, rightly-oriented niyet, binding divine command) through which this dependency operates, while the English text expresses the same dependency through softer, less doctrinally anchored vocabulary of favor and grace.

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The following fragment of royal counsel in *Kutadgu Bilig* concerning the conduct of warfare and the treatment of fellow believers. The English translation renders it as: “Do not march against another Muslim, O king. His adversary is God alone. Muslims are brothers to one another: do not quarrel with your brother, keep on good terms with him always” (Dankoff, 1983, p. 218). The Kazakh original states: «*Мұсылманға қол тигізбе, жақындап, Хақтың өзі қорғайды оны, мақұлдап. Мұсылманға – мұсылман, біл, туысқан, Туысқанмен жұлыспай, жөн, ұғысқан*» (Yegeubayev, 2007, p. 445) (English gloss by authors: “Do not lay a hand upon a Muslim, drawing near [to attack]; al-Ḥaqq [God, the Truth] Himself protects and sanctions him. Know that to a Muslim, a Muslim is a kinsman; it is right to be in mutual understanding with one's kinsman, without tearing at [quarreling with] him”).

The theological framing of divine protection differs meaningfully between the two versions. The English “His adversary is God alone” casts God as the opposing party confronting anyone who would harm a Muslim – a relatively abstract, juridical formulation emphasizing the threat awaiting the aggressor. The Kazakh «*Хақтың өзі қорғайды оны, мақұлдап*» instead employs «*Хақ*» (al-Ḥaqq, “the Truth” – one of the ninety-nine names of Allah, carrying strong theological connotations of absolute justice and truth) and frames the relationship as one of active divine protection and sanction *(«қорғайды»* – protects; *«мақұлдап»* – approving, sanctioning), rather than adversarial opposition. This shifts the theological emphasis from God-as-opponent-to-the-wrongdoer toward God-as-guardian-of-the-protected – a distribution of agency that foregrounds the sanctioned inviolability of the Muslim under threat rather than the punishment awaiting his attacker.

The core fraternal formula is rendered through «*Мұсылманға – мұсылман, біл, туысқан*» (“know that to a Muslim, a Muslim is *туысқан*”). The Kazakh translator's choice of *туысқан* (kinsman, blood relative) rather than a term meaning *brother* in a purely fraternal-religious sense intensifies the familial closeness implied by the English *brothers* into an idiom of literal kinship. This lexical choice draws on the broader Turkic cultural framework in which «*туыс*»/«*туысқан*» relations carry specific obligations of mutual defense, loyalty, and non-aggression – obligations that extend beyond voluntary religious solidarity into something closer to structural, blood-bond duty.

The concluding line reinforces this idiomatic embedding: «*Туысқанмен жұлыспай, жөн, ұғысқан*» (“it is right to be in mutual understanding with one's kinsman, without tearing at him”). The verb *жұлысу* (to tear at one another, to grapple or scuffle) is a vivid, physically concrete idiom for conflict, considerably more visceral than the English *do not quarrel*, which remains in a more abstract register of verbal or relational disagreement. *Ұғысқан* (mutual understanding, being in accord) similarly frames the desired outcome not merely as an absence of conflict (*keep on good terms*, as in the English) but as an achieved state of shared comprehension between kin.

Based on Descriptive Translation Studies (Toury, 1995), the English translation reflects a norm favoring accessible, doctrinally unmarked phrasing: *brothers, quarrel, and adversary* are terms readily intelligible within a general Western ethical-religious vocabulary, requiring no specific familiarity with Islamic theological or Turkic kinship idiom. The Kazakh rendering, by contrast, activates a denser network of culturally and theologically specific resources – the divine name *Хақ*, the kinship term *туысқан*, and the physically vivid idiom *жұлыспай* – each of which draws the passage more firmly into an Islamic-Turkic ethical and social framework rather than a universalized moral statement.

In Venuti's terms, the English strategy performs domestication through cultural neutralization, presenting the injunction against inter-Muslim violence as a generalizable ethical principle accessible to readers outside the Islamic tradition. In Tymoczko's terms, the Kazakh version preserves the cultural location of the original by rendering fraternal solidarity through the vocabulary of actual kinship obligation and by retaining a theologically specific divine epithet rather than a generic reference to God.

The divergence, then, lies not in propositional content – both texts affirm that Muslims must not harm one another and that God protects the wronged party – but in the degree to which the underlying Islamic-Turkic conceptual architecture (divine names, kinship-based social obligation, physically embodied idioms of conflict and concord) remains visible to the reader. The English reader receives a universal ethical injunction against internal strife; the Kazakh reader receives the same injunction embedded within a specifically Turkic-Islamic vocabulary of kinship, divine sanction, and bodily-idiomatic conflict.

C. Idiomatic Translation and the Transformation of Cultural Meaning

The idiom of *bread and salt* as a marker of hospitality and loyalty appears within the advice on cultivating friendship in *Kutadgu Bilig*. The English translation reads: “If you would have many who love you, be open-handed with bread and salt and cheerful in manner” (Dankoff, 1983, p. 177). The expression *bread and salt* is retained as a literal calque of the source image. Although the phrase is lexically transparent – the association between food-sharing and generosity is readily understandable – it is not an established idiom in contemporary English. Consequently, the causal implication that hospitality fosters loyal friendship is conveyed primarily through the surrounding conditional clause, *if you would have many who love you,* rather than through the expression itself. In other words, the ethical force of the image derives largely from its syntactic context rather than from the phrase alone.

The Kazakh rendering embeds the same image within a more comprehensive representation of the reciprocal obligations of friendship: «*Ақжүректі туыс, жолдас, бауыр тұт, Сен соларға – болмас қайғы, ауырлық. Дос, туыс сол қуанышта қуанар, Қайғы келсе, қасыңда боп уатар. Сүйсін десең, көп достарың өзіңді, Тұз-нан ұсын, жарқын ұста жүзіңді*» (Yegeubayev, 2007, pp. 363–364) (English gloss by authors: “Hold the pure-hearted one as kinsman, companion, brother; with such people there will be no grief or hardship for you. A friend, a kinsman, rejoices

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in your joy; if grief comes, he will remain beside you to offer comfort. If you wish your many friends to love you, offer tuz-nan [salt-bread, i.e., hospitality] and keep your face bright"). Here, *тұз-нан ұсын* (offer salt-bread) functions as a direct imperative embedded within a sequence of reciprocal duties – shared joy, shared sorrow, and mutual consolation. As a result, offering bread and salt functions less as advice on how to gain affection than as the expected concluding element of an already familiar catalogue of obligations that define friendship. This interpretation is consistent with the broader conventional use of the expression in Kazakh as a fixed collocation denoting hospitality. A Kazakh reader is therefore likely to recognize *«нан-тұз»/«тұз-нан»* immediately as a conventional shorthand for the hospitality–loyalty relationship, whereas *bread and salt* cannot be assumed to carry the same idiomatic resonance for an English-speaking audience.

One point of uncertainty should nevertheless be acknowledged. In this passage, the expression appears as *тұз-нан* rather than the more frequently cited form *нан-тұз*. Whether this reflects a meaningful lexical variant, a metrical requirement of the poetic line, or simply permissible variation in word order cannot be established with confidence on the basis of a single example. Verification against a Kazakh phraseological dictionary or a representative corpus would be required before any broader conclusions could be drawn. Accordingly, this issue is set aside and is not treated as evidence for the flexibility of the idiom.

The more defensible contrast lies elsewhere. In Dankoff's translation, the bread-and-salt image remains intelligible but depends on its surrounding conditional construction to explain why hospitality serves as the foundation of loyal friendship. In Yegeubayev's rendering, by contrast, the same image appears as one imperative among several within a sequence of obligations that readers are expected to recognize as constitutive of enduring friendship, and therefore requires no comparable interpretive support. This observation is broadly consistent with Toury's view that translators working under different target-system norms make different decisions regarding the degree of interpretive scaffolding required for figurative language. At the same time, the observed difference may reflect genre as much as translation norms, since the Kazakh passage is embedded within a more extensive descriptive sequence. Consequently, the comparison does not warrant broader claims about the relative idiomatic vitality of *bread and salt* and *нан-тұз* in English and Kazakh, but rather demonstrates how different translational contexts influence the degree to which a culturally marked image requires explicit interpretive framing.

The following passage, exhorting the ruler to righteous conduct in *Kutadgu Bilig*, addresses him through a bodily-political image: "Commit no wrong, you whose hand is long, but only good in word and deed; for the sovereignty you now enjoy can turn its back on you, but virtue never turns its back" (Dankoff, 1983, p. 205). In the English translation, "*you whose hand is long"* is syntactically embedded as a relative clause modifying the addressee. Its primary function is identificatory: the image contributes a descriptive attribute within a broader prohibition but does not acquire independent rhetorical prominence within the sentence.

Yegeubayev renders the same address as: «*Ай, қолы ұзын, жамандыққа бармағын*» (Yegeubayev, 2007, p. 420) (English gloss by authors: "O you of the long hand [i.e. far-reaching power], do not turn to wrongdoing"). The structural difference extends beyond stylistic preference. Although *қолы ұзын* is formally a possessive construction (literally, *his hand is long*), Kazakh permits third-person possessive forms to function as vocative epithets without additional morphological marking, a pattern attested in both didactic and epic discourse (cf. comparable epithet constructions in oral formulaic verse). Equally significant is the particle *Ай*, which separates the epithet from the subsequent prohibition *жамандыққа бармағын*, creating a distinct syntactic pause. No comparable separation is present in the English translation, where the descriptive phrase remains fully integrated into the main clause.

The difference is more convincingly explained by the idiomatic status of the expression in the respective linguistic traditions than by individual translator preference. In Kazakh, *қолы ұзын* belongs to a conventional repertoire of political and ethical phraseology denoting the reach of authority or influence beyond one's immediate presence. Because the expression is already culturally recognizable, it can function independently as a vocative epithet, invoking the ruler through a familiar symbolic attribute without requiring additional explanation. By comparison, *long hand* has no corresponding idiomatic status in English. It remains semantically transparent, yet functions as a non-conventional figurative expression whose intended meaning must be inferred from the surrounding context rather than retrieved as an established phraseological unit.

This contrast should not, however, be interpreted as evidence of a fundamental distinction between a supposedly "descriptive" English mode of address and an inherently "performative" Kazakh one. English is fully capable of comparable vocative constructions, particularly in archaic or elevated literary registers (e.g., *"O thou of..."*). Their absence in Dankoff's translation therefore reflects a translational decision rather than a structural limitation of the language itself. The comparison instead indicates that Yegeubayev's rendering preserves a greater degree of immediacy in addressing the ruler, whether through deliberate stylistic choice or through the availability of an established Kazakh idiom, whereas Dankoff's version privileges syntactic integration and semantic explicitness. From this perspective, the passage illustrates a distinction central to Toury's and Venuti's discussions of translation norms: fidelity to the lexical content of a metaphor does not necessarily entail fidelity to its pragmatic or rhetorical function, and the two dimensions may diverge even in translations that remain otherwise highly accurate.

The passage contrasting contentment and greed through ocular imagery provides another instructive example. The English translation reads: "Hear the words of a full-eyed man – 'Fullness of eye is the head of wealth': Even if a greedy-

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eyed man gained the entire world, he still could not be called rich" (Dankoff, 1983, p. 215). The expressions *full-eyed* and *greedy-eyed* preserve the source metaphor through a largely literal calque, presenting the eye as the locus of desire– or, conversely, of freedom from desire. Neither expression, however, constitutes an established idiom in English. As a result, the translation relies on the accompanying aphorism, "*Fullness of eye is the head of wealth",* to explicate the metaphor rather than allowing the figurative expressions to convey their evaluative meaning independently.

Yegeubayev's (2007) rendering reads: «*Тыңда, көзі тоқ кісі не деді екен, Көз тоқтығы – байлық көзі, береке: Қолға алса да, сұқ көз түгел жаһанды, Бай деме оны!* » (p. 439) (English gloss by authors: "Hear what the man of the 'full eye' [content, undesiring] said: the fullness of the eye is the source of wealth and abundance– even if the 'piercing/covetous eye' [greedy, envious] were to seize the entire world, do not call him rich"). The expressions *көзі тоқ* (content or satisfied eye) and *сұқ көз* (covetous or envious eye) function as recognizable phraseological units in Kazakh. Their precise frequency or degree of conventionality would require confirmation through phraseological reference works or corpus evidence; nevertheless, they are sufficiently familiar that a Kazakh reader is unlikely to require the subsequent aphorism in order to recognize the evaluative contrast. Although the explanatory statement is likewise retained in the Kazakh version, its function differs from that of the English translation. Rather than establishing the meaning of the metaphor, it reinforces an opposition that is already encoded in the idiomatic expressions themselves.

Venuti's distinction between foreignizing and domesticating translation strategies offers a useful point of reference, although the present example resists a straightforward binary interpretation. Dankoff preserves the source imagery through literal calques, even though English lacks corresponding conventional idioms capable of carrying the same evaluative associations. Yegeubayev, by contrast, draws upon phraseological resources that are already available within the target language and therefore activates meanings familiar to the intended readership. At the same time, the English rendering should not be interpreted simply as a failure to domesticate. English possesses its own idiomatic expressions for contentment and greed that could have conveyed comparable evaluative meanings without reproducing the original metaphor so closely. The decision to retain *full-eyed* and *greedy-eyed*, supplemented by an explanatory aphorism, therefore appears to reflect a deliberate attempt to preserve both the figurative imagery and the aphoristic character of the source text rather than a lack of suitable expressive resources in English.

The comparison therefore points to a more limited conclusion. In this passage, the Kazakh idioms communicate their evaluative meanings independently, whereas the English rendering relies on the accompanying aphorism to guide interpretation. Whether this difference reflects broader contrasts between the idiomatic repertoires of English and Kazakh or merely the translator's strategy in this particular instance cannot be determined on the basis of a single example.

The scene depicting a dying man's final words to his brother in *Kutadgu Bilig* provides a particularly revealing example of how the approach of death is conceptualized through idiomatic expression. In the English translation, the speaker declares: "my path lies straight before me, death's vanguard has seized me and soon I shall depart" (Dankoff, 1983, p. 234). The expression *death's vanguard* sustains an extended military metaphor in which death advances like an army whose leading ranks have already overtaken the speaker. Although the image is rhetorically coherent, it does not function as a conventional English idiom. Its interpretation therefore depends on reconstructing the underlying military analogy rather than recognizing an established phraseological unit. Notably, English possesses several conventional idioms referring to imminent death, such as *at death's door* or *one foot in the grave,* yet Dankoff deliberately avoids substituting the source image with any of these established expressions. From the perspective of Toury's Descriptive Translation Studies, this choice appears to reflect a translational norm favouring the preservation of the source text's figurative organization over replacement with a target-language idiom of equivalent communicative function.

Yegeubayev adopts a markedly different solution by combining two independent idiomatic expressions within a single utterance: *«Бауырым, – деді, – жолым, дәмім таусылды, Өлім бүріп, құшағына қаусырды! »* (Yegeubayev, 2007, p. 476) (English gloss by authors: "'Brother,' he said, 'my path, my däm [allotted life-span, divinely appointed portion] has run out; death has swooped down and gathered me into its embrace.'"). The expression *дәмім таусылды* (my däm has run out) derives from the Turkic-Islamic concept of *däm*, referring to the divinely allotted measure of a person's life and sustenance, and functions as a conventional euphemism for death. Rather than portraying death as an external force approaching the individual, the expression conceptualizes dying as the natural exhaustion of a predetermined life allotment. The accompanying phrase, *Өлім бүріп, құшағына қаусырды* (death swooped down and gathered [me] into its embrace), combines a predatory verb associated with the attack of a bird of prey or a forceful grasping movement with the unexpectedly gentle image of an embrace. The resulting personification presents death simultaneously as both aggressor and protector, producing a level of emotional complexity absent from the martial imagery employed in the English translation.

At the same time, the analysis should avoid stronger claims than the available evidence can support. Whether *дәм* and the predator–embrace construction occupy a particularly central position within the Kazakh phraseological repertoire cannot be established without systematic evidence from phraseological dictionaries or corpus data. A more defensible observation, viewed through Even-Zohar's concept of repertoire, is that the translator draws upon two distinct idiomatic resources originating in different conceptual domains: one rooted in theological understandings of fate and allotted lifespan, the other in personified imagery of predation and embrace. Their combination within a single utterance represents a translation strategy qualitatively different from replacing the source metaphor with a single conventional

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target-language equivalent.

Venuti's distinction between foreignization and domestication is likewise applicable only with appropriate qualification. Dankoff's translation is not foreignizing because it introduces culturally unfamiliar imagery; military metaphors for death are well established within English literary tradition. Rather, its foreignizing tendency lies in preserving the internal figurative logic of the source text instead of replacing it with a more conventional English idiom. Yegeubayev's rendering, conversely, should not be regarded as a straightforward example of domestication. Rather than reducing the source image to a single familiar expression, it expands the emotional and cultural resonance of the passage by integrating two complementary idioms whose semantic associations reinforce one another. In this respect, domestication operates not through simplification but through enrichment of the expressive repertoire available to the target reader.

Ultimately, both translations communicate the same propositional meaning: the speaker recognizes that death is imminent. Their divergence lies instead in the degree of cultural and emotional meaning condensed into that recognition. The English version develops a single extended metaphor whose significance must be inferred by the reader, whereas the Kazakh rendering compresses two culturally established idioms into a single farewell, allowing each to contribute its own semantic and affective associations to the representation of death.

V. Conclusion

This study examined how culturally embedded meanings are reconstructed in the Kazakh and English translations of *Kutadgu Bilig*, approaching both versions as culturally situated interpretive texts rather than as direct linguistic reproductions of the medieval original. Instead of assessing translational fidelity, the analysis focused on the ways philosophical concepts, ethical values, and culture-specific expressions are reinterpreted within different linguistic and cultural environments.

The findings reveal distinct translational orientations in the two versions. Yegeubayev's Kazakh translation preserves the ethical depth, poetic character, and Turkic-Islamic conceptual framework of the original, functioning as a form of cultural continuity that reconnects the medieval text with contemporary Kazakh literary tradition. In contrast, Dankoff's English translation prioritizes conceptual clarity and intercultural accessibility, frequently reformulating culturally specific concepts into more universal philosophical categories. While this strategy broadens international accessibility, it also reshapes certain theological, historical, and cultural dimensions of the source text.

These findings support the central assumptions of Descriptive Translation Studies by demonstrating that translation is shaped not only by linguistic equivalence but also by cultural norms, interpretive traditions, and the expectations of target audiences. The comparison further illustrates that different translations do not simply represent varying degrees of accuracy; rather, they construct distinct interpretive perspectives on the same literary work.

The study also contributes to comparative literature and intercultural communication by demonstrating how the comparative analysis of parallel translations can reveal recurring patterns of semantic reconstruction, conceptual adaptation, and cultural repositioning. In this respect, *Kutadgu Bilig* serves as a valuable case for understanding how classical literary heritage is continually reinterpreted across languages and cultures while preserving its enduring philosophical significance.

Although the analysis is limited to the Kazakh and English translations, the proposed analytical framework may be applied to other multilingual versions of *Kutadgu Bilig* and to comparable works of classical world literature. Future research may incorporate additional translations and investigate readers' reception of culturally reconstructed meanings in different educational and cultural contexts.

Overall, the study confirms that translation is not merely a means of transferring meaning but a dynamic process through which cultural memory, philosophical thought, and literary heritage are continuously reconstructed across historical periods, languages, and civilizations.

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The Impact of Teaching Soft Skills Awareness and Practice for Saudi EFL Students: Bridging the Classroom and Workplace

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***Abstract*—Soft skills are distinctive traits that reflect individual differences among people when they are equal in qualifications but vary in personal abilities. Accordingly, organizations and employers set their terms of employment to include different soft skill parameters. The current study aims to investigate the impact of teaching soft skills to Saudi EFL students. The focus is on two variables: students' awareness of soft skills and instructional practices of soft skills implemented in the classroom. The study was conducted in the English Language Department at Jouf University in Saudi Arabia. To collect the data, 106 male and female students participated by completing a questionnaire to assess awareness and practice of soft skills and their correlation with the workplace. The results revealed a significant level of student awareness of soft skills, although the female students were more conscious of the concept than the male students. The findings also revealed that the most common instructional practices of soft skills implemented in the classes related to communication, leadership, teamwork, critical thinking, and flexibility. In contrast, issues of time management, creativity, problem-solving, and values orientation generated less interaction and engagement through instructional practices, despite these skills being significant for students' readiness for professional life.**

***Index Terms*—soft skills, EFL students, workplace, employers, teaching practice**

I. Introduction

Global changes have caused a remarkable shift, resulting in social transformation, economic growth, and a workforce seeking skilled and qualified labor. An academic qualification is significant, but it is not adequate for ongoing professional development (Aziz et al., 2024) and is no longer sufficient for job market requirements (Islam et al., 2024). Employers seek candidates who can acquire or demonstrate soft skills, such as problem-solving, decision-making, encouraging and motivating others, communication, and collaboration (El Messaoudi, 2021; Gembaruk, 2024), and who are proficient at meeting workplace demands (Ngo, 2024). Therefore, hard skills alone are insufficient for the workforce, so attention should be directed to soft skills (Kumari & Vitharana, 2024), as they are crucial for one's success, and closely intertwined with emotional intelligence, life skills, and social interaction (Caga-anan & Valle, 2024).

In recent years, soft skills have become a component of contemporary instruction used interchangeably with other terms such as "skills for employability" and people skills (Kostikova et al., 2021). It represents "a dynamic combination of cognitive and meta-cognitive skills, interpersonal, intellectual, and practical skills" (Haselberger et al., 2012; as cited in El Messaoudi, 2021, p. 119). It is also defined as "the abilities, skills, and traits that pertain to personality, attitude, and behavior rather than to formal or technical knowledge" (Shakya & Dube, 2023, p. 130).

Strengthening such skills improves opportunities and supports career advancement through holistic personal growth, thereby increasing job readiness. Teaching soft skills can bridge the gap between academic preparation and job market demands for key proficiencies in communication, teamwork, problem-solving, and adaptability, resulting in confident and qualified students who can meet job expectations (Aprilita & Pritasari, 2024). Indeed, one of the primary responsibilities of educational institutions is to produce skilled employees for the workforce (Islam & Das, 2023) who possess not only professional knowledge but also the soft skills that enable them to complete tasks creatively, make decisions independently, and be effective team members. Furthermore, it is a vital practical activity that should emerge early in an educational context to prepare students for the future, highlighting the need to integrate employability skills in the curriculum, syllabus, training, and teaching. When hard and cognitive skills are taught with greater emphasis than soft skills (Islam et al., 2024), insufficient attention is paid to crucial qualities, affecting students' readiness for employment (Saranya & Guduru, 2022). In this scenario, an employee lacks the necessary communication and teamwork skills, which may make it challenging to be a productive team member, given the importance of personal qualities for success (Kostikova et al., 2021). A skill gap can then be observed, as a basic mismatch between universities' outputs and market requirements (El Messaoudi, 2021).

Keeping pace with global shifts and in harmony with Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030, Jouf University has endeavored to equip its students for the labor market. In particular, providing Saudi students of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) with future employment skills is necessary as they face "increasingly more competitive job application requirements" (Kivunja, 2015; as cited in Alghamdi, 2022, p. 39). Learning English is an effective approach to improve soft skills that directly relate to global market competition (Ellah & Azmi, 2024). Therefore, this study investigates the extent to which

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EFL students are aware of soft skills and how they are implemented into the pedagogical process.

In recent years, integrating soft skills into classrooms has gained increasing attention, particularly in teaching English language learners, where students must acquire essential competencies for diverse professional situations. Due to the significant impact of such skills, achieving high academic qualifications alone is insufficient for a successful career. There has been some concern about the distinct challenges encountered by Saudi employees when applying English in professional contexts (Al-Tamimi, 2025), due to the multiple challenges faced by educational institutions to equip English graduates with the necessary market skills (Alharbi, 2022). The misalignment between graduates' qualifications and the evolving demands of the workforce has been attributed to students' lack of awareness of the significance of soft skills for career development (Saranya & Guduru, 2022). Employers and organizations need qualified candidates who practice effective communication, teamwork, problem-solving, and demonstrate other personal skills. Accordingly, assessing EFL university students' understanding of the concept of soft skills, as well as their perception of the relevant instructional practices, is a fundamental area of study. The findings of this research may offer valuable insights to enhance and reinforce Saudi universities' initiatives in this regard.

The study poses three main questions:

1. To what extent do Saudi students in the English Language Department demonstrate awareness of the concept of soft skills?
2. What classroom instructional practices do Saudi students in the English Language Department perceive as being influential for the workforce?
3. Are there statistically significant gendered differences in soft skills awareness among English Language Department students?

This study aims to investigate the following objectives:

1. Assess Saudi EFL students' awareness of the concept of soft skills.
2. Explore Saudi EFL students' readiness for employment through identifying the soft skills implemented in classroom instructional practices.
3. Determine whether the difference in awareness among students is related to gender.

The study's significance lies in its empirical contribution, which is based on investigating EFL students' awareness of soft skills and classroom instructional practices in comparison with the skills demanded by the workforce. The findings provide grounded evidence of how soft skills are implemented in the English Language major at Saudi universities and are perceived by students. Based on the researcher's knowledge, few studies have examined this topic in the Saudi context. This is believed to be the first study to investigate three dimensions simultaneously: students' awareness of soft skills, instructional practices of soft skills, and the influence of gender. Moreover, the findings offer a conceptual framework for decision-makers to guide instructional practices and review curricula to focus on employability skills.

II. Literature Review

A. The Concept of Soft Skills

Soft skills were introduced as a significant concept within educational and professional contexts in 1972 and gained prominence in the 1990s (Khoudri, 2024). When Daniel Goleman coined the term "emotional intelligence" in 2006, he highlighted the significance of this attribute, rather than IQ, as a critical factor in improving professional settings (Nazari et al., 2015). Indeed, professional success is influenced by "soft skills," defined as "personal qualities that enable you to communicate well with other people" (Hussein, 2024). The shift toward soft skills has been attributed to the insufficiency of hard skills, which encompass technical elements (e.g., typing speed, machine operation, computer programming) or teachable abilities (e.g., proficiency in learning a foreign language or a relevant degree) (Boonmoh & Chanchay, 2024). Conversely, soft skills are "non-technical involving interpersonal and intrapersonal skills to expedite controlled performance in certain social contexts" (Hurrell et al., 2013; as cited in Saranya & Guduru, 2022, p. 35). Although no precise definition exists for soft skills, they are always linked with individual characteristics and traits. Identified as "life skills," "core skills," "key skills," or "employability skills" (Cornalli, 2018), they encompass analytical and critical thinking, oral communication, problem-solving, collaborative teamwork, work ethics, and leadership abilities (El Messaoudi, 2021). Thus, the definition has been expanded to describe the nature of interaction, incorporating basic skills to non-academic skills (Saleh, 2020). As transferable and valuable attributes, they enable people to interact effectively with others (Guerch & Bouklah, 2024; see also Doghonadze & Zoranyan, 2021). In this study, soft skills are conceptualized as a combination of personal traits and capabilities that surpass academic skills to empower an individual's achievement in the professional domain, and are considered a value-add to an organization's reputation.

B. Teaching Soft Skills

In the educational context, integrating soft skills into the EFL classroom has become a significant concern. Following a recent paradigm shift (Kasim et al., 2022), the teaching focus has moved away from the transmission of cognitive abilities to a complete integration of soft skills, because both educators and employers have recognized the importance of soft skills for students' academic and professional achievement (Mabić et al., 2024). Teaching soft skills prepares students to engage with multifaceted contexts (Karimova, 2025), giving them chances to practice their acquired skills in real scenarios, raising awareness of academic achievement, and workplace demands (Islam & Das, 2023). Engaging students

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through cooperative activities, workshops, and real-world problem-solving situations helps them to create interpersonal qualities (Hussein, 2024).

Numerous studies globally have discussed teaching soft skills in EFL classes with a focus on new teaching methods (Hanafi & Ouahidi, 2024) and alignment with employability demands. Two approaches to teaching soft skills can be identified in educational institutions: first, designing courses to develop soft skills, and second, incorporating soft skills into the traditional curriculum (Ellah & Azmi, 2024). In their study, Boonmoh and Chanchay (2024) investigated how Thai ELT teachers incorporated soft skills into their instruction in the EFL classroom. The finding showed that soft skills were embedded within literacy and life skills, which are relevant to employability skills such as communication, teamwork, and technology literacy. Contrarily, some skills were less emphasized, such as leadership.

Additionally, incorporating English language activities such as role-play and group discussion into many interactive topics in training programs is effective in improving students' personality traits, including their universal values, critical thinking, communication abilities, and workplace etiquette. Saranya and Guduru (2022) revealed that Indian engineering students who enrolled in a soft skills training program in an ESL context gained confidence, improved critical thinking, and experience in adaptability, which shaped students' abilities in personal and professional contexts. Implementing activities improves language and soft skills, as Doghonadze and Zoranyan (2021) identified in a study of English classrooms at Georgian Technical University. They investigated the effect of teaching soft skills through presentations, discussion, debates, role-play, diaries, and portfolios to enhance a wide range of skills (problem-solving, communication, leadership, teamwork, decision-making, computer, critical, creative thinking, presentation, and reflection). The findings revealed that integrating soft skills into the curriculum and practicing activities were a vital point of study and integral to employability. Similarly, Kostikova et al. (2021) found that teaching English through game-based activities enhanced the soft skills of Ukrainian university students.

Embedding soft skills within the curriculum is critical, as Siddique et al. (2022) mentioned: "the course must include training on much-needed soft skills." Given the importance of this issue, Islam and Das (2023) explored the perceptions of Bangladesh English teachers and graduates regarding embedding soft skills within the English literature curriculum and their relevance to employability. Although soft skills were implicitly embedded in the curriculum, they were not articulated in a form that enables transferability, with skills instruction highlighted as one of several issues. One of the responsibilities of enhancing students' soft skills lies with teachers' practical instruction, as Hanafi and Ouahidi (2024) highlighted. They investigated the perception of Moroccan high school teachers and students concerning soft skills tuition in the English language curriculum. The findings revealed that although teachers positively perceived the significance of soft skills for students' future, their application within the classroom was disparate. The students appreciated the relevance of soft skills to academic and professional growth, but lacked familiarity with soft skills in the classroom due to the quasi-absence of related activities. Similarly, Boudemagh (2024) recommended that teachers should raise students' awareness of soft skills. As part of their training, university students should acquire employability traits such as leadership, communication, teamwork, and a constructive attitude (El Messaoudi et al., 2023), skills of particular significance for English graduates whose employability depends on cognitive and non-cognitive skills (Islam & Das, 2023).

Saleh (2020) also investigated the incorporation of soft skills into educational programs for EFL teachers at Libyan universities, revealing a lack of concern for soft skills in the English Language Department curriculum. The participants received little or no training in essential soft skills like communication, problem-solving, critical thinking, teamwork, and leadership. Embedding soft skills into EFL training programs is a fundamental factor for teachers to improve their professional effectiveness. This point is asserted by Jones and Thirunagari (2019), who emphasized the significance of integrating soft skills into English language program training for both Indian teachers and students to improve the quality of instruction and learning outcomes.

C. Awareness and the Workforce

Raising students' awareness of soft skills is essential for universities whose mission is to serve the community by delivering qualified graduates for a dynamic work environment. Thus, one of the imperative issues in higher education is preparing graduates for the escalating and competitive demands of the contemporary workforce. While hard skills are significant for technical proficiency, soft skills are essential for emotional intelligence, enabling students to perform successfully in life and the workplace. Recent graduates transitioning from university to employment require some skill adjustments, including acclimating to the organization, work capacity, and relationship-building, which they likely did not experience while studying (Nugroho et al., 2024). Interpersonal abilities and effective communication are required to fill the gap between academic knowledge and companies' needs (Kaburise, 2016; as cited in Aziz et al., 2024). Equipping the students with essential skills is one of the university's roles, requiring them to adopt advanced pedagogical methods to improve soft skills alongside conventional academic skills (Hussein, 2024). Teaching soft skills is necessary for students' development (Saleem et al., 2024) and to support their personal growth, career success, and positive social interaction (Boonmoh & Chanchay, 2024). This is an awareness of effective instructional practices to meet the twenty-first-century demands for employability and education. Thus, university instructors are required "to change the way they teach to encourage more rigorous group work, better project planning, more effective feedback and the use of well-framed questions to drive authentic enquiries into real-world problems" (Lucas, 2016; as cited in Saleh, 2020, p. 99).

To enhance educational outcomes, an understanding of the correlation between soft skills and the workplace is essential to meet contemporary labor market expectations. Studies conducted around the world have assessed this correlation. At

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Taif University, Saudi Arabia, Hussein (2024) explored the significant role of soft skills in preparing postgraduates for the workforce, revealing that postgraduates possess a notable degree of recognition of soft skills, including anger management and networking skills. Islam et al. (2024) investigated the increasing number of unemployed graduates in Bangladesh, particularly among English majors: the lack of soft skills awareness was noticeable. The findings revealed a positive correlation between raising awareness of soft skills and actual practice. Although soft skills are recognized as fundamental, students showed a lack of sufficient awareness of their potential to enhance professional and personal success. For example, Ngo (2024) assessed undergraduate students' perceptions of eight Vietnamese universities. Although the participants considered soft skills necessary for their personal and academic achievement, they perceived them below the expected level. Similarly, Ramlan and Ngah (2015) showed 76.7% of students at the University of Kuala Lumpur believe that soft skills lead to better opportunities. By contrast, Aziz et al. (2024) investigated Moroccan undergraduates' comprehension of soft skills and employability. Asked to identify fourteen soft skills in a questionnaire, the students identified just five top skills and showed limited awareness of the issue. The findings focused on the teacher's role in raising students' awareness of soft skills by enhancing their understanding of the implications for their future careers.

D. Soft Skills and Gender

An increasing number of Saudi women are participating in the workplace. According to Saudi Vision 2030, the female participation ratio has risen from 22% to 30% (Alajlan & Aljohani, 2024), exceeding the target. Several initiatives are supporting women and maximizing their engagement in the labor market. For example, in alignment with its Vision, Saudi Arabia has implemented gender-inclusive laws to guarantee women equal rights and opportunities as men. Thus, the correlation between women and soft skills is encouraging, as women are "highlighting interpersonal abilities" (Aziz et al., 2024, p. 10). Some limited studies have linked soft skills with gender. Setiati (2023) explored the significance of soft skills and gender differences in students' proficiency levels. She found better performance in communication, interpersonal skills, and professionalism among women, but male students showed enhanced flexibility and work ethics. Aziz et al. (2024) found female students possessed a greater concentration of soft skills, particularly in time management, discussion, and positive attitude.

III. Methodology

A. Research Design

To answer the research questions outlined in the introduction, the study adopted a quantitative descriptive design to explore the impact of soft skills tuition on Saudi EFL students' awareness of workforce readiness. This approach describes a phenomenon, investigating the correlation among variables, and collects the data without manipulating conditions.

B. Participants

The participants in the study included English Language majors in the College of Arts at Jouf University during the academic year 2025. The total comprised 106 students enrolled in the third and fourth levels, including 70 females (66% of the sample) and 36 male students (representing 34%). The participants were randomly selected to ensure fairness and prevent bias. See Table 1 for demographic information.

Table 1
Participant Demographics by Gender and Academic Year

Variable		Frequency	Percent
Gender	Male	36	34.0
	Female	70	66.0
	Total	106	100.0
Academic Year	Fourth year	52	49.1
	Third year	54	50.9
	Total	106	100.0

C. Study Instruments and Data Collection

To collect data, the study used a structured questionnaire designed by the researcher after a comprehensive review of empirical studies and relevant theoretical literature. The questionnaire comprised three sections. The first section collected demographic data, including participants' information (gender and academic year). The second section related to students' awareness, consisting of six statements to measure their perception of the concept of soft skills. The third section included nine soft skills, represented by 27 statements (three for each skill) to assess students' perceptions of EFL teachers' practices. Participants' responses were rated on a five-point Likert scale with statements ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree. Data collected through the questionnaire were analyzed using descriptive statistics.

D. Study Validity and Reliability

The questionnaire's apparent validity was verified by eight qualified experts with relevant academic and professional experience. They evaluated the questionnaire for its appropriateness, comprehensiveness, linguistic accuracy, and the

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alignment of each item. Based on their revisions, an 80% consensus rate was achieved for the final version.

A pilot study was conducted on thirty volunteer students that revealed a correlation between item scores and the total score. The Pearson Correlation Coefficient range (0.832–0.917) was statistically significant at the 0.01 level. Hence, the final version of the instrument comprised 33 items categorized into two main axes. The first consisted of a single dimension of six items, and the second included nine dimensions. According to Guilford (1954), any item with a correlation coefficient below 0.30 was rejected.

To verify the study instrument's reliability, Cronbach's Alpha Test was used to evaluate the internal consistency of each dimension and the whole instrument. To ensure the validity of quantitative data, a pilot study was conducted on 30 participants who were not part of the main study sample. The test result was 0.965, which is an acceptable level of internal consistency across all study dimensions.

E. Ethical Consent

Ethical standards were strictly observed, with the participants informed at the outset about the study objective, their voluntary participation, and their right to withdraw at any time. Their identities were kept confidential. The consent form was submitted in advance for approval by the Ethics Committee at Jouf University.

IV. Results and Discussion

The descriptive and statistical data were analyzed in accordance with the three dimensions of the study, as outlined by the three research questions.

A. Results

(a). Research Question 1: To What Extent Do Saudi Students in the English Language Department Demonstrate Awareness of the Concept of Soft Skills?

The results revealed that students were aware of the concept of soft skills, as illustrated in Table 2.

Table 2
Students' Awareness of the Concept of Soft Skills

Items	Mean	Std. Deviation	Awareness Level
1. "Soft skills" refers to the personal traits and qualities that deepen individuals' potential to carry out tasks effectively.	3.89	1.063	High
2. Soft skills are crucial for academic qualifications.	3.72	1.076	High
3. Being aware of soft skills prioritizes employment adoption.	3.83	1.064	
4. Soft skills are as important as hard skills, which focus on cognitive knowledge.	3.83	1.064	High
5. Soft skills help students recognize and develop their strengths.	3.83	1.150	High
6. Employers today consider soft skills essential for fostering creativity.	3.74	1.072	High
Total	3.8050	.95493	High

Item 1 ("Soft skills" refers to the personal traits and qualities that deepen individuals' potential to carry out tasks effectively) was valued at the highest mean (M=3.89, SD=1.063). While the mean value (M=3.83) of items 3, 4, and 5 was identical, the standard deviation for item 5 scored the highest (1.150), whereas items 3 and 4 were the same (SD=1.064). Such variability was attributed to either the difference in participants' understanding or the ambiguity of the items' content. Item 6 (Employers today consider soft skills essential for fostering creativity) had a lower mean (M=3.74, SD=1.072), but item 2 (Soft skills are crucial for academic qualifications) achieved the lowest (M=3.72, SD=1.076). Overall, the figures (M=3.8050, SD=.9549) for the dimension "Students' Awareness of Soft Skills Concept" were statistically significant.

(b). Research Question 2: What Classroom Instructional Practices Do Saudi Students in the English Language Department Perceive as Being Influential for the Workforce?

To capture students' perception of soft skills in classroom instructional practices, they were surveyed on nine skills as described below. Table 3 synthesizes the nine soft skills into one composite metric.

Communication skills were measured through three sub-skills, with the mean scores ranging from 3.83 to 4.17. The first sub-skill, "Communicating in English with classmates enhances students' confidence to speak effectively outside the class," scored the highest (M=4.17, SD=.845). "Practicing activities of English lessons, such as role-play, indicates readiness for a job" ranked second (M=3.91, SD=1.000), while "Listening to one another attentively is one of the EFL university teachers' norms" scored third (M=3.83, SD=.990). The overall mean score for communication skills (M=3.9686, SD=.85638) demonstrated significant awareness among participants.

In terms of teamwork skills, "Choosing the topics with EFL university teachers to be discussed with the team group" recorded the most frequent value (M=3.94, SD=.903), meaning it was identified as the most highly practiced among students in this dimension. "Cooperating with EFL university teachers to create university initiatives makes students proud of themselves" ranked second in terms of mean value (M=3.91, SD=1.038), whereas "Providing feedback to peer groups enhances English language performance" was ranked lowest (M=3.85, SD=.964). The teamwork overall mean score (M=3.8994, SD=.84724) demonstrated significant awareness among participants.

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For leadership skills, “Sharing of organizing lesson activities with EFL university lectures enhances students’ sense of responsibility” was most frequently recorded (M=3.92, SD=1.048) and therefore deemed by students as the most highly practiced by teachers in this dimension. The second sub-skill ranked by students was “Prompting leadership skills, such as decision-making, by EFL university teachers, enhances confidence” (M=3.85, SD=1.040). The lowest-ranked sub-skill was “Guiding students while performing English tasks supports the leading of other situations in the future” (M=3.79, SD=1.110). The overall mean score of leadership skills was relatively high (M=3.8553, SD=1.02562).

In the dimension of flexibility, “Adapting to rapid changes in the English language teaching strategies and learning helps students to open up to others’ cultures” scored the highest frequency (M=3.98, SD=.985). “Discussing in class with peers and EFL university teachers lets students be adaptable to others’ points of view” ranked second (M=3.96, SD=.995), whereas “Responding to unexpected situations during English classes, such as 'the changing group,' is usually quite challenging” was the lowest ranking skill (M=3.64, SD=1.106). The overall mean score of the flexibility was 3.8616 (SD=.93250).

For time management, the sub-skill “Introducing some activities in the EFL classroom, like presentations, requires allocating time” attained the highest recognition (M=3.91, SD=.961) and was the most highly practiced by teachers, as rated from students’ perspectives. It was followed by “Submitting assignments with deadlines improves time value respect” (M=3.81, SD=1.015), while “Prioritizing the tasks of English lectures allows the students to keep time and fulfill their duties” scored lowest (M=3.79, SD=1.002). The overall mean score of time management skills was 3.8365 (SD=.94868).

In relation to problem-solving, the sub-skill “Asking EFL lecturers to clarify errors when communicating to fix the correct answers” was the most frequently perceived (M=3.79, SD=1.002). “Looking for more resources like online courses and language apps when finding problems in understanding the tasks” ranked second (M=3.77, SD=1.063), while the lowest scoring sub-skill was “Eliciting information and knowledge from some tasks, such as reading comprehension, prepares students to think deeply” (M=3.74, SD=1.072). The overall mean score for time management was valued at 3.7673 (SD=.96409).

In terms of values orientation, “Using polite phrases such as ‘Could you help me?’ and ‘I believe that’ in speaking and writing skills,” was the highest perceived item (M=3.90, SD=.950). “Integrating moral and ethical values by EFL lecturers when explaining lessons” was the second sub-skill perceived by students based on mean value (M=3.77, SD=1.063). The item with the lowest rate was “Listening skills support students’ respect for the diverse views of others” (M=3.75, SD=1.049). Consequently, the mean value of all items was statistically significant (M=3.8050, SD=.92567).

In the dimension of creativity, “Generating writing or speaking skills is one of the requirements for scoring high grades,” achieved the highest mean score (M=3.85, SD=1.040). “Integrating some activities such as brainstorming and role-play/storytelling, leads to creativity” ranked as the second item with a mean score of 3.81 (SD=1.015). The lowest item was “Identifying some talented students through explaining some courses like poetry, novels” (M=3.72, SD=1.002). In total, the mean score of all items (M=3.7925, SD=95002) was statistically significant.

For critical thinking, “Evaluating information before sharing it in class is highlighted by EFL instructors” scored highly with a mean of 3.89 (SD=.989), followed by “Sharing of some class issues discussed with EFL instructors based mainly on thinking rather than feeling” (M=3.87, SD=1.033). “Comparing ideas and thoughts to be trusted before expressing them is emphasized by EFL instructors” was the lowest ranking item (M=3.85, SD=1.058). The overall values of items in this category were statistically significant (M=3.8679, SD=.98741).

Table 3 demonstrates how the total mean scores varied across the soft skills. The highest perceived skill was communication, while the lowest was time management. The other soft skills were graded as follows: teamwork scored second, and critical thinking was third. These skills were followed in order of total mean by flexibility, leadership, and values orientation. Creativity skills ranked seventh, and problem-solving ranked eighth.

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TABLE 3
MEAN SCORES AND STD. DEVIATION ACROSS SOFT SKILLS DIMENSIONS

	Academic Year	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	t	Sig.
Communication	Fourth	52	3.8333	.79349	-1.611	.110
	Third	54	4.0988	.90104		
Teamwork	Fourth	52	3.7949	.78147	-1.249	.214
	Third	54	4.0000	.90190		
Leadership	Fourth	52	3.6667	.92884	-1.881	.063
	Third	54	4.0370	1.08866		
Flexibility	Fourth	52	3.9103	.84821	.527	.600
	Third	54	3.8148	1.01285		
Time management	Fourth	52	3.8333	.82578	-.033	.973
	Third	54	3.8395	1.06151		
Problem-solving skills	Fourth	52	3.6154	.88901	-1.604	.112
	Third	54	3.9136	1.01805		
Value orientation	Fourth	52	3.5897	.89690	-2.403	.018
	Third	54	4.0123	.91336		
Creativity	Fourth	52	3.6538	.86309	-1.482	.141
	Third	54	3.9259	1.01698		
Critical thinking	Fourth	52	3.6154	.92269	-2.658	.009
	Third	54	4.1111	.99475		
Total	Fourth	52	3.7236	.73631	-1.560	.122
	Third	54	3.9726	.90130		

(c). Research Question 3: Are There Statistically Significant Gendered Differences in Soft Skills Awareness Among English Language Department Students?

There were statistically significant differences related to the gender variable (see Table 4). The T-test value had statistical differences in favor of female students (4.0905) compared to male students (3.2500). The result might be attributed to female social orientation, interpersonal abilities, motivation, classroom practices, or the greater female sample size.

TABLE 4
T-TEST FOR THE GENDER DIFFERENCE IN SOFT SKILLS AWARENESS

Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	T-test	Sig.
male	36	3.2500	1.21401	-3.893-	.000
female	70	4.0905	.62983		

B. Discussion

The majority of Saudi students in the English Language Department demonstrated high awareness of soft skills based on the six survey items (see Table 2). This outcome aligns with a contemporary educational trend that is giving increasing recognition to soft skills over non-technical skills. The findings are consistent with other studies that demonstrated students' perceptions of soft skills are important for employment and education (e.g., Ramlan & Ngah, 2015). Furthermore, Islam et al. (2024) highlighted that soft skills awareness among English graduates had a significant effect on their predicted practice. Tino and Fedeli (2024) emphasized the importance of reflection on soft skills for enhancing students' labor opportunities. In the researcher's view, Saudi Vision 2030 has overemphasized the development of technical human capital for effective participation in the country's advancement. Awareness of soft skills is the next critical step in workforce readiness, enabling students to recognize them, why they are needed, why they matter, and how they contribute value. National and global developments have also enhanced awareness among Saudi students regarding job demands. This finding aligns with Yusuf and Jamjoom's (2022) study, which highlighted that Saudi students are aware of the significance of employability skills to advance their professional ambitions.

In terms of the integration of soft skills instructional practices, the findings showed that most activities associated with soft skills (communication, leadership, teamwork, critical thinking, flexibility) were highly recognized by students (see Table 3). Communication skills were ranked the most significant. This is unsurprising given that the EFL classroom provides an opportunity to practice language and communication skills, and students perceive it as a valuable instrument for interaction and expression. Implementing communication activities, such as speaking, negotiating meaning, role-play, and presentations, engages students in real-world skills and enhances their recognition of the practical performance of language rather than its abstract use. The findings aligned with Boonmoh and Chanchay (2024), who found that communication skills were the most emphasized in classroom activities, and with other studies (Gembaruk, 2024; Ngo, 2024; Saragih et al., 2025) that underscored the significance of communication skills for the workforce. However, the findings contradicted those of El Messaoudi (2021) and Khoudri (2024), whose studies scored a low significance for communication skills.

The second-ranked skill was leadership, encompassing the ability to influence others to achieve goals, motivate people, and set expectations. To meet contemporary organizational needs, leadership is an important element for survival, affecting the decision-making processes, goal attainment, and staff performance. The high score reflected the students'

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awareness of the pivotal role of leadership skills. This outcome aligns with Ingsih and Suhana (2023), who found that effective leadership enabled candidates to manage organizational responsibilities, and with Islam et al.'s (2024) study, which found leadership skills were the highest ranked.

Ranked in third place, teamwork skills reflected students' ability to work collaboratively by sharing tasks, coordinating to achieve common goals, providing mutual support, and sharing responsibilities. The findings revealed a positive attitude toward teamworking as an important soft skill for labor. Similarly, Saragih et al. (2025) found that teamwork is critical for recent graduates, enabling them to engage in meaningful interactions. The findings also aligned with Boonmoh and Chanchay (2024) and Khoudri (2024), who found that most students were capable of group work, and Gembaruk (2024), who found 50% of students showed outstanding teamwork capabilities. Teamwork skills are essential for organizations as they are required by most jobs (Ingsih & Suhana, 2023). However, the findings contrasted with those of El Messaoudi (2021), who found that entry-level employees did not feel comfortable working as a team, and with the teamwork assessment by Saleh (2020), which identified that 67% of participants lacked training to interact effectively with others.

The other significant skill in this study is flexibility, which enables employees to adapt to multiple tasks, enhance productivity, and satisfaction (Tongia et al., 2024). Flexibility is a critical skill for contemporary professional and academic achievement. It is not only an execution skill, but also helps navigate workforce challenges (e.g., technological disruption and system changes). When students show interest in flexibility, it indicates their awareness of strategy modification, acceptance of feedback, and adaptation to a changing professional context. The finding was consistent with Kostikova et al. (2021), who found that flexibility helped individuals adjust smoothly to unpredictable circumstances and provided opportunities for ongoing growth. By contrast, flexibility received little recognition in Boonmoh and Chanchay's (2024) study, despite its significance in language learning.

The findings demonstrated a lower awareness of some skills, despite their workplace significance. Time management is a crucial skill for academic success and professional productivity, enabling students to arrange tasks, set objectives, and meet deadlines (Nurlaila & Fadhillah, 2023). The findings contrasted with those of Aziz et al. (2024), which ranked time management highly and perceived it as demonstrating a positive attitude and readiness to learn. Time management is related to job performance efficiency, stress management, and task organization. Aprilita and Pritasari (2024) revealed the positive contribution of time management skills to productivity and excellence in the job context. When this skill received limited interest, the students lacked self-regulation and monitoring, with insufficient ability to plan, late achievement, and low productivity. One of the causes for low responses to time management is related to challenges in the EFL classroom. As Soumia (2020) stated, "poor lesson planning, ineffective classroom management, large classes, as well as the overloaded language syllabus are the main factors that negatively affect EFL teachers' instructional time management process" (as cited in Makuru et al., 2024, p. 2).

Another low-ranking skill was problem-solving, a complex skill involving emotions and thinking. EFL teachers need to engage their students in authentic scenarios to analyze and resolve problems. Chen and Lee (2024) found that students are poorly prepared to manage complex challenges in a professional context, and did not believe that problem-solving is important for career success. Ingsih and Suhana (2023) found that problem-solving had no positive effect on job readiness, as respondents were not involved in real work. This stance contrasts with several studies, including Ngo (2024), who ranked problem-solving as one of the top soft skills for career success. Further, Aprilita and Pritasari (2024) revealed that students perceived problem-solving as a skill for work readiness.

The findings showed fewer responses for the creativity skill. Creativity is defined as "coming up with new and unique ways to get things done that work and give you the outcome you want" (Cropley, 2019; as cited in Boudemagh, 2024, p. 15). Creativity is fundamental not only for creative professions but also for individuals to think outside the box, generate ideas, draw inspiration, and find accurate solutions (Kostikova et al., 2021). Graduates who lack creativity skills could hinder organizational development and resist novel ideas. This finding is partially in agreement with Gembaruk (2024), who observed creativity falling in the "above-average category" in students' soft skills but with "room for improvement".

Value orientation also received a low rating from students, reflecting limited awareness of its academic and professional importance. Value-oriented skills are widely recognized in a professional context, with employers and organizations seeking graduates who demonstrate integrity, responsibility, commitment, and ethical conduct. The findings aligned with Ingsih and Suhana (2023), who found no effect of ethics on work readiness. However, the researcher believes that these skills were taught implicitly rather than explicitly, which may explain why students' responses were diffuse and partial. It is not even clear how these skills could be assessed for both teachers and students. The lack of teachers' soft skills knowledge may also have an impact. For example, Ellah and Azmi (2024) identified that most teachers are aware of soft skills, but only occasionally integrate them in class activities. Part of the responsibility for greater training rests with English language teachers as they must develop tasks and activities to enhance soft skills practice.

One fundamental factor addressed was the effect of gender on the study results. Table 4 provides T-test results for male and female awareness of soft skills. The findings revealed a superior outcome for females compared to the male perceptions. The outcome aligns with Aziz et al. (2024, p. 10), who explained that "soft skills, which often involve emotional intelligence and interpersonal abilities, are more frequently linked to women." Similarly, Rybowska's (2024) study indicated that 58% of women scored highly on interpersonal skills, and Setiati (2023) found that, although male and female students demonstrated equal soft skill levels, female students showed stronger competencies in communication, interpersonal, and professionalism. Various factors can explain the gender findings. Most prominently,

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females are more socialized than males, as reflected in their engagement in communication and collaboration skills. It has been demonstrated that women place a stronger value on interpersonal and emotional intelligence activities. The findings are also partially attributed to an imbalanced sample size distribution, with a higher proportion of female students. Therefore, further research is required to explore whether the result is related to gender differences or sampling distributions. It is also likely that instructional practices embedded within activities were varied, influencing the result.

In summary, embedding soft skills within the pedagogical process is a pivotal activity. It can help students to meet workforce demands and bridge the gap between academic qualifications and professional development. The identification of communication, teamwork, leadership, flexibility, and critical thinking skills as being of a higher priority than others indicates that students have frequent exposure to these dimensions, intentionally or unintentionally. EFL teachers design interactive activities, including presentations, role-play, and dialogue, or ask students to think critically, which encourages a social inclination, particularly with peers, and a desire to engage in activities. By contrast, several other skills, such as problem-solving, creativity, time management, and value orientation, received less emphasis. It is likely that there are shortcomings in implementing these dimensions in the EFL classroom activities, leading to the result. One of the challenges of teaching soft skills concerns their intangible nature, since they cannot be directly assessed but are reflected through individual behaviors and interactions. Accordingly, EFL teachers should be trained to design soft skills activities collaboratively and obtain pedagogical competencies to integrate them systematically in authentic contexts.

V. Conclusion

This study explored the impact of integrating soft skills in EFL classes at Jouf University. Corresponding to the ongoing changes in the labor market, universities have transitioned from teaching cognitive knowledge to practical transferable skills to facilitate adaptability in professional contexts. The study was an attempt to assess and bridge the gap between what was taught and what is required in the workforce. The findings revealed that EFL students were aware of soft skills as essential to workplace readiness, and demonstrated the positive results of instructional practices implemented in the EFL classes. Adopting soft skills in EFL teaching practices fosters university students' abilities to engage in activities required by employers, rather than focusing on linguistic competence. In particular, communication, leadership, teamwork, critical thinking, and flexibility are widely recognized by students, which reflects that the instructional practices were visible and observable. However, time management, problem-solving, creativity, and values orientation were perceived as being less significant. A potential reason for this outcome was the EFL teachers' lack of knowledge of how to integrate such skills into class activities. Regarding the effect of gender, the findings revealed that female students were more aware of soft skills than male students.

In light of the findings, the study recommends that soft skills should be embedded in the academic program outcomes of university majors, particularly in the English Language Department. Policymakers should clearly institutionalize a framework for the core soft skills demanded by the labor market, identify guidelines for supporting teaching strategies, develop assessment standards, and design a relevant curriculum. An effective partnership between policymakers and stakeholders is required to ensure the correct focus on labor market soft skills and to provide feedback on relevant topics, activities, and assessments implemented in the curriculum. To bridge the gap between graduates' qualifications and workforce expectations, the study recommends that these skills should be reflected explicitly and directly in the learning process. Thus, universities should adopt training programs to equip EFL teachers with pedagogical and practical competencies to raise awareness of the soft skills that need to be effectively observed, taught, and assessed.

Based on the findings, further studies should investigate a wider scope than the present study. Potential topics include EFL teachers' strategies and activities for integrating soft skills into the classroom, EFL teachers' awareness of soft skills and their implications for workforce readiness, EFL teachers' assessment of students' performance, and soft skills adoption to investigate gender differences. Further research should focus on soft skills that have not received attention in the literature, such as time management, problem-solving, creativity, and values orientation. Also, diverse methodologies should be explored to explain the effect of soft skills on personal and professional success, such as an observation instrument.

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A Critical Analysis of Debates on the Role of English in China's English Education Policy

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***Abstract*—Ideological debates concerning English in relation to indigenous language and culture have triggered controversies in China for over a century. While China embraces the economic benefits of English, discourses framing it as a threat to local culture persist, creating a dichotomy between nationalist perspectives and neoliberal instrumentalism. This paper evaluates these perspectives by analyzing key debates on English language policies, including the status of English in the Gaokao, English-Medium Instruction (EMI), and the value orientation of tertiary English education. It argues that such debates often rely on a false zero-sum mentality. Drawing on recent developments in the sociolinguistics of globalization, specifically English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) and multilingualism, this study proposes a paradigm shift. It suggests that English policy must move beyond the neoliberal-nationalist dichotomy, recognizing English as a global communicative resource that can coexist with, and even enhance, Chinese cultural identity when decoupled from native-speaker norms.**

***Index Terms*—English language policy, globalization, language ideology, English-medium instruction, multilingualism**

I. Introduction

Recent scholarship highlights how English as a global lingua franca is intertwined with neoliberalism, particularly in global higher education where English is exploited for its market value (Block et al., 2012; Chowdhury & Phan, 2014). For nation-states like China, perceived deficiency in English is often equated with an inability to survive in a globalizing world. However, this presents a dilemma: while China is a major beneficiary of globalization, discourses framing English as a threat to local culture and society persist (Zhou, 2007). The tension between the pragmatic value of English and the preservation of indigenous identity has dominated English teaching discourse. Although English is compulsory, the public sector retains control, evidenced by restrictions on foreign names and signboards, reflecting a desire to prevent cultural erosion.

China's position is unique due to the sheer scale of both Mandarin and English speakers within its borders, creating a complex competition between national identity and global economic drives (Majhanovich, 2014). As China undergoes drastic socio-economic changes, conflicting language ideologies emerge. How does China reconcile nationalism and neoliberalism? This paper explores theoretical and political discourses on the role of English in China, focusing on recent educational debates. To contextualize these debates, a brief diachronic account of English in the Chinese education system is provided.

II. A Historical Review: Fluctuating Discourses and Perpetuating Ambivalence

English language teaching was introduced to China by missionary schools in the early 19th century, immediately sparking conflicting views: seen simultaneously as tools of Western cultural imperialism and as contributors to Chinese modernization (Deng, 1997). This tension between accepting English for modernization and preserving indigenous culture has been a long-standing issue.

Until the late 1970s, English held minimal status, often resisted by nationalists fearing unwanted cultural transfer (Adamson, 2004). The Reform and Opening-up policy marked a turning point, positioning English as a key tool for accessing technology and knowledge. This instrumentalist view led to the depoliticization of ELT (Hu, 2005), though worries about cultural "corrosion" persisted, exemplified by the 'Campaign Against Spiritual Pollution' in the 1980s.

Entering the new millennium, English became a gate-keeping language for upward mobility, igniting an unprecedented "English fever." However, this craze faced backlash for allegedly wasting resources and deteriorating students' native language proficiency (Xinhua News, 2013). Consequently, proposals emerged to reduce English's weight in standardized tests or even abolish it in the Gaokao (Beijing Review, 2014). Recent policies also suggest backgrounding English in favor of Chinese in higher education (Wang, 2016). This historical trajectory reveals a

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continuing ambivalence: language education in China is characterized by fluctuating discourses where English is oscillating between a strategic asset and a cultural threat (Y. Gao, 2015).

III. Ideological Debates Around the Role of English in Education

Globalization has intensified the role of English as a global lingua franca, emphasizing its instrumental value for modernization and mutual understanding (Crystal, 1997; Graddol, 2006). Conversely, critical perspectives frame English as an instrument of imperialism that disrupts local linguistic ecologies and threatens indigenous languages (Phillipson, 1992; Mühlhäusler, 1996). This tension between English as a beneficial resource and a cultural threat has fueled intense ideological debates in China regarding its relationship with the Chinese language and culture. Recognizing that such debates reflect broader sociopolitical struggles (Blommaert, 1999), this paper examines these conflicting language ideologies within the Chinese context to elucidate their role in national development and identity formation.

A. The Debate on the Status of English in Gaokao

What has been seen as the key propellant for the popularity of English in China is its inclusion in Gaokao as one of the three major examination subjects, because its dominant position lies in its weight in various levels of exams, with Gaokao having the greatest impact (Zhao, 2016). Currently, English and Chinese subjects, along with mathematics, share the same weight (150) in Gaokao. However, the Beijing Municipal Commission of Education was recently reported to have a plan to raise the value of the Chinese language by shifting points from English to Chinese in college and senior high school entrance exams (Zhao, 2016; Zheng, 2014). This proposal has generated heated debates and mixed responses from the academic circle and the public. Whilst this move has been seen as a timely development to cool down the nationwide blind mania for English, it is claimed as a failure to take into account the nation's demand for foreign language ability when facing the challenge of globalisation and internationalisation of higher education (Zhao, 2013).

The proponents of de-emphasising English in Gaokao have attributed the worsening of Chinese students' native language proficiency to the over-emphasis on English. A prominent example is the attack on the national fever for English learning by Wang Xuming, former spokesman of MOE, who argued that English learning has not only cost learners too much time and money, but has also deteriorated the learners' Chinese language proficiency (Xinhua News, 2013). In this view, the prevalence of English has negatively affected the native language. This implies a zero-sum mentality that the gains in English learning have been offset by the losses of Chinese learning (Zheng, 2014). With this mindset of native speakerism, some Chinese scholars have strongly supported the move to de-emphasise English in Gaokao, even labelling it as a measure to enhance 'cultural self-confidence' (Sheng, 2014). Some scholars (e.g., Zheng, 2014), however, suggests a bilingual ideal to come up with a bicultural identity consisting of a local identity with the mother tongue and a global identity with English (Kramsch, 1998). However, one of the biggest challenges for Chinese learners to become such competent bilingual users is the deprivation of actual English usage experiences that discourages them from seeing the connection of English with their real lives, as English has been learned as a school subject – rather than as a means of communication – in China, where English has no official status (Zheng, 2014). A possible solution is to shift the focus from language as a course content to language as a medium of instruction. Although the necessity of such shift has been supported by a number of research (Cai, 2014; Li & Wang, 2010) to enable students a Chinese-English bilingual learning experience, the proposal of English as a Medium of Instruction (EMI) is not without controversy in China.

B. The Debate on the Medium of Instruction in Higher Education

As early as 2001, the MOE had published guidelines for improving the quality of undergraduate English teaching, requiring that 'within three years 5–10% of undergraduate courses offered by tertiary institutions be conducted in English' (Hu & McKay, 2012, pp. 346-347). It was criticised by China Youth Daily (the official newspaper of the Communist Youth League of China) as being politically incorrect, for promoting EMI amongst non-English majors can be an unlawful practice against the education law which stipulates that all educational institutions should use Chinese as the medium of instruction (Li, 2006). It had appealed for an end of any form of bilingual instruction that embodies a residue of colonialist ideology. Some scholars (Geng, 2005; Ma, 2006) also showed concern about the status of Mandarin as a medium of instruction and opposed the use of EMI courses or programs in higher education, which aroused a heated debate on EMI policies.

Considering the demand of the global spread of English and internationalisation of higher education, other scholars (e.g., Cai, 2015) however argued that, EMI – as a manifestation of bilingualism in an essentially monolingual country – is the only way to meet the opportunities and challenges of globalisation through 'Englishnisation'. They have supported the use of EMI as not causing 'language shift', i.e., giving up the mother tongue for English, as long as the vernacular domains are well used and kept (Zhang, 2018). Against the background that more institutions in non-English-speaking countries have now offered English courses to overcome linguistic disadvantage (OECD, 2004), the necessity and benefits of EMI seem too great to be ignored by China. As such, the Chinese government has to take an eclectic view regarding EMI to respond to the pressure of internationalisation of higher education; that is to say,

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China has kept a rational ratio between EMI and Chinese-medium instruction (Zhang, 2018).

In effect, EMI in true meaning in tertiary education has not yet been popularised in China; it has been primarily adopted by a limited number of top-tier universities and Sino-foreign cooperative (regional) ones, particularly offshore branch campuses from English-speaking countries. Recent research has suggested that EMI policies in China have met some difficulties in teaching practices (Zhang, 2018), and EMI is not a favourable source of language learning (Hu & Lei, 2014; Jiang et al., 2019). Consequently, English for Specific Purposes (ESP) has been proposed as a bridge course linking English for General Purposes (EGP) to EMI. In fact, using English in specialised areas corresponds closely with the implementation of bilingual instruction in higher education institutions (Xu, 2012). Whilst accepting ESP as an important component of tertiary English education in China, scholars and experts have never come to an agreement about whether traditional EGP should be completely replaced by ESP.

C. The Debate on the Value Orientation of Tertiary English Education

College English teaching. There are two types of English education at the tertiary level in China: one is for English majors, whilst the other is for non-English majors, which account for an overwhelming majority of Chinese university students (more than 90%). English education for the latter is known as College English teaching (CET), and its course College English (CE) has been required for university undergraduates of arts, science and engineering since the 1960s. (Yu & Liu, 2018) The last decade, however, has witnessed a nationwide reduction of CE credits in CET curricula. The course decline may have resulted from a constant incongruity between the nation's needs and college graduates' English proficiency, apart from a lack of disciplinary status of CE. A report released in 2014 by Education First (EF), an international education company, revealed that scores obtained by adult test-takers in mainland China (50.15) were ranked amongst 'low efficiency countries', falling behind other Asian countries and regions such as Korea (53.62), Japan (52.88), Hongkong (52.50), Taiwan (52.56), and even Vietnam (51.57). (Education First, 2014; Wang, 2017) The gap between China's urgent need for a large number of competent English users and its reality in a great shortage of so-called 'compound professionals' who are proficient both in their own fields and in English language is often attributed to the inappropriate direction of CET (Cai, 2016, 2017). That is to say, CET has been taught for general purposes, targeting at the improvement of students' general cultural awareness and the accumulation of language phenomena and teaching the four skills of listening, speaking, reading, and writing. It is believed that the devotion of limited credit-bearing CE courses to the appreciation of English literature and understanding of foreign society, history and cultures is misleading, and it obliterates the distinction between CE and English courses for high school students and English majors (Yu & Liu, 2018). Therefore, CET should be redirected to ESP, providing students with necessary foreign language skills needed in their academic studies and future work (Yu & Liu, 2018). This has eventually developed into a debate on the value orientation of CET, particularly whether CET should be instrumentally-oriented or humanistically-oriented.

ESP-oriented instrumental value. Instrumentalists have insisted on the complete replacement of traditional CET featuring EGP by ESP or EAP (English for academic purposes) for academic universities, in order to equip students with English as a tool to cope with their academic studies and future work (Cai, 2017). The discourse of linguistic instrumentalism promises both national and individual economic benefit from English language proficiency, which corresponds to a broader neoliberal discourse of human capital, i.e., skills deemed necessary for knowledge economy (Kubota, 2011). This perceived usefulness of English is congruent with the conceptualisation of English as a 'linguistic capital' (Bourdieu, 1991), as it can be easily converted to other forms of capital, such as cultural (educational qualifications) and economic capital (better employment and career development) (Pan & Block, 2011). In this view, the instrumentalist value of CE may rely upon empowering future scientists, engineers, and businessmen, at least in terms of improving their economic condition. It can be said that the ever-growing demands for English language education have largely been driven by such self-vested and widespread sociocultural perception of English proficiency as the most valorised symbolic capital with a strong exchange value in China (Hu & McKay, 2012; Pan, 2015).

EGP-oriented humanistic value. The pragmatic perception implicit in the instrumental value of English has been opposed by many other scholars who believe that English learning should go beyond instrumental value and recognise its humanistic value as well, since language, as an inseparable part of culture, is also the carrier of culture and human thought (Xu & Fan, 2017). They argued that instrumentalism has failed to realise that English education, like other humanistic disciplines, constitutes as an important source to cultivate students' humanistic qualities and enhance their wholistic development, including cognition, affect, attitude, values, and character (Zhang, 2010). This humanity-oriented view of English education is said be traced back to an emphasis on cultivation of moral and cultural qualities and neglect of instrumentalist utility in traditional Chinese culture, an idea expressed in the Chinese phrase zhongdaoqingqi (Cai, 2017). This is explicitly reflected in language policy statements, in which English learning is supposed to 'improve their [students'] comprehensive cultural literacy' (MOE, 2004, 2007). The importance of culture and cultural issues in CET has been further elevated in a recent language policy document, indicating the government's emphasis on the humanistic value of English. For instance, English for Intercultural Communication (EIC) was embraced in the most recent CET curriculum document 2015/2017 Guidelines along with EGP and ESP to form the three course categories in CET, with the aim to nurture students' awareness and appreciation of cultural differences. The new guidelines claimed to 'enhance intercultural communication awareness … improve their comprehensive cultural quality' in the overall teaching objective description (MOE, 2015, 2017). These discursive constructions of

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English learning to cultural enrichment and intellectual development in policy rhetoric are seen as ostensible reasons for English language education, whilst the underlying language ideology is deeply imbedded in self-interest that various stakeholders can reap from English as a highly valorised form of cultural capital (Hu & McKay, 2012). Indeed, the ESP-oriented reform on CET has met some resistance from teachers, experts, administrators and policymakers who have a vested interest in traditional CET-based textbooks, teaching and tests) (Cai, 2016).

Therefore, it is advisable to take a cautious attitude towards the seemingly positive signs towards ESP (i.e., the pragmatic use of English), because the policy documents may simply pay lip service to the notion of ESP, given its ambiguity in defining teaching objectives in policy discourses (Xu & Fan, 2017). Therefore, the conclusion needs to be re-examined in which the instrumental usefulness of English to the nation is placed at the forefront of the discourse, overshadowing any potential socio-political effect the language might have on Chinese language and culture (Pan & Seargeant, 2012). In effect, the discourse on the perceived threat of English learning to national identification has already been existing even at the height of English mania (Gao, 2015). To counter the powerful cultural politics of the global spread of English, the government highlighted the cultivation of national awareness in all levels of education, especially in foreign language disciplines. A close examination of foreign language plans and policies enacted in recent years shows that the integration of national consciousness has become one of the distinctive features of the development in the field of foreign language with such expression as Socialist Core Values, humanistic connotation, Chinese feelings, Chinese style, Xi Jinping socialism with Chinese characteristics in the new era (Xu, 2021).

The paradox of the debate. Some scholars (e.g., X. Gao, 2018) have expressed their puzzle about the 'humanism vs. instrumentalism' debate, wondering why these two aspects need to be put to opposite sides to create a pseudo proposition. If humanistic quality is defined as the quality that an individual social being is expected to possess, which is further determined by what kind of society we wish to live in, the cultivation of humanistic quality should not be dependent exclusively on foreign language education. Furthermore, proficient use of language as a resource to achieve one's personal or professional goals contributes to the development of humanistic quality. In this sense, the instrumental role of language has helped lay a solid foundation for improving one's humanistic quality (e.g., X. Gao, 2018).

The resolution to this puzzle lies in the politicized nature of teaching English culture in China. While current policy encourages cultural awareness, it simultaneously emphasizes "appreciating differences" and "deepening understanding of Chinese culture" (Pan, 2015). This suggests that the promoted "humanistic value" is not merely for personal development but serves a patriotic agenda: exporting Chinese culture and enhancing national soft power. As Wang (2013) noted, College English Teaching (CET) must elucidate China's achievements and socialism with Chinese characteristics to the world. Consequently, CET is endowed with the mission of cultivating patriotism alongside language skills.

This dual mandate reflects a broader struggle between economic globalization and nationalism, where students are urged to compete globally while maintaining loyalty to China (Law, 2014). The recent integration of sizhengjiaoyu (ideological and political education) into English Language Teaching epitomizes this trend, blurring the lines between neoliberal utility and nationalist ideology. Rather than viewing globalization as a threat to identity, the Chinese discourse frames English as a strategic resource for sovereignty construction and national storytelling (Gao, 2017). Thus, the function of English in China can never be "purely pragmatic"; it is inherently expanded to include the transmission of political ideas and the consolidation of national identity (Pan, 2015).

IV. Discussions

In this section, the three areas of controversies will be further discussed to offer implications for future English language policy and language ideology in China and beyond in the globalized context.

A. Establish Functional Links Between English and Chinese

As China has proudly established itself as the world's second economic powerhouse, it may arguably aspire to assert the importance of its national language on the world stage. To that end, the Chinese government had set up a total of 475 Confucius institutes and 851 Confucius classrooms in 126 regions and countries by the end of 2014 since its launching of the promotion of Chinese and culture in 2004 (Chinanews, 2015). This effort to promote Chinese language and culture has not only exemplified China's ambition to enable what Giddens (2000, pp. 34-35) calls as 'reverse colonisation' (i.e., non-Western countries influence Western culture and development), but has served as an important measure to counterbalance the powerful cultural politics of the global spread of English (Pan & Seargeant, 2012). Therefore, English is being embedded in the new world system and social orders under neoliberal globalisation, and employed as a useful resource for constructing desirable national identities and images with a globally competitive edge.

Given the impact of shifting economic power relations on the foreign language domain, it is natural for China to promote its national language and culture worldwide through foreign language education. The issue is whether it is necessary to impose or prioritise the task of spreading Chinese culture on all non-English majors in policy discourse, especially those majoring in science and engineering, when 'instrumentalism' has become a predominant ideology of internationalisation in higher education today (Stier, 2004). The Chinese government has been convinced that EGP needs to be strengthened rather than weakened, because an essential part of EGP is cross-cultural education that is supposed to cultivate students' world vision, enabling them in the future to explain China's position and values.

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Furthermore, having received cross-cultural training in the course of CE, students are expected to become leaders rather than followers in the process of participating in global 'governance', through playing an inspiring, shaping and influencing role in international affairs (Wang & Wang, 2019).

This clearly explains the two purposes of learning English in China: 'getting to know Western culture and spreading our national culture' (Bianco et al., 2009, p. 286). The latter seems to become more salient, instead of obscure, at the age of globalization. Although it can be a possible strategy in language policy to establish functional links between English and Chinese to enable a sustainable ecosystem of language (Gao, 2017; Mühlhäusler, 1997), it should not be overused to the extent that languages are simply appropriated to promote political goals overseas. These functional links are supposed to construct 'a mutually supportive system' (Mühlhäusler, 1997, p. 5) in a linguistic ecosystem supporting both English and Chinese. Perhaps, the perceived links may also be strengthened through creating a multilingual classroom where English and Chinese each has different roles to play, or promoting the awareness of the role of the Chinese variant of English in intercultural commutation. According to García (2019), for foreign language education to enter the multilingual education realm, it needs to give up being a mechanism of political states. That said, it has to be admitted that it would be a long shot to 'shed the strong link between language and nation-state that has been at the core of foreign language epistemologies' (García, 2019, p. 1). However, policy makers might be informed and guided by robust research results in addition to political considerations. For instance, empirical research suggests that Chinese is of much help in both teaching and learning in bilingual instruction classes (Xu, 2012), and that more value should be placed on home culture as a resource to challenge the dominance of Anglophone culture in English teaching classrooms, because 'effectively understanding other cultures requires adequate comprehension of one's own home culture' (Liu & Fang, 2017, p. 33). In addition, as non-native speakers have become the overwhelmingly majority in contemporary English communication, cultures other than the native speakers' should be brought into the field as well (Dahmardeh & Kim, 2020). These research-based discourses are represented as more 'natural' and 'legitimate', thus indicating a widely accepted and 'less apparent' way of thinking and acting (cf. Pan, 2015).

B. Encourage a Bilingual User Identity

Like many other countries in the expanding circle, Chinese universities have currently faced contradicting pressures for internationalisation on one hand and nationalism on another. The above discussion shows that the Chinese education system is still facing a dilemma of using English or Chinese as the medium of instruction. Whilst the instrumental role of English is foregrounded both in policy and in public imagination (Pan & Seargeant, 2012), there is a concern that people might lose their identity if English is viewed as more important than their mother tongue. Likewise, if Chinese people spend too much time and energy in learning English, it will naturally jeopardise their Chinese studies (Xinhua News, 2013). Hence, the reduced points from English will be given to Chinese according to the English-Chinese weight shift plan in Gaokao. Although controversial and still unimplemented, the proposed Gaokao reform has clearly shown the country's worry about the status of Chinese language, culture and traditional values alongside the unprecedented development of English in China. Whilst the reasons behind the policy change are seen as politically driven by Western media, stating that Chinese policymakers had regarded the reform scheme as a matter of national pride or cultural confidence in highlighting the fundamental importance of the mother tongue in the curriculum (Kaiman, 2013), the underlying discourse on the state's decision to de-emphasise English can also be related to the perception of the language as a threat to national language and culture (Zheng, 2014). This mentality is probably resulting from the practice of 'teaching English as a native speakers' variety in the non-native Chinese context with the expectation for the learners to be like a (monolingual) native speaker of English' (Zheng, 2014). Trying to impose native-speaker norms on non-native speaking learners is not only unrealistic and unattainable, but also a cause of sentiments of frustration amongst teachers and students (Morley, 1991). Should we then be able to use the language effectively as a form of communication only if we conform to native-speaker norms? The answer is a resounding 'no'. Widdowson (2015) has demonstrated how English users are capable of effective communication without conforming to the norms of native English speakers, taking as a role model the former Secretary General of the United Nations, Ban Ki-Moon. Therefore, there is a need for all language education programs to build legitimate multilingual subjectivities, without reference to the social construction of native speakers (García, 2019).

People's language ideology needs to be updated through raising their awareness of the developments of English as a global language and 'the possibility to approach English as an additional language resource to be part of the globalisation processes' (Zheng, 2014, p. 38). Since the development of English as a lingua franca (ELF) has blurred traditional boundaries amongst different languages (Blommaert, 2010; Seidlhofer, 2011), English should not be seen as an 'isolated subject' and in conflict with Chinese learning. The ultimate goal of language learning in today's globalised world is multilingualism connecting with the conceptualisation of ELF with a global culture, rather than a monolingual native ideology attached to Anglophone cultures and traditionally defined ethnicity and nationality (Seidlhofer, 2011). Foreign language education can no longer be constructed as teaching a separate alien language that belongs to a distant nation with a distinct culture (García, 2019). Recognising the ELF paradigm or Global English Language Teaching (cf. Galloway & Rose, 2018) is useful in reconciling tensions between nationalism and globalisation, because it argues for individuals to be fluent bilingual (or multilingual) speakers, whilst retaining their national identities through accent and special skills required for international communication (Baker, 2015). The maintenance of native cultural identity can also be achieved by 'productive bilingualism' (Gao, 2015) transcending the binary dichotomy between a native

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language and a foreign language. This concept of bilingualism is symbolized as "1+1>2", meaning that that use of the target language and the native language positively reinforce each other, and deeper understanding and appreciation of the target culture goes hand in hand with that of the native culture (Gao, 2001).

In recent years, more scholars have called for abandoning the native-speaker myth and establishing a legitimate bilingual user identity among Chinese learners. Qiu (2024) finds that teaching practices guided by the elf paradigm can significantly reduce learners' anxiety and improve their practical communicative effectiveness. Additionally, Tang (2025) notes that the latest primary and secondary school English policies have gradually focused on multilingual competence rather than monolingual native-like proficiency, which helps reshape public language ideology and reconcile the tension between nationalism and globalization in language education.

C. Redefine Communicative Competence From the Perspective of ESP-ELF Kinship

There is also a need for revisions or adaptations to English language policy and ELT courses in China to reflect the latest theories on global spread of English and the sociolinguistics of globalisation. Recent EMI researches (e.g., Fang, 2017) have been conducted from a multilingual perspective with a focus on ELF conception accentuating communication strategies. It is a strategic capability rather than traditional 'competence' that needs to be cultivated for using linguistic resources, adapting them as appropriate to various contexts and for various purposes of global communication (Widdowson, 2015). It is therefore crucial to explore the effectiveness of implementing EMI with an ELF-informed ideology. For instance, it is important to challenge the traditional native-speaker model in which the standard British and American English variants have been upheld as the only acceptable pedagogical models. To that end, there is a need to reconceptualise communicative competence from the perspective of English as an international language (EIL), as the global learning of English needs to be based on its global use (Seidlhofer & Widdowson, 2019).

English should be introduced as a tool for communication and access to information (Ramanathan, 2013) rather than subject knowledge. Therefore, higher education may need to prioritise English for communicative purposes especially in specialised fields. The predominant ingredients of 'ELF approach' such as context, target situation and learners' needs/wants are also the components that form the backbone of the 'ESP approach'. As such, 'ELF approach' can be understood as an embodiment of the 'ESP approach' (Ramanathan, 2013). I thus propose that ELF-informed teaching should start with prospective ESP users, such as students in Business English or Engineering English program. I also suggest a trial implementation of ELF-oriented teaching in EMI programs to explore its feasibility and suitability on Chinese learners in Chinese higher education (as cited in Yu & Liu, 2022).

This ESP-ELF kinship perspective enables us to reflect on traditional mode of cultivating students' communicative competence dominated by normative mindset, realising that the ultimate goal of the ELF model is to produce 'expert users' (House, 2005) instead of native English speakers. In other words, the purpose of most English learners is specific, namely, to learn the language which enables them to become members of expert communities and to communicate with other members from different cultures. After all, it is the ability of using 'expert English' rather than native-like English that largely determines our position in the international community (Yu & Liu, 2019, 2022).

V. Conclusion

This paper has reviewed several ideological debates on the role of English in China, focusing on entrance examinations, English-Medium Instruction (EMI), and the value orientation of tertiary English teaching. Specifically, the controversy over whether College English Teaching (CET) should be instrumentally or humanistically oriented has persisted for decades. In line with the arguments put forward by Gao (2018) and Cai (2017), this debate centering on instrumentalism and humanism can be regarded as a pseudo-proposition. These orientations align with Cook's (2007) distinction between 'external' goals (information acquisition) and 'internal' goals (human quality improvement), forming a complementary rather than dichotomous relationship.

The debates on the status of English in China's education system and the value orientation of tertiary English teaching as reviewed in this paper show that the pendulum of China's position on English has been oscillating between national ideas and neoliberal instrumentalism or functionalism. This study has elucidated the correlations between the aforementioned debates and diverse language ideologies. It further contends that, within the contemporary context of global economic integration and geopolitical dynamics, the formulation of English language policies and the implementation of pedagogical practices ought to be grounded in cutting-edge research advances in the sociolinguistics of globalisation. Describing globalisation from the perspective of linguistic imperialism and 'linguicide' (Phillipson, 1992; Skutnabb-Kangas, 2000) is no longer relevant to the contemporary reality of language use, as these approaches have assumed that there is a place for just one language at a time: wherever a 'big' and 'powerful' language such as English 'appears' in a foreign territory, small indigenous languages will 'die' (Blommaert, 2010). In this sociolinguistic space, an either-or dichotomy has been imposed upon foreign language and indigenous language, suggesting that English learning and use are necessarily at the cost of Chinese learning and use. Since English in the world today has been deterritorialized, i.e., no longer associated with any particular geographical or national entity, the defense mechanism and response strategy formed in the semi-colonial history (Gao, 2015) are no longer the inevitable choice for China and other countries in the outer circle with a colonial history (see Haidar & Fang, 2019, for a comparative analysis of the role of English in Pakistan and China). Language and cultural self-confidence should be built within the

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framework of 'a Community of Shared Future for Mankind' (Xi, 2017) instead of the 'zero-sum game' in which learning/appreciating other languages/cultures is equivalent to the loss/depreciation of one's own language/culture.

The inexorable spread of English as a lingua franca requires us to update our traditional understanding of target culture which was seen as 'a foreign invader seeking to impose a new order on alien lands' (Sybing, 2011). As it, in many cases, has already taken root in non-Western countries, the paradigm in foreign language education must evolve into one that recognize that multiple cultures are already present in the local contexts (Sybing, 2011). Therefore, teaching foreign languages should be more about integration with the global community than assimilation with native speakers (McClelland, 2000; Dahmardeh & Kim, 2020). In effect, the pedagogical goals of ELF (or EIL) place more emphasis on the learner's ability to communicate ideas and culture with others and do not require the learner to learn the cultural norms of English. In a word, by viewing English as a lingua franca rather than as a language owned by native speakers, it would be seen as less threatening by Chinese and be more readily accepted as the second language of education (after Chinese itself).

We must be reminded that, due to globalisation, languages no longer remain independent of each other, because people resort to different linguistic resources to accomplish different communicative tasks in today's extraordinarily diverse contexts. It can be said that we have benefited more from being a bilingual or a multilingual, rather than a monolingual. Therefore, the English-as-a-threat mentality should give way to a complementarity between support for the benefits of English as a global means of communication and the importance of multilingualism (Crystal, 1997). I contend in the paper that Chinese and English can coexist with different functions in a multilingual environment and language education should aim for this. In order to reframe foreign language education through a multilingual framework, teachers of English need to attend to the diverse needs and goals of students who will use English in different settings in order to help them participate with flexibility in intercultural communication (Sharifian, 2013).

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Corpus-Based Analysis of the Ethnocultural Connotation of "Gold" in Kazakh Fairy Tales

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Abstract—**This article presents a corpus-based analysis of the ethnocultural connotation of "gold" in Kazakh fairy tales. The study aims to systematize and examine the symbolic and cultural meanings associated with gold through corpus data. In the Kazakh worldview, gold occupies a significant place in folklore, culture, and everyday life. Due to its radiant yellow color, intrinsic value, and rarity, it is portrayed in fairy tales as a sacred object endowed with mystical and supernatural qualities. Images such as a golden palace, a golden-horned deer, a golden tree, golden water, and golden hair symbolize not only material wealth but also culturally embedded meanings specific to Kazakh tradition. The relevance of the study stems from the lack of specialized corpus-based research devoted to this topic. The article clarifies the concepts of "connotation" and "ethnocultural connotation" and reviews their interpretation in both international and Kazakh scholarship. The distinctive features of the ethnocultural connotation of gold are identified through linguistic data collection, systematization, frequency and statistical analysis, and comparative analysis. The findings contribute to the development of theoretical and applied research in emerging areas of Kazakh linguistics, including linguo-folklore studies, linguoculturology, ethnolinguistics, cognitive linguistics, and related disciplines.**

Index Terms—**connotation, ethnocultural connotation, gold, corpus, fairy tale**

I. Introduction

In recent years, corpus linguistics–one of the branches of applied linguistics concerned with the collection, systematization, analysis, and processing of large volumes of linguistic data–has been developing rapidly in Kazakh linguistics. Corpus data are now widely used in numerous linguistic studies.

The first major linguistic corpus was the Brown Corpus, created in the 1960s at Brown University (USA) by Nelson Francis and Henry Kucera. The Brown Corpus consisted of one million word tokens and included 500 texts of approximately 2,000 words each. The texts represented various genres, including fiction by well-known American writers and poets, religious texts, newspaper and magazine articles, and others. The Brown Corpus became a model and stimulus for the creation of corpora in other languages.

Between 1970 and 1978, European scholars also began compiling text corpora and created the Lancaster–Oslo/Bergen Corpus (LOB Corpus), which included 500 texts of approximately 2,000 words each. In developing this corpus, Geoffrey Leech, Stig Johansson, Knut Hofland, and Roger Garside followed the principles established by the Brown University corpus.

One of the most well-known contemporary corpora is the British National Corpus (BNC), compiled between 1991 and 1994 by researchers from Oxford and Lancaster Universities. The corpus includes newspaper articles, religious and political texts, business documents, radio recordings, academic texts, and other materials.

Following the model of the British National Corpus, many countries established their own national corpora: the Russian National Corpus (containing 2 billion word tokens), the Bulgarian National Corpus (1.2 billion word tokens), the Czech National Corpus (3 billion word tokens), and others.

Kazakhstan has also taken part in this global trend. The National Corpus of the Kazakh Language currently contains 65 million word tokens, and this number continues to grow daily.

According to A. Zhubanov, the scholar who first introduced the concepts of "corpus" and "corpus linguistics" into Kazakh linguistics, a corpus is "a large collection of texts in electronic form, compiled across all functional styles of the Kazakh language and designed for public use through computer-based software" (Zhubanov, 2009, p. 3).

The National Corpus of the Kazakh Language (NCKL) is a large-scale electronic collection of millions of word tokens that comprehensively covers the lexical and grammatical system of the Kazakh language through deep annotation. It functions as an intelligent, specialized knowledge base that consolidates extensive information about the Kazakh language. At present, the NCKL consists of 16 purpose-built subcorpora. The official website of the National Corpus of the Kazakh

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Language is: https://qazcorpus.kz/.

The National Corpus of the Kazakh Language has opened new opportunities for conducting various linguistic studies, including determining word frequency and valency, constructing semantic fields, performing statistical analyses, and developing linguistic models, among others. In this regard, the corpus-based analysis of folklore language–particularly the ethnocultural connotations found in fairy tales–represents one of the pressing research issues.

Folklore, and especially its distinctive genre of fairy tales, has consistently attracted scholarly interest in both linguistics and literary studies. This interest is not limited to examining the structural system of fairy tales, the diversity of characters, or the peculiarities of their plot development. It is also related to the fact that fairy tales vividly reflect the Kazakh national code–formed in the historical memory of the people over hundreds or even thousands of years and preserved to the present day. Today, corpus-based research on the language of Kazakh fairy tales is particularly relevant, as the study of a nation's worldview, culture, history, language, and knowledge accumulated over centuries is of great importance.

The purpose of this article is to systematize, analyze, and examine the ethnocultural connotation of "gold" in Kazakh fairy tales on the basis of corpus data. The research object of the article is the ethnocultural connotation of "gold," which occupies a significant place in Kazakh fairy tales.

As a result of the study, the ethnocultural connotation of "gold" in Kazakh fairy tales was analyzed and comprehensively examined using corpus-based methods.

II. Literature Review

In the XII century, the concept of "connotation" (Lat. *Connotare*) was frequently used by philosophers to explain the meaning of words in philosophical, logical, and theological discussions.

The term appears in the treatise "Summa Logicae", published in 1323 in Paris (France). The author of the treatise was the English philosopher, logician, and theologian William of Ockham (1288–1347). W. Ockham divided names into two types: "absolute names" and "connotative names." In the treatise, an "absolute name" refers to the primary meaning, that is, the object itself, whereas a "connotative name" denotes words expressing different or similar meanings. He included in this category proper names and words expressing various feelings and faculties of the soul (Ockham, 1957).

The English philosopher John Stuart Mill (1806–1873), in his work, published in 1843 "A System of Logic, Ratiocinative and Inductive: Being a Connected View of the Principles of Evidence and the Methods of Scientific Investigation", explained denotation as the extensional meaning of an object and connotation as its intensional meaning (Mill, 2008).

Later, in the XX century, foreign linguists such as Ch. Bally, V.V. Vinogradov, L. Hjelmslev, I.V. Arnold, R. Jakobson, R. Barthes, Eugenio Coseriu, E.M. Wolf, V.N. Telia, L.M. Vasilyev, U. Eco, O.G. Revzina, N.F. Alefirenko, G.I. Berestnev, V.I. Shakhovsky, Z.Z. Chanysheva, and others emphasized the inseparable connection between connotation and human cognitive activity.

Bykova (2005) notes that connotations, as mental units of a special level, are formed at the intersection of the world image in speakers' linguistic consciousness and the linguistic worldview. She also argues that ethnoconnotation, as a specific type of cultural connotation, includes heterochronous and heterofunctional features of an ethnoconnotat, reflecting the affiliation of a linguistic unit with a particular ethnocultural space in the consciousness of communicants (Bykova, 2005).

"Connotations are relatively unstable; they differ considerably according to culture and the experience of the individual" (Al-Ghoweri et al., 2021, p. 613). "Cultural connotations play a crucial role in the formation of word meanings by adding supplementary, often latent associations that reflect the historical, cultural and social characteristics of a society" (Pateev, 2025, p. 111).

In Kazakh linguistics, the theoretical issues of connotation have not been studied as an independent research object, which determines the relevance of investigating this phenomenon. The topic of connotation has been addressed in the works of B. Abilkasymov, E. Suleimenova, R. Syzdyk, S. Isaev, D. Alkebaeva, N. Uali, M. Orazov, G. Kaliyev, Zh. Mankeeva, O. Burkitov, B. Momynova, E. Abakan, R. Avakova, A. Salkynbay, G. Khasanov, and others, within the frameworks of linguopoetics, lexical semantics, secondary nomination, linguostylistics, and related fields.

III. Material and Methods

According to the anthropocentric paradigm in modern linguistics, language is not merely a means of communication but also a reflection of human cognition, perception, culture, life experience, and cognitive abilities. From this perspective, the study of folklore–considered a treasury of the Kazakh national code–and its corpus-based linguistic analysis are of significant scholarly interest.

In analyzing the ethnocultural connotation of "gold" in Kazakh fairy tales on a corpus basis, Volume 74 of the one-hundred-volume collection "Babalar Sözi" ("The Words of the Ancestors"), published in 2011, was used as the research material. This volume contains a collection of fairy tales. The texts included in the collection were taken without any modification from original manuscripts preserved in the archives of the M.O. Auezov Institute of Literature and Art and the Central Scientific Library, as well as from collections published in the XIX-XX centuries and from fairy tales recorded among Kazakh communities in China and Mongolia. The volume comprises 80 fairy tales of diverse themes.

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In the corpus-based analysis of the ethnocultural connotation of "gold" in Kazakh fairy tales, the following methods were employed: collection and systematization of linguistic data, frequency analysis, statistical analysis, and comparative analysis.

IV. Results and Discussion

"When a person perceives objects and phenomena in the surrounding world, emotions arise in their consciousness in relation to those objects or phenomena, and an evaluation of them is formed. A person conveys their subjective attitude, feelings, assessments, and positions toward the environment and surrounding phenomena through language. Without emotion and evaluation, meaning or language cannot possess completeness. In this regard, the expressive and evaluative function of language units in conveying human emotion is of great importance. From this perspective, identifying and systematizing the structure and types of ethnocultural connotation within the semantic space of folklore language also constitutes a subject of scholarly interest" (Zhuniskali et al., 2025, p. 106).

In our research, we aim to analyze and examine, on a corpus basis, the highly relevant issue of the ethnocultural connotation of "gold" in Kazakh fairy tales.

According to the "Concise Etymological Dictionary of the Kazakh Language": «1. Some researchers suggest that the word derives from the Mongolian *altın/ altin*, meaning "reddish copper"; 2. Others associate it with the word *al*, widely used in Turkic languages to denote "bright red, fire-like color," based on the color of gold; 3. Still others argue that the word *altın* originates from the Turkic word *alty* (six). It is known that in earlier periods various objects served as money among the peoples of Central Asia. For example, among the Mongols silk fabric functioned as currency, among the Altai peoples animal skins were used, and among certain Turkic peoples (such as the Bulgars) the value of goods was measured by six squirrel skins. Over time, the words *alty* (six) and *tiyin* (squirrel; later "coin") merged into *altın*, and when coinage appeared, a three-*tiyin altın* (later copper coin) was used as currency (especially in Russia and its dependent territories). For instance, in Russian altyshnik referred to a three-kopek coin and pyatialtyinnik to a fifteen-kopek coin. Later, when paper money replaced gold coins, the word altın returned from Russian in this modified form and in Turkic languages came to denote only the name of the precious metal (formerly associated with currency) (Iskakov et al., 1966, p. 35).

In the 40-million-word National Corpus of the Kazakh Language, 26,729 occurrences of the word *altın* ("gold") were identified (Main Corpus – 4,324; Dialect Subcorpus – 49; Cultural-Representative Subcorpus – 13,587; Terminological Subcorpus – 945; Educational Subcorpus – 309; Proverbs Subcorpus – 43; Historical Subcorpus – 307; Parallel Subcorpus – 275; Writers' Subcorpus – 1,620; Historical-Poetic Subcorpus – 396; Onomastic Subcorpus – 4,248; Advertising Texts Subcorpus – 48; Akhmet Baitursynuly Subcorpus – 108; Phraseological Subcorpus – 157; Contemporary Poetry Subcorpus – 262; Six-Language Parallel Subcorpus – 10; Oral Subcorpus – 41) (last accessed to https://qazcorpus.kz/: 03.02.2026).

In the Russian National Corpus, 335 texts and 908 examples containing the word "altın" were identified. In the corpus, the word was used in the meaning of "money, coin". In Russian literature, culture, and everyday life, "altın" was employed to denote material value and financial relations (last accessed to https://ruscorpora.ru/: 03.02.2026).

In the Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA), the word "altyn" occurred six times, all of which referred to texts connected with the Altyn-Tagh (Altun Tagh) mountain range of the Kunlun mountain system in Central Asia (last accessed to https://www.english-corpora.org/coca/: 03.02.2026).

In Volume 74 of the one-hundred-volume collection "Babalar Sözi" ("The Words of the Ancestors"), published in 2011 and containing Kazakh fairy tales, the word "altın" appears 400 times. Table 1 presents the frequency and percentage distribution of the word forms of "altın" in Kazakh fairy tales.

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TABLE 1
FREQUENCY OF THE WORD FORMS OF "GOLD" IN KAZAKH FAIRY TALES

Word Form	Frequency of use	Percentage	Example
Altın	308	77.0 %	«altyn saqina» ("gold ring"), «altyn tabaq» ("gold plate"), «altyn qapas» ("golden cage"), etc.
Altındy	34	9.0 %	«altyndy tauyp alady» ("finds the gold"), «altyndy äkelıp beredı» ("brings the gold"), etc.
Altın-kümis	15	3.7 %	«altyn-kümıs beremın» ("I will give gold and silver"), «altyn-kümıspen syilaidy» ("rewards with gold and silver"), etc.
Altınnan	10	2.5 %	«altynnan salynğan» ("built of gold"), «altynnan qaiyq jasaidy» ("makes a boat from gold"), etc.
Altınga	8	2.5 %	«altynğa ainalady» ("turns into gold"), «altynğa syimai ketedı» ("does not fit into gold"), etc.
Altınmen	6	1.5 %	«altynmen aptağan» ("decorated with gold"), «altynmen jalatqan» ("gilded with gold"), etc.
Altını	4	1.0 %	«balanyñ altyny» ("the child's gold"), «altyny men kümısı köp bolğan eken» ("had much gold and silver"), etc.
Altınnıñ	3	0.75 %	«altynnyñ buymen» ("with the vapor of gold"), «altynnyñ artynan qorqyp» ("fearing because of gold"), etc.
Altındap	3	0.75 %	«ışın de altyndap» ("gilding the interior"), «altyndap qarğy taqty» ("put on a gilded bridle"), etc.
Altındy (adj.)	2	0.5 %	«altyndy şymyldyq» ("golden curtain"), «altyndy besık» ("golden cradle")
Altındagan	2	0.5 %	«altyndağan aq otau» ("gilded white yurt"), «altyndağan ülken şahar» ("gilded great city")
Altındardy	2	0.5 %	«qalğan altyndardy» ("the remaining gold pieces"), «būl altyndardy» ("these gold pieces")
Altınım	1	0.25 %	«menıñ altynym» ("my golden one")
Altındarıñdy	1	0.25 %	«myna altyndaryñdy» ("your gold (pl.)")
Altınıñdy	1	0.25 %	«altynyñdy almaimyn» ("I will not take your gold")

As can be seen from Table 1, the word "altın" ("gold") is most frequently used in its root form without any affixes (77.0%). This demonstrates that in Kazakh fairy tales the word "altın" predominantly performs an attributive function, expressing a qualitative characteristic of an object. Among the case forms, the accusative case ("altındy", "altındardy", "altındarıñdy", altınıñdy) occurs more frequently with "altın" than the genitive, dative, ablative, or instrumental cases, while it is not used at all in the locative case. This indicates that in fairy tales the use of "gold" as an object of action ("found the gold," "brought the gold") prevails. Frequency analysis also shows that the verbal forms "*altındap"* ("to gild") and *"*altındagan" ("gilded") occur rarely in fairy tales. The compound word *"*altın-kümis" ("gold and silver") (3.7%) conveys not only the literal meaning of two precious metals but also reinforces the ethnocultural connotation of "all wealth, abundance, prosperity".

"Gold is one of the highly valued yellow precious metals with diverse meanings in traditional culture. Since gold is easy to process and highly resistant to environmental influences, it is used to produce decorative objects and to gild other metals… In Kazakh tradition, depending on its quality, quantity, and production technology, gold has several types: pure, alloy-free gold is called *ayırgan altın* and *qarq altın*. The word *qarq* historically meant uniform, without mixture. *Sap altın* (pure gold) and *sary altın* (yellow gold) denote refined gold. In the language of jewelers, terms such as *şi altyn, şym altyn, şymqai altyn, şyn altyn, şora altyn, ūrğaşy altyn* etc., indicate high quality" (Traditional System of Kazakh Ethnographic Categories, Concepts and Terms, 2011, p. 163).

In Volume 74 of the fairy tales collection from the one-hundred-volume edition "Babalar Sözi", only the phrase "shyn altın" ("true gold") appears among the types listed above. In the fairy tale "The Golden Bird and the Gray Wolf," it is stated: "The gray wolf galloped after the young man mounted on a truly golden-maned horse and the true tsar's daughter" (Babalar Sözi, 2011, p. 31). In this context, the phrase "shyn altın" carries the ethnocultural connotation of "genuine, authentic gold". In the fairy tale "Qaratai," the ethnocultural connotation of "pure, alloy-free gold" is conveyed by the phrase "nağız altın" ("real gold"): "He had built a magnificent palace and garden *of real gold*, inside of which there were wonders of every kind" (Babalar Sözi, 2011, p. 214).

The red variety of gold appears in the fairy tale "Qaramergen": "At one moment the door opened and a girl entered the house; her beauty was like the full moon, and her clothes were covered in *red gold*, whose radiance illuminated the dark house" (Babalar Sözi, 2011, p. 13). In the tale "Arzy the Merchant," the phrase occurs in the following excerpts: "Let us also take nine camels of *red gold* and divide them," "The people cured from illness gave them, as promised, nine camels and as much *red gold* as their horses could carry," "Mahmud's companions also took as much *red gold* as they needed" (Babalar Sözi, 2011, p. 44). In the tale "Zhana Mizandaran," it is stated: "From the land you sold, a jar of *red gold* was found; you had forgotten about that gold, so go and retrieve it" (Babalar Sözi, 2011, p. 356). In Kazakh culture and worldview, the color red carries both positive ethnocultural connotations–such as "strength, beauty, life, power, victory" – and negative ones, including "blood, danger, fire, flame, war". In the examples above, however, the connotative meaning of the phrase *red gold* is associated with "beauty" and "wealth".

"After being refined and processed, gold is cast into various forms, each with its own designation: a larger ingot is called altın *jamby* or *som altın* (also referred to as cast gold); a gold ingot the size of a horse's hoof is called *at tuyaq*; a

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slightly smaller one, comparable to a colt's hoof, is *tay tuyaq altın*; and a piece the size of a sheep's hoof is called *qoy tuyaq altın*. Smaller gold ingots also have specific names: a piece the size of a large button is called *tüime altın*; a coin cast in the shape of a sheep's head is known as *qoy bas dilda"*, and so on (Traditional System of Kazakh Ethnographic Categories, Concepts and Terms, 2011, p. 163). These types of gold, however, do not occur in the analyzed fairy tale collection.

Nevertheless, the phrase "at basınday altın" ("gold the size of a horse's head"), which carries the ethnocultural connotation of "great size; immense wealth; valuable gain," appears 14 times in Volume 74 of "Babalar Sözi". For example, in the tale "Altın Topai," it is said: "The rich man pleaded with the ogress: 'I will give you gold the size of a horse's head, just let him go'" (Babalar Sözi, 2011, p. 33). In "What Elemes Saw," we read: "When Elemes saw the gold and dug further, another piece of gold the size of a horse's head appeared" (Babalar Sözi, 2011, p. 129). In "The Wolf and the Young Man," it is stated: "When the executioners dragged the old fish from its place, gold the size of a horse's head lay beneath it" (Babalar Sözi, 2011, p. 196). The comparison of gold to the size of a horse's head in these examples is not accidental. In the Kazakh worldview, the horse is a sacred animal. At the same time, this comparison intensifies the ethnocultural connotation of "immeasurable wealth" in human consciousness. In fairy tales, the expression "gold the size of a horse's head" produces a far stronger expressive effect on the listener than simply saying "a lot of gold".

Words and phrases expressing quantitative and dimensional meanings are frequently used together with the word "altın" ("gold"). For example, in the fairy tale "Arzy the Merchant," the phrase "toğyz tüie altyn" ("nine camels of gold") appears: "Now that you have returned to your homeland, this girl and the nine camels of gold are yours" (Babalar Sözi, 2011, p. 45). In this excerpt, the phrase "nine camels of gold" reinforces the ethnocultural connotation of "great treasure, abundant wealth." Considering that one camel can carry approximately 200–300 kg of load, "nine camels of gold" would amount on average to more than two tons of gold, symbolizing immense wealth. The number nine also holds special sacred significance in the Kazakh worldview, representing completeness and ultimate fullness. Thus, "nine camels of gold" denotes not merely a quantity but the ultimate limit – "no greater wealth is possible". Its ethnocultural connotation can therefore be defined as "absolute wealth, the highest status".

In the fairy tale "The Poor Man's Three Sons," the phrase *"*tık tūrğan boiymdai altyn*"* ("gold as tall as my standing height") appears: "I will go and bring the girl, but give me gold as tall as my standing height," he says (Babalar Sözi, 2011, p. 138). In this context, the ethnocultural connotation of the phrase "gold as tall as my standing height" is associated with the "value of life" and "human freedom".

Kazakh fairy tales also contain expressions such as *"bır tabaq altyn"* ("one plate of gold"), *"on tabaq altyn"* ("ten plates of gold"), *"bır köterem tılla altyn"* ("one gold coin"), *"ekı etek altyn"* ("two hems full of gold"), *"jūdyryqtai altyn"* ("gold the size of a fist"), *"bır süiem altyn"* ("a span of gold"), and *"bır qap altyn"* ("a sack of gold"), all of which convey quantitative and dimensional meanings. For example, in the tale "The Bird of Fortune," it is said: "If my mother gives you *one plate of gold*, I will give you *ten plates of gold*," and when he spits on the ground, *ten plates of gold* fall from his mouth (Babalar Sözi, 2011, p. 164). In the tale "The King Who Had a Dream," we read: "The king rejoiced and said, 'This man is a learned saint,' and once again rewarded him with one gold coin and respectfully sent him on his way" (Babalar Sözi, 2011, p. 169). (Here, the word *tillä* is of Persian origin and means "gold coin" or "gold.") In the tale "Go There, Bring Here," it is stated: "The viziers, embarrassed before the king, took *two hems full of gold* and went around the city proclaiming: 'If anyone knows the road from which there is no return, we will give this gold'" (Babalar Sözi, 2011, p. 208). In "Akhmetzhan," we read: "One day, one of the shepherds found *gold the size of a fist*" (Babalar Sözi, 2011, p. 246). In "The Golden-Tailed Snake," the snake says: "From now on, I will give you *a span of gold* every day to atone for my guilt" (Babalar Sözi, 2011, p. 312). In "The Khan and the Young Man," it is stated: "When the ashes had cooled during the night, they placed a ring and *a sack of gold* into the young man's hands and buried them in the ashes" (Babalar Sözi, 2011, p. 338). These expressions – *one plate of gold*, *ten plates of gold*, *one gold coin*, *two hems full of gold*, *gold the size of a fist*, *a span of gold*, *a sack of gold* – are rooted in the traditional Kazakh system of measurement and quantity. They reinforce the ethnocultural connotations of "abundant wealth, great treasure, substantial gain, prosperity," while simultaneously conveying evaluative and expressive meaning.

The ethnocultural connotation of "altın" ("gold") in the Kazakh language functions both as a noun and as an adjective. Corpus analysis shows that in Kazakh fairy tales the ethnocultural connotation of "gold" occurs 35 times in a substantive (nominal) meaning and 99 times in an attributive (adjectival) meaning. These data indicate that in Kazakh fairy tales the ethnocultural connotation of "gold" is predominantly realized in its qualitative (adjectival) function. The corresponding quantitative data are systematically presented in Tables 2 and 3 of the study.

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TABLE 2
FREQUENCY OF THE SUBSTANTIVE (NOMINAL) USE OF THE ETHNOCULTURAL CONNOTATION OF "GOLD" IN KAZAKH FAIRY TALES

Word combination	Frequency of use	Percentage
At basyndai altyn (Gold the size of a horse's head)	14	40 %
Qyzyl altyn (Red gold)	5	14 %
Bır süiem altyn (A span of gold)	3	8.5 %
Bır tabaq altyn (One plate of gold)	2	5.7 %
On tabaq altyn (Ten plates of gold)	2	5.7 %
Bır qap altyn (A sack of gold)	2	5.7 %
Toğyz tüie altyn (Nine camels of gold)	1	2.85 %
Tık tūrğan boiymdai altyn (Gold as tall as my standing height)	1	2.85 %
Bır köterem tılla altyn (one gold coin)	1	2.85 %
Ekı etek altyn (Two hems full of gold)	1	2.85 %
Jūdyryqtai altyn (Gold the size of a fist)	1	2.85 %
Şyn altyn (true gold)	1	2.85 %
Nağyz altyn (real gold)	1	2.85 %
Total	**35**	

According to the data presented in Table 2, in Kazakh fairy tales the phrase "*at basyndai altyn*" ("gold the size of a horse's head") has a significantly higher frequency of usage compared to other word combinations. Today, the expression *"*at basyndai altyn*"* has largely fallen out of active use in the Kazakh language and has acquired an archaic character, since it represents a metaphorical figurative comparison typical of the nomadic way of life and rooted in everyday practical experience. Similarly, such expressions as "*bır tabaq altyn*" ("one dish of gold"), "*on tabaq altyn*" ("ten dishes of gold"), "*bır köterem tılla altyn*" ("one thin tilla gold"), "*ekı etek altyn*" ("two hems full of gold"), "*jūdyryqtai altyn*" ("gold the size of a fist"), "*bır süiem altyn*" ("a span of gold"), and "*bır qap altyn*" ("a sack of gold") are found only in folkloric texts. In contrast, the phrases "*qyzyl altyn*" ("red gold"), "*Şyn altyn*" ("true gold"), and "*nağyz altyn*" ("real gold") remain active lexical units in modern Kazakh. In Kazakh fairy tales, *"*Şyn altyn*"* and *"*nağyz altyn*"* reinforce the ethnocultural connotation of "pure, unalloyed, natural, of high quality, highly valuable," adding an evaluative nuance. The expression *"*qyzyl altyn*"* found in fairy tales denotes not only the color of gold but also carries the meaning "archaic: pure gold, unalloyed gold" (Dictionary of the Kazakh Literary Language, 2011).

TABLE 3
FREQUENCY OF ADJECTIVAL USAGE OF THE ETHNOCULTURAL CONNOTATION OF *"АЛТЫН"* IN KAZAKH FAIRY TALES

Word combination	Frequency of use	Percentage
Altyn jal (golden mane)	24	24.2 %
Altyn qūs (golden bird)	23	23.2 %
Altyn jylqy (golden horse)	11	11.1 %
Altyn köl (golden lake)	9	9 %
Altyn müiızdı (şūbar) kiık (golden-horned [spotted] saiga)	8	8.08 %
Altyn qūlyn (golden foal)	8	8.08 %
Altyn ağaş (golden tree)	7	7.07 %
Altyn terek (golden poplar)	3	3.03 %
Altyn su (golden water)	2	2.02 %
Altyn bäiterek (golden Baiterek)	1	1.01 %
Altyn tūlym (golden forelock)	1	1.01 %
Altyn şaş (golden hair)	1	1.01 %
Altyn qūiryqty aiğyr (golden-tailed stallion)	1	1.01 %
Total	**99**	

According to the data in Table 3, word combinations related to horses – *"altyn jal"* ("golden mane"), "altyn jylqy" ("golden horse"), "altyn qūlyn" ("golden foal"), and "altyn qūiryqty aiğyr" ("golden-tailed stallion") – are particularly frequent. For example, in the fairy tale "The Golden Bird and the Grey Wolf" we find: "If you accomplish this task, I will willingly give you *the horse with the golden mane* and the golden bridle" (Babalar sözi, 2011, p. 29). In the tale "The Treacherous Relative": "Their *golden horses* graze beneath that lake; each month they are brought back to the stable and returned again" (Babalar sözi, 2011, p. 264). In another episode: "When it foals near dawn, it gives birth to a fine *golden foal*" (Babalar sözi, 2011, p. 262). In the tale "The Wolf's Kindness": "He sees before him a stallion tied up, with a silver mane and a *golden tail*" (Babalar sözi, 2011, p. 328) and etc. The horse occupies a special place in traditional Kazakh culture as the most revered of the four types of livestock. In the life of nomadic Turkic peoples, the importance of the horse was immense... Its multifaceted role in the ethnos' existence profoundly influenced traditional beliefs, customs, and legal relations, elevating the horse to a cult status… Like other peoples, the Kazakhs regarded the horse as a gift from the Creator and as a symbol of the higher world. The ritual of *at tuldau* (removing a deceased person's horse from use) further demonstrates the deep connection between the ethnocultural community and the horse. In the mythopoetic consciousness of the ethnocultural collective, when the hero faces hardship, magical horses capable of speech and counsel appear (as in the tales "Er Töstik," "Altyn saqa," etc.). In epic and historical legends, such horses include Koblandy's Tayburyl, Alpamys's Baishubar, Kambar's Karakaska, as well as the steeds of later batyrs – Raiymbek's Kokoinak and Kabanbay's Qubas. In folkloric tradition, such extraordinary horses function as markers of the hero's bravery and immense power.

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(The Traditional System of Kazakh Ethnographic Categories, Concepts, and Terms, 2012, p. 516**)**. Since the Kazakh people regarded the horse as a sacred animal, in fairy tales it is often equated with gold, thereby reinforcing the ethnocultural connotation of "exceptionally valuable, sacred, incomparable, unique being".

The daily life, culture, and worldview of the Kazakhs were closely connected with nature and the surrounding environment; therefore, various animals, birds, and trees frequently appear in fairy tales, myths, and legends. In Kazakh fairy tales, the word combination with the highest frequency that contains the ethnocultural connotation of "gold" is "golden bird". For example, in the fairy tale *"*The Wolf's Kindness*"*, it is said: "The wolf and Saq came, found the nest among the reeds, and when they looked under the *golden bird*, they saw one large egg" (Babalar sözi, 2011, p. 331). In the fairy tale *"*The Golden Bird and the Grey Wolf*"*: "Once upon a time, a *golden bird* came to this garden" (Babalar sözi, 2011, p. 25), and "The two mounted the golden-maned horse and took the *golden bird* and the golden cage" (Babalar sözi, 2011, p. 31). The word combination "golden bird" in the Kazakh worldview denotes not only the color of the bird but also combines profound sacral and axiological meanings. In mythological consciousness, a golden-colored bird–such as the Samuryq bird, which connects the upper and lower worlds–frequently appears in Kazakh fairy tales. In these tales it is also called "zymyraq". In Volume 74 of Babalar sozi, which contains fairy tales, the word samuryq / samyryq occurs 37 times (in the tales *"*Bekbolat*"*, *"*Gül and Samyryq*"*), and "zymyraq" occurs 54 times (in the tales *"*The Bird from Whose Mouth Clusters of Flowers Fall When It Laughs and Strings of Pearls Fall from Its Eyes When It Cries*"*, *"*The Young Man Who Cast a Fishing Rod*"*). The word combination "golden bird" contains such ethnocultural connotations as "the bird of happiness that does not fall into everyone's hands," "the bird of dreams," "the bird of imagination," etc. This further demonstrates the close connection between human life, birds, and nature.

The ethnocultural connotations "Altyn köl" ("golden lake") and "altyn su" ("golden water") appear in the fairy tale *"*Külmeskhan, Äzimkhan, Aiazkhan*"*: "He came to the girl who had done him a favor earlier and told her that he was searching for the *golden lake*," and "After seeing the amulet, he gave his steed to Aiazkhan and explained how to retrieve the *golden lake*" (Babalar sözi, 2011, p. 334). In the fairy tale *"*Kün astyndağy Künıkei qyz*"* ("The Maiden Künikey Beneath the Sun"): "One bathed in *golden water*, the other in silver water," and "As he was walking, he saw a great Baiterek tree; at its foot there were two wells, in the first *golden water*, in the second silver water" (Babalar sözi, 2011, p. 123). The combination of the word "gold" with "lake" and "water" shows that in the Kazakh worldview water and lakes are perceived as "extremely valuable, sacred sources of life".

Among the Kazakhs, myths, fairy tales, and legends about sacred trees (terek, baiterek) have been preserved to this day. The frequent occurrence of the ethnocultural connotations "altyn ağaş" ("golden tree"), "altyn terek" ("golden terek") and altyn bäiterek ("golden baiterek") in fairy tales demonstrates that the Kazakh worldview, way of life, culture, and existence are closely connected with nature, particularly with trees. For example, in *"*The Maiden Künikey Beneath the Sun*"*: "There is also a beautiful *golden tree* growing deep underground; if you bring it and plant it before your palace, your splendor will increase even more" (Babalar sözi, 2011, p. 124). In the fairy tale *"*The Silent Stone*"*: "Second, let a *golden terek* be erected on the right side of the village. Third, let a spring flow beside the *golden terek*. Fourth, let every kind of wild animal in the world be tied to the *golden terek*" (Babalar sözi, 2011, p. 322). In *"*The Treacherous Relative*"*: "Take that bridle and go to the head of the lake; on its shore there stands a tall *golden baiterek*" (Babalar sözi, 2011, p. 264). In these tales, the "golden tree," "golden terek," and "golden baiterek" function as ethnocultural connotations expressing the unity and harmony between human beings and nature.

The mythozoonym "golden-horned (dappled) saiga" appears in *"*The Maiden Künikey Beneath the Sun*"*: "The boy presents the *golden-horned dappled saiga* to the khan" (Babalar sözi, 2011, p. 123), and in the fairy tale *"*The Golden-Horned Saiga*"*: "*The golden-horned saiga* suddenly turns into a white-bearded old man" (Babalar sözi, 2011, p. 240). This mythozoonym emerged from the Kazakh worldview and vivid imagination. The saiga in Kazakh culture, folklore, and consciousness is a sacred animal, a symbol of freedom, beauty, and purity; its horns are believed to possess healing power and cure various illnesses. Therefore, the Kazakhs did not regard saiga horns merely as natural objects but equated them with gold, highly valuing them. Gold itself was also used for medicinal purposes. People believed that drinking water from a golden vessel or from a vessel containing gold items was beneficial to health.

Since ancient times, the Kazakhs have believed in the magical power of hair and regarded it as sacred. The word combinations "Altyn tūlym" (golden braid) and "altyn şaş" ("golden hair" appear in the fairy tale *"*Omar and Gaziza*"*: "However, Gaziza did not follow her brother's advice; when she washed her head in running water, the *golden braid* attached to her hair fell off" (Babalar sözi, 2011, p. 96), and in *"*The Son of Khan Ushar*"*: "The fisherman who caught the *golden hair* presented it to the khan" (Babalar sözi, 2011, p. 155). Tūlym is a lock of hair left on both temples of a young girl; it is also called tūlym şaş, tūlymşaq. It is usually left when a girl turns one year old. This custom was performed as a protective ritual so that the girl would not be affected by the evil eye and would grow up beautiful and graceful. From that age, the girl's hair was not cut; the tulym left from infancy was later braided together with the grown hair, often decorated with beads or stones (The Traditional System of Kazakh Ethnographic Categories, Concepts, and Terms, 2017, p. 466). In the excerpt from "Omar and Gaziza*"*, the hair ornament itself is also called tulym. In *"*The Son of Khan Ushar*"*, the word combination "golden hair" indicates that hair was considered sacred, rare, precious, and worthy of being presented to a khan. The ethnocultural connotation of "golden hair" expresses not only its physical color but also its sacred and mystical nature.

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In the mythologies, folklore, worldviews, and cultures of many peoples, gold is associated with the Sun. For example, in Ancient Egypt, the Sun god Ra sails in a golden boat and warms the earth with his golden rays. In Chinese culture and philosophy, gold symbolizes not only wealth but also the emperor's "infinite power," "happiness," and "longevity". In the Ancient Greek myth of King Midas, gold acquires the connotations of "greed" and "insatiability". "The Bashkir anthroponymy reflects some ancient beliefs related to metals. For example, the word altyn 'gold' is closely associated with the upper world, that of the sky and the sun" (Khisamitdinova, 2016, p. 124).

"The attribute 'golden' is associated with magical objects and supernatural beings of the otherworld. In epic tales and folklore, magical items made of gold possess healing powers, which may be linked to the use of golden objects in the ritual and healing practices of the Altai people in the past. Gold is connected with ideas of supreme justice and divine grace, it is regarded asa primary measure and a symbol of wealth, power, and beauty" (Oinotkinova, 2021, p. 65).

In the Kazakh worldview, the ethnocultural connotation of "gold" signifies not only the metal and its color but also the most valuable things in human life. For example, "altyn uaqyt" ("golden time"), "altyn jürek" ("golden heart"), "altyn mınez" ("golden character"), "altyn jan" ("golden soul") etc. These ethnocultural connotations occupy a special place in Kazakh culture and worldview. The word "gold" conveys not only material wealth but also positive spiritual values.

In Kazakh culture, there are numerous proverbs related to gold: *A person is corrupted by words, gold by brass; Wisdom does not change, gold does not decay; Do not take gold, take wisdom; Gold is valuable in the marketplace; Gold does not lie on the ground, a bad master cannot find water; Even an angel may stray upon seeing gold; Gold is not valued while in hand; Gold is tested by fire, a person is tested in absence; Gold is stone, grain is food; Dig deep where gold is found; Gold is valued where it is found.* "These proverbs provide information about the ethnocultural significance of gold in traditional society and about the place of wealth and abundance within the moral and ethical norms of the nomadic environment. At the same time, the concept of gold was used in aesthetic and ethical senses. Calling someone "like gold" could both praise a girl's exceptional beauty and describe a person's nobility. For example, people refer to the descendant of a good person as "a fragment of gold," meaning the living trace of a worthy individual" (The Traditional System of Kazakh Ethnographic Categories, Concepts, and Terms, 2011, p. 163).

V. Conclusion

The study revealed that the ethnocultural connotation of "gold" in Kazakh fairy tales is multifaceted and wide-ranging. Through the ethnocultural connotation of words, the culture of a nation, the people's way of life, worldview, and cognitive perception are manifested.

The article provides a comprehensive corpus-based analysis of the ethnocultural connotation of "gold" in Kazakh fairy tales, supported by specific examples. In the course of the research, Volume 74 of the hundred-volume edition "Babalar sözi", which contains a collection of Kazakh fairy tales, was used as the primary source.

Based on the issues discussed in the article, the following conclusions were drawn:

- corpus-based analysis of the language of folklore, including ethnocultural connotations in fairy tales, is one of the pressing research issues;
- in the Kazakh worldview, ethnic culture, and folklore, the word "gold" possesses a distinctive connotative character;
- in the corpus-based analysis of the ethnocultural connotation of "gold" in Kazakh fairy tales, the methods of data collection, systematization, frequency analysis, statistical analysis, and comparative analysis were applied.

Thus, the study identified the unique features of the ethnocultural connotation of "gold" in Kazakh fairy tales through corpus analysis. The research findings may be applied in further theoretical and practical investigations within new directions of Kazakh linguistics, such as corpus linguistics, linguistic folkloristics, linguoculturology, ethnolinguistics, cognitive linguistics, and related fields.

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An Inquiry-Based Collaborative Writing and Assessment (IB-CWA) Prototype Model Supported by Digital Technology: Design, Validation, and Initial Practicality

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Abstract—**This study aims to develop the Inquiry-Based Collaborative Writing and Assessment (IB-CWA) prototype model supported by digital technology through a Design-Based Research (DBR) approach during the prototyping phase, which includes model design, expert validation, and initial practicality testing. The IB-CWA prototype model consists of six main phases, namely: (1) Orientation and Questioning, (2) Inquiry Exploration, (3) Collaborative Drafting, (4) Self and Peer-Assessment, (5) Revision and Publication, and (6) Reflection and Evaluation. The research involved lecturers, students, and experts who were purposively selected in accordance with the research stages. Data were collected through interviews, questionnaires, and expert validation sheets, and were subsequently analysed qualitatively and quantitatively using thematic analysis, descriptive statistics, and Aiken's V index. The research findings indicate that the prototype model possesses high levels of content and construct validity based on expert assessment, as well as high to very high levels of practicality based on the perceptions of lecturer and students. These findings indicate that the IB-CWA prototype model is suitable for use in further pilot testing and has the potential to be implemented in collaborative writing instruction in higher education. However, the model's effectiveness in improving writing and critical thinking skills still needs to be tested in subsequent assessment phases.**

Index Terms—**assessment for learning, collaborative assessment, collaborative writing, digital technology, inquiry-based learning**

I. Introduction

Academic writing and critical thinking skills are two key competencies in 21st-century learning that play a vital role in both academic and professional contexts. These two skills form the foundation for students to analyse information in depth, construct logical arguments, and respond to various issues in a reflective and evidence-based manner (Maharani & Santosa, 2025; Akib et al., 2024). However, several studies indicate that students' writing and critical thinking skills have not yet developed optimally and do not fully meet academic demands (Nabilah et al., 2025; Syahwalya et al., 2024; Rusmin et al., 2024; Patmasari et al., 2023).

This situation is influenced by several factors. Firstly, the learning approach still tends to be oriented towards one-way knowledge transfer, and therefore does not yet optimally facilitate cognitive engagement and the development of critical thinking (Wardani et al., 2024; Kamaruddin et al., 2021). Secondly, the use of digital technology in learning has not been pedagogically integrated, as it tends to function merely as a technical tool rather than as an integral part of a systematic learning design (Ebadijalal & Moradkhani, 2025; Patmasari et al., 2024). Furthermore, students still face difficulties in organising ideas coherently, developing evidence-based arguments, and revising their writing reflectively

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(Rayhan et al., 2025; Koswara et al., 2021). Limitations in providing constructive feedback and a lack of collaborative practice also pose obstacles to the development of these skills (Chingchit, 2024; Xiao & Lee, 2024; Wu & Schunn, 2021; Kuyyogsuy, 2019).

To address these issues, a learning approach is required that focuses not only on the written product, but also on the process of knowledge construction through inquiry, collaboration, and formative assessment. One relevant approach is the development of the Inquiry-Based Collaborative Writing and Assessment (IB-CWA) model, which integrates inquiry-based learning, collaborative writing, assessment for learning, and collaborative assessment within a single integrated learning framework (Siew & Chai, 2024; Nggawu et al., 2022). Within this framework, assessment for learning is positioned as an assessment function that supports the learning process in a formative manner, whilst collaborative assessment refers to an assessment mechanism involving interaction between students through the practice of self-assessment and peer-assessment. The integration of these two aspects enables assessment to function not only as an evaluation, but also as an integral part of the learning process.

Several previous studies have examined inquiry-based learning, collaborative writing, and collaborative assessment separately. Their findings indicate that inquiry-based learning has the potential to support the development of critical thinking and higher-order thinking skills (Kamaruddin et al., 2023; Sapriati et al., 2024; Arifin et al., 2025; Antonio & Prudente, 2024), whilst collaborative writing and collaborative assessment are reported to facilitate the process of sharing ideas, reflection, and improving the quality of writing (Taufiqulloh et al., 2024; Wonglakorn & Deerajviset, 2023; Coffin, 2020). On the other hand, research on computer-mediated collaborative learning has also explored the use of various digital platforms such as Trello, WeChat, and Google Docs to support learning interactions (Oluwajana et al., 2023; Ngai et al., 2019; Yan, 2019; Alwahoub et al., 2022). However, most of these studies still focus on partial implementation or on the effectiveness of specific technologies, without designing a learning model that systematically integrates the dimensions of inquiry, collaboration, and assessment into a single, complete learning cycle.

Considering this gap, this study offers a conceptual contribution through the development of an IB-CWA prototype model supported by digital technology that systematically integrates inquiry-based learning, collaborative writing, assessment for learning, and collaborative assessment into a coherent pedagogical design. The novelty of this study lies in: (1) the integration of these four components within a single structured learning cycle, (2) the positioning of assessment as an integrated process throughout the learning stages, and (3) the utilisation of digital technology as a pedagogical enabler that supports continuous collaboration, interaction, and reflection.

This research was conducted within the framework of Design-Based Research (DBR), which comprises three main stages: preliminary research, the prototyping phase, and the assessment phase. This article focuses specifically on the prototyping phase, which aims to produce a prototype learning model that meets the criteria of validity and practicality as a basis for further testing. Therefore, the objectives of this study are: (1) to design the IB-CWA prototype model supported by digital technology, (2) to examine the prototype model's validity through expert assessment, and (3) to evaluate the prototype model's initial practicality through limited implementation.

Theoretically, this study contributes to the development of literature regarding the integration of inquiry-based learning, collaborative writing, assessment for learning, and collaborative assessment within the context of digital technology-assisted learning. In practical terms, this study produces a validated prototype learning model with an initial level of practicality, which can serve as a basis for further testing in a broader implementation phase. Thus, the development of the IB-CWA prototype model supported by digital technology is considered relevant in supporting pedagogical transformation in the digital age, particularly in facilitating collaborative, reflective, and inquiry-based academic writing.

II. Method

A. Research Design

This study employed a Design-Based Research (DBR) approach, which emphasises the iterative and evidence-based design, development, validation, and refinement of learning models (Plomp, 2013). The approach aims to produce a learning model that is not only theoretically valid but also feasible for implementation in authentic learning contexts. Following Plomp's (2013) framework, the study consisted of three main phases: preliminary research, the prototyping phase, and the assessment phase. The preliminary research phase involved problem identification and needs analysis to establish the foundation for the model design. The prototyping phase focused on designing the initial prototype, conducting expert validation, and carrying out initial practicality testing with prospective users. The assessment phase, which will be conducted subsequently, aims to examine the effectiveness of the refined model in classroom practice.

The present article reports only the findings from the prototyping phase. Specifically, it presents the design of the Inquiry-Based Collaborative Writing and Assessment (IB-CWA) model supported by digital technology, the results of expert validation, and the findings of the initial practicality testing. The outcomes of this phase were directed towards producing a prototype that met the criteria of validity and practicality and could serve as the basis for effectiveness testing in the subsequent assessment phase.

B. Research Participants

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The participants in this study consisted of lecturers, students, and experts who were involved in accordance with the objectives of each research stage.

During the problem identification stage, interviews were conducted with six lecturers and eight students from three universities in Palu, Central Sulawesi, namely Universitas Tadulako, Muhammadiyah University of Palu, and UIN Datokarama Palu. During the needs analysis stage, data were collected via a questionnaire involving 50 lecturers and 100 students from these three universities.

The prototype model validation stage involved five experts comprising two English writing specialists, one English assessment specialist, and two learning technology specialists. Subsequently, in the initial practicality testing stage, participants consisted of one lecturer and 15 students currently undertaking writing courses to evaluate the ease of implementing the prototype model within a learning context.

C. Data Collection Techniques and Instruments

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and the distribution of questionnaires. The research instruments used comprised several components in line with the research stages. Firstly, interview guidelines were used in the preliminary research stage to identify issues and the experiences of lecturers and students in writing instruction. Secondly, a needs analysis questionnaire using a five-point Likert scale was used to measure the level of readiness and need for the development of the model. Thirdly, an expert validation sheet was used to assess the theoretical suitability, integration of components, and feasibility of implementing the prototype of the IB-CWA model supported by digital technology. Fourthly, a practicality questionnaire was used during the practicality testing stage to evaluate the clarity of the learning syntax, the ease of use of digital technology, and the usefulness of the model in supporting collaborative writing learning.

D. Data Analysis Techniques

Data were analysed in accordance with the stages within the Design-Based Research framework. During the preliminary research stage, interview data were analysed qualitatively using thematic analysis to identify patterns of problems and learning needs as the basis for model design development. Data from the needs analysis questionnaire were analysed descriptively and quantitatively to obtain an overview of users' readiness levels and needs regarding model development.

In the prototyping phase, data from expert validation were analysed using Aiken's V index to measure the level of agreement among evaluators regarding the relevance and consistency of the model's indicators. The validity categories refer to Aiken's V (Aiken, 1985), namely: $V < 0.40$ = low; $0.40 \leq V < 0.80$ = moderate; and $V \geq 0.80$ = high.

Furthermore, the practicality data were analysed descriptively and quantitatively using SPSS software to obtain mean values as the basis for determining the assessment categories. The criteria for interpreting mean values refer to Sugiyono (2019), namely: 1.00-1.79 = very low; 1.80-2.59 = low; 2.60-3.39 = moderate; 3.40-4.19 = high; and 4.20-5.00 = very high.

The findings from the validation and practicality testing stages were used as the basis for refining the prototype model before proceeding to the next testing stage within the DBR framework.

III. RESULTS

A. Design of the Inquiry-Based Collaborative Writing and Assessment (IB-CWA) Prototype Model Supported by Digital Technology

Based on the results of problem identification and the analysis of lecturers' and students' needs, the IB-CWA prototype model supported by digital technology was developed. This prototype model integrates inquiry-based learning, collaborative writing, assessment for learning, and collaborative assessment into a single integrated learning framework.

The IB-CWA prototype model consists of six main phases, namely: (1) Orientation and Questioning, (2) Inquiry Exploration, (3) Collaborative Drafting, (4) Self and Peer-Assessment, (5) Revision and Publication, and (6) Reflection and Evaluation. Each phase is designed with integrated components, including learning objectives, student learning activities, the lecturer's facilitative role, and digital technology support. The syntactic design of the IB-CWA prototype model supported by digital technology is presented in Table 1, while Table 2 presents its validated and refined syntax following expert review and revision.

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TABLE 1
SYNTAX OF THE IB-CWA PROTOTYPE MODEL SUPPORTED BY DIGITAL TECHNOLOGY

Phase	Objective	Student Activities	Lecturer's Role	Digital Technology Support
Orientation and Questioning	Activating prior knowledge and prompting critical questions.	Watching a video on a controversial issue, noting down key ideas, asking critical questions, discussing, reading examples of argumentative essays.	Playing videos, guiding observations, selecting relevant questions, presenting text examples, clarifying concepts.	Online video
Inquiry Exploration	Exploring and gathering relevant information.	Selecting a topic, searching for sources, reading, noting down facts and arguments, discussing in groups, formulating a position or stance on the issue.	Providing a list of topics, guiding the search for sources, facilitating class discussions.	Academic search engines
Collaborative Drafting	Drafting the first draft collaboratively.	Brainstorming ideas, creating an outline, writing a draft together.	Guiding the structure of the text, providing feedback on sentences and paragraphs.	Google Docs for collaboration
Self and Peer-Assessment	Evaluating and revising the writing based on reflection and peer feedback.	Conducting self-assessment, revising, assessing other groups' drafts, and discussing feedback.	Providing assessment guidelines, facilitating the exchange of drafts.	Google Docs for comments
Revision and Publication	Finalising the final draft and publishing it.	Revising according to the lecturer's feedback, proofreading, and uploading the final version.	Providing constructive feedback.	Google Docs, Microsoft Teams
Reflection and Evaluation	Reflecting on the learning process and outcomes.	Writing personal reflections and group discussions.	Facilitating reflection, offering appreciation and guidance.	

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TABLE 2
VALIDATED AND REFINED SYNTAX OF THE IB-CWA PROTOTYPE MODEL SUPPORTED BY DIGITAL TECHNOLOGY

Phase	Objective	Student Activities	Lecturer's Role	Digital Technology Support
Orientation and Questioning	Activating prior knowledge and stimulating the emergence of critical questions based on authentic issues.	Watching an interactive video presenting a controversial issue, identifying key ideas, answering questions embedded in the video, posing critical questions, discussing, and analysing examples of argumentative essays.	Facilitating the viewing of interactive videos, guiding students' focus, directing the questions asked, selecting relevant issues, and presenting and clarifying the structure and characteristics of argumentative essay texts.	Using interactive videos via Edpuzzle to insert questions, provide immediate feedback, and monitor student engagement.
Inquiry Exploration	Exploring and gathering relevant information as a basis for developing arguments.	Selecting a topic, searching for relevant sources of information, reading critically, noting down facts and supporting arguments, discussing in groups, and formulating a position or stance on the issue under consideration.	Providing alternative topics, guiding the process of source research, directing the evaluation of information credibility, and facilitating group and class discussions.	Using academic search engines such as Google Scholar to access relevant and credible scholarly sources.
Collaborative Drafting	Collaboratively drafting an initial draft as a basis for developing the written work.	Brainstorming ideas, drafting an outline, and writing an initial draft collaboratively in a group by dividing up writing roles and responsibilities.	Guiding the development of the text's structure, providing feedback on sentences and paragraphs, and ensuring the text has good coherence and cohesion.	Collaboration platforms such as Google Docs to support real-time collaborative writing.
Self and Peer-Assessment	Evaluating and revising the text based on reflection and peer feedback.	Conducting self-assessment of writing drafts, revising based on personal reflection, assessing other groups' drafts using established criteria, and discussing the feedback provided.	Provide guidance and assessment rubrics, guide the self- and peer-assessment process, and facilitate exchange and discussion between groups.	A collaborative platform such as Google Docs to provide comments, suggestions, and revisions directly.
Revision and Publication	Refining the writing and publishing the result to a wider audience.	Revising the draft based on feedback received, proofreading to ensure linguistic accuracy and correct formatting, and uploading or publishing the final version.	Provide further constructive feedback, ensure the final quality of the writing, and guide the publication or dissemination process.	Collaborative platforms such as Google Docs and Microsoft Teams for final revisions and sharing published results.
Reflection and Evaluation	Reflecting on the process and evaluating learning outcomes for continuous improvement.	Writing personal reflections on the learning process and outcomes, identifying strengths and weaknesses, and discussing in groups to share experiences and learning.	Facilitate the reflection process through prompting questions, acknowledging students' achievements, and providing guidance for future improvement.	Learning platforms such as Google Classroom or Padlet for writing and sharing reflections digitally.

This prototype model positions students as active learners (student-centred), who are involved in the process of problem identification, information exploration, knowledge construction, collaborative writing, and reflective assessment. Meanwhile, the lecturer acts as a facilitator who directs the inquiry process, mediates collaborative interactions, and provides formative feedback throughout the learning process.

B. Validity

Validity is a crucial stage in the development of a learning model to ensure the alignment of design, content, and instruments with academic and pedagogical standards. The validity of the IB-CWA prototype model supported by digital technology, along with the learning tools and assessment instruments, was assessed by five experts. The assessment focused on the alignment between the model's components, learning objectives, the principles of inquiry-based learning, and the characteristics of collaborative learning. The self-assessment rubric, peer-assessment rubric, and argumentative writing scoring rubric were adapted from the validated instruments developed by Thamrin (2023). Therefore, they did not require further validation. The results of the analysis using Aiken's V index indicate that all components fall within the high validity category, as presented in Table 3.

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TABLE 3
THE RESULTS OF VALIDITY ANALYSIS (AIKEN'S V)

Validated Aspects	V Value	Category
Prototype Model	0.926	High
Lesson Plan	0.920	High
Student Worksheets	0.951	High
Assessment Instrument	0.973	High
Overall Average	**0.943**	**High**

These findings indicate that the prototype model exhibits a high level of content and construct fit at the initial design stage, making it suitable for progression to the limited pilot phase. Nevertheless, the experts recommended several improvements, particularly regarding the clarity of the learning syntax, the operationalisation of inquiry steps, the alignment of objectives, activities and assessment, as well as guidelines for the use of digital technology to support collaborative writing and assessment. Based on this feedback, revisions were made by clarifying the syntax of the IB-CWA prototype model, strengthening the implementation of inquiry-based collaborative learning, aligning learning constructs and assessment, and simplifying the digital technology guidelines to make them more operational. Following the revisions, the prototype model was deemed to meet content and construct validity and is ready for use in a pilot study.

C. Practicality

Practicality aims to assess the ease of implementing the IB-CWA prototype model supported by digital technology from the users' perspective, including both lecturer and students. The aspects measured include ease of use, clarity of guidance, time efficiency, and the accessibility of features in supporting the learning process. The measurement of practicality covers not only the prototype model but also the learning tools and assessment instruments to obtain a comprehensive picture of feasibility.

Assessment was conducted via a Likert scale questionnaire (1-5) administered to 15 students and one lecturer. The results of the student practicality questionnaire analysis are presented in Table 4, whilst the results of the lecturer practicality questionnaire analysis are presented in Table 5.

TABLE 4
RESULTS OF THE STUDENT PRACTICALITY QUESTIONNAIRE ANALYSIS

Aspects Assessed	Average	Category
Prototype Model	3.70	High
Lesson Plan	4.13	High
Student Worksheets	4.09	High
Assessment Instrument	4.02	High
Overall Average	**3.94**	**High**

TABLE 5
RESULTS OF THE LECTURER PRACTICALITY QUESTIONNAIRE ANALYSIS

Aspects Assessed	Average	Category
Prototype Model	4.40	Very High
Lesson Plan	4.55	Very High
Student Worksheets	4.72	Very High
Assessment Instrument	4.67	Very High
Overall Average	**4.59**	**Very High**

Overall, the findings indicate that the IB-CWA prototype model supported by digital technology has a level of practicality falling within the high to very high category. From the lecturer's perspective, the prototype model is viewed as systematic and relatively easy to implement in a learning context, whilst from the students' perspective, this prototype model facilitates collaborative learning and enables the integration of digital-based writing and assessment processes. These findings indicate that the prototype model has an adequate level of feasibility for use in further pilot testing.

IV. DISCUSSION

A. Design of the Inquiry-Based Collaborative Writing and Assessment (IB-CWA) Prototype Model Supported by Digital Technology

The IB-CWA prototype model supported by digital technology is designed to facilitate the development of students' academic writing and critical thinking skills through the integration of inquiry-based learning, collaborative writing, assessment for learning, and collaborative assessment. This model positions students as active researchers who explore authentic issues, write collaboratively, and conduct self- and peer-assessment using validated rubrics. The use of digital technology serves as a tool to support collaboration, communication, and the publication of written work, thereby creating a learning process that is constructive, reflective, and aligned with the demands of 21st-century skills.

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The results of the development indicate that this prototype model comprises six mutually integrated learning phases, namely: (1) Orientation and Questioning, (2) Inquiry Exploration, (3) Collaborative Drafting, (4) Self and Peer-Assessment, (5) Revision and Publication, and (6) Reflection and Evaluation. These six phases form a systematic sequence designed to facilitate academic writing and critical thinking through a collaborative, inquiry-based approach supported by digital technology.

The first phase, Orientation and Questioning, aims to establish a meaningful learning context and foster students' curiosity regarding authentic issues. Students engage in activities such as watching videos, reading sample texts, and discussing to identify problems relevant to both academic and social contexts. Through this process, students develop the ability to ask critical questions and formulate the focus of their inquiry. The lecturer acts as a facilitator by providing learning stimuli, guiding discussions, and helping students formulate questions. This phase facilitates cognitive engagement and problem ownership as the foundation for critical thinking. The use of multimedia stimuli in this phase is supported by previous research indicating that the use of multimedia in the early stages of inquiry can support student motivation and engagement (Hinostroza et al., 2024).

The second phase, Inquiry Exploration, aims to guide students in conducting an in-depth investigation into the problem that has been formulated. Students collect, analyse, and evaluate information from various sources to obtain relevant data and arguments. This activity contributes to strengthening digital literacy and facilitates the process of critical thinking. The lecturer guides source searches, directs credibility assessments, and facilitates discussions. The emphasis on digital inquiry and evidence evaluation in this phase supports previous research, which also reported that the use of digital sources enables more effective and efficient exploration and contributes to the development of evidence-based reasoning and higher-order thinking skills (Deng et al., 2019; Dehghanzadeh et al., 2024).

The third phase, Collaborative Drafting, aims to produce an initial draft of an academic paper collaboratively. Students brainstorm, outline, and write the draft together in groups. This collaboration facilitates academic communication, enables the exchange of ideas, and supports shared responsibility for the quality of the writing. The lecturers guide the structure of the writing, provide feedback, and ensure coherence and cohesion. The use of platforms such as Google Docs enables real-time shared authorship. The integration of collaborative technologies in this phase is consistent with previous studies showing that technology-based collaboration can support writing awareness and learning motivation (Alsahil, 2024; Alharbi, 2019).

The fourth phase, Self and Peer-Assessment, aims to develop the quality of writing through self-assessment and peer-assessment. Students carry out self-assessment, evaluate other groups' work using a rubric, and discuss feedback constructively. This activity facilitates metacognitive awareness and supports collective responsibility. The lecturer provides rubric guidelines and facilitates the assessment process. This phase is in line with previous research indicating that peer assessment using clear rubrics can support reflective skills and the quality of written revisions (Ortega-Ruipérez & Correa-GorospeJosé, 2024).

The fifth phase, Revision and Publication, aims to refine and publish the final written work. Students revise their drafts based on feedback and carry out proofreading prior to publication. The lecturer provides further feedback and guides the dissemination process. The use of technology such as Google Docs and Microsoft Teams enables the revision and publication process to proceed more effectively. The emphasis on revision through feedback and rubric-guided evaluation in this phase is supported by previous research indicating that the integration of feedback and the use of rubrics can contribute to the quality of writing (Panadero et al., 2024; Taufiqulloh et al., 2024; Panadero et al., 2023).

The sixth phase, Reflection and Evaluation, aims to reflect on the process and evaluate the learning outcomes. Students review all stages of the learning process to identify developments in their writing and critical thinking skills through individual reflection and group discussions, whilst the lecturer facilitates this reflection and provides guidance for continuous improvement. This activity fosters metacognitive awareness and helps students understand the interconnection between inquiry, collaboration, and assessment as an integrated learning process. Previous research indicates that structured reflection through group discussions and reflective journals can contribute to students' self-awareness and critical thinking skills, whilst reflection within a collaborative context supports shared responsibility and a culture of reflective learning in academic settings (Chen & Chen, 2025a; Yang et al., 2024). Consequently, this phase is positioned as the culmination of a constructive learning cycle.

Overall, the IB-CWA prototype model forms a constructive, collaborative, and reflective learning cycle supported by digital technology. Each phase is designed to complement one another in facilitating the development of academic writing and critical thinking skills as 21st-century competencies.

Although various previous studies have examined inquiry-based learning, collaborative writing, and assessment for learning, the majority of studies still focus on the partial implementation of each approach (Kamaruddin et al., 2023; Taufiqulloh et al., 2024; Wonglakorn & Deerajviset, 2023). Several studies have also integrated digital technology into writing instruction, but tend to treat it as a tool rather than an integral part of the pedagogical design (Oluwajana et al., 2023; Yan, 2019; Alwahoub et al., 2022). Furthermore, research on peer assessment generally emphasises the evaluative aspect, without explicitly linking it to the inquiry cycle and the collaborative writing process as a whole.

In contrast to these studies, the IB-CWA prototype model in this research was designed to systematically integrate the four main components, inquiry-based learning, collaborative writing, assessment for learning, and collaborative assessment, into a single, holistic and interrelated learning cycle. This integration positions assessment not merely as a

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final stage, but as a process distributed across every phase of learning, particularly through structured self- and peer-assessment mechanisms.

Furthermore, the novelty of this model lies in the role of digital technology, positioned as a learning enabler, which facilitates continuous collaboration, interaction, and publication at every stage. Thus, the IB-CWA prototype model offers a more comprehensive and integrated pedagogical framework compared to previous approaches, particularly within the context of collaborative and inquiry-based academic writing in higher education.

B. Validity

Validation results indicate that the IB-CWA prototype model supported by digital technology has met the feasibility criteria from pedagogical, assessment, and technological perspectives. These findings suggest that all components of the model possess a high level of validity, meaning the developed design aligns with the principles of inquiry-based learning and collaborative learning, whilst meeting the criteria for content and construct validity at the initial development stage.

The high validity scores of the assessment instruments demonstrate consistency between the assessment approach and the learning objectives focused on the collaborative writing process. Furthermore, the coherence between the lesson plans, student worksheets, and assessment instruments indicates adequate pedagogical integration, particularly in linking learning activities, the inquiry process, and authentic assessment practices within a coherent learning framework.

The integration of digital technology into this prototype model serves not only as technical support but is also positioned as an element that facilitates the implementation of collaborative learning and assessment in a more systematic manner. Thus, the IB-CWA prototype model can be seen as having the potential for use in the context of structured, digital technology-assisted collaborative writing instruction. However, these findings are still limited to the expert validation stage.

Overall, the validation results provide an initial basis suggesting that the IB-CWA prototype model is worthy of further testing in a limited implementation phase to examine its practicality and potential feasibility in a real-world learning context. These findings align with previous research indicating that technology-assisted inquiry-based collaborative learning has the potential to support the development of scientific skills and argumentative abilities, whilst collaborative assessment can contribute to the quality of students' writing performance (Chen & Chen, 2025b; Taufiqulloh et al., 2024). Furthermore, the collaborative process writing approach is reported to facilitate the development of writing skills, whilst collaborative writing practices are considered important from both the lecturers' and students' perspectives (Wonglakorn & Deerajviset, 2023). This alignment indicates that the integration of inquiry, collaboration, and digital technology within the IB-CWA prototype model is situated within a relevant theoretical and empirical framework.

Furthermore, the validity of the learning materials and assessment instruments indicates that the lesson plans, student worksheets, and assessment instruments have met the criteria for validity and are suitable for use in the limited pilot phase. These tools are designed to support the structured implementation of inquiry-based and collaborative learning, and are consistent with previous research findings that emphasise the importance of validated learning tools and assessment instruments in supporting the quality of technology-based learning processes (Oluwajana et al., 2023; Ngai et al., 2019; Yan, 2019; Alwahoub et al., 2022).

Thus, these validation results can be positioned as an initial conceptual and empirical foundation for the development of the IB-CWA prototype model, whilst also opening up scope for further testing at the implementation stage to obtain evidence of its practicality and potential contribution within a broader learning context. However, these validation results are still limited to expert validation and do not yet reflect the dynamics of implementation in real classrooms. Furthermore, the relatively limited number of validators may affect the generalisability of the findings, necessitating further testing in more diverse contexts.

C. Practicality

The practicality results indicate that the IB-CWA prototype model supported by digital technology is perceived as practical by users, both lecturer and students. These findings suggest that the prototype model's design has taken into account aspects of usability, procedural clarity, and implementation efficiency within a technology-based learning context.

The high level of practicality in the students' assessments suggests that the prototype model is relatively easy to follow and facilitates engagement in collaborative writing activities. The clarity of the lesson plans and student worksheets indicates support for the smooth implementation of inquiry stages and the collaborative process among students. These findings align with the principle of instructional clarity in instructional design, which plays a role in reducing potential confusion and supporting the effectiveness of the learning process (Morrison et al., 2019).

Furthermore, the IB-CWA prototype model also demonstrates efforts to maintain a balance between task complexity and the achievement of learning objectives. This is relevant to the principle of cognitive load management, which emphasises the importance of managing cognitive load so that students can focus their attention on critical thinking and academic writing without experiencing excessive strain (Sweller, 2020).

From the lecturer's perspective, the very high level of practicality indicates that the prototype model is relatively easy to implement and supports efficiency in the management of learning and assessment. The integration of digital

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technology helps organise the writing and assessment processes more systematically, potentially reducing the operational burden in collaborative learning.

Nevertheless, some adjustments are still required to make the prototype model more adaptable to varying classroom conditions and potential technical constraints. This aligns with the findings of previous research emphasising the importance of flexibility in the application of digital-based learning models to ensure they can still be implemented in diverse contexts (Afonso et al., 2025).

Overall, these findings regarding usability indicate that the IB-CWA prototype model supported by digital technology has an adequate level of feasibility from the users' perspective. The usability identified from the perspective of students and lecturer provides an initial indication of the prototype model's potential for implementation in collaborative writing instruction. These findings are consistent with the principles of Design-Based Research, which prioritise practicality and applicability as key indicators before a model is tested further in a broader context (Kirchner, 2025). However, these findings regarding practicality are still based on a limited number of respondents and an initial implementation context, so they must be interpreted with caution. Therefore, further testing on a larger scale is required to obtain a more comprehensive picture of practicality.

V. Conclusion

The research findings indicate that the IB-CWA prototype model has met the criteria for content and construct validity based on expert assessment, and demonstrates a level of practicality ranging from high to very high from the perspective of lecturer and students. These findings suggest that the prototype model design possesses theoretical soundness and initial feasibility in the context of collaborative writing-based learning.

Furthermore, the IB-CWA prototype model offers a conceptual contribution through the integration of the four main components into a single, complete learning cycle, with assessment positioned as a distributed element across each phase of learning. The role of digital technology in this model is also positioned as an enabler that supports collaboration, interaction, and continuous reflective processes.

Nevertheless, the findings of this study are still limited to the expert validation and initial practicality testing stages, and therefore do not yet reflect the model's effectiveness in improving writing and critical thinking skills empirically. Consequently, further research is required to test the model's effectiveness through implementation on a larger scale and within diverse learning contexts.

Theoretically, this study contributes to strengthening an integrative framework between inquiry-based learning, collaborative writing, and collaborative assessment within the context of digital technology-assisted learning. Practically, the IB-CWA prototype model has the potential to serve as a guide for lecturers in designing more structured, collaborative, and reflective writing instruction. These findings also provide a basis for the development of more adaptive and contextual technology-based pedagogical interventions in higher education.

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An Appraisal Analysis of Affect in Vietnamese Journalistic Commentary: A Case Study of *Tuoi Tre* and *Nhan Dan* Newspapers

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***Abstract*—Appraisal theory, developed by Martin and White (2005) based on Halliday's Systemic Functional Linguistics, has increasingly demonstrated its potential in discourse analysis studies. This study applies the Appraisal theory to identify and interpret realizations of *Affect* in 40 commentaries in *Tuoi Tre* and *Nhan Dan* newspapers during the COVID-19 pandemic on the following issues: healthcare, education, economics, and tourism. Rather than treating the two newspapers as isolated objects of comparison, the study approaches them as case studies representing different institutional journalistic voices, aiming to elucidate patterns of evaluative language use in Vietnamese journalistic commentary discourse. Findings show that *Affect* is mobilized as a strategic discursive resource to construct stance, organize interpersonal relations, and enact persuasive strategies directed at the public.**

***Index Terms*—appraisal theory, affect, attitude, commentary discourse, Vietnamese journalistic**

I. Introduction

In the context of the rapid development of digital media, journalism continues to affirm its important role in reflecting social reality and shaping public opinion. Not merely functioning as a channel of information dissemination, journalism also serves as a forum for the exchange of ideas, where attitudes, emotions, and viewpoints are expressed in response to major societal issues. Within the system of journalistic genres, commentary occupies a distinctive position as it combines informational and analytical functions with the expression of evaluative meanings and institutional stance. Commentary integrates rational analysis with emotional appeal to persuade readers and shape social stance.

From the Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) perspective, Appraisal Theory (Martin & White, 2005) offers an effective framework for investigating how attitudes and stance are constructed in discourse. Within this framework, the subsystem of *Affect* functions as a key evaluative resource that enables journalists to express their viewpoints, evoke empathy, alignment or contestation among the public, thereby construing interpersonal relations with readers and enhancing the persuasive force of the text.

A. Problem Statement

In Vietnamese journalism, commentary is a genre that clearly demonstrates the role of evaluative language in constructing stance and shaping public opinion. Although previous studies have examined Vietnamese journalistic commentary from a variety of perspectives (Dung, 2008; Chuyen, 2014), they have generally focused on ideational meaning and argumentation, while the examination of *Affect* as a systematic evaluative linguistic resource remains limited. This research gap becomes even more noticeable in the diverse context of Vietnamese journalism, where media organizations differ in their missions, roles, and target audiences.

These institutional differences may imply the existence of different styles and strategies for expressing emotion within the same genre of journalistic commentary, which has not yet been systematically examined from a functional linguistic perspective. Addressing this gap, the present study examines the subsystem of *Affect* in print newspaper commentaries in *Tuoi Tre* and *Nhan Dan* as representative case studies, aiming to clarify the use of evaluative language in Vietnamese journalistic commentary discourse. Specifically, this study focuses on the subsystem of *Affect* within the category of *Attitude* in a corpus of forty print newspaper commentaries published in *Tuoi Tre* and *Nhan Dan*, addressing four major issues during the COVID-19 pandemic: healthcare, education, economics, and tourism.

B. Objectives of the Study

This study aims to:

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1. Describe and analyse resources for *Affect* realizations in Vietnamese journalistic commentary discourse, based on case studies from *Tuoi Tre* and *Nhan Dan* newspapers.
2. Identify tendencies in the employment of evaluative language to fulfil interpersonal functions in commentary discourse, thereby revealing stylistic differences associated with different institutional journalistic orientations.
3. Based on these analyses, outline key stylistic features of evaluative language in Vietnamese journalistic commentary discourse.

C. Research Questions

1. What resources are employed to realize *Affect* in Vietnamese journalistic commentary discourse?
2. How do similarities and differences in the expression of *Affect* across journalistic voices with different institutional orientations reflect commentary styles and persuasive strategies toward readers?
3. Based on the case studies, what stylistic characteristics of evaluative language can be identified in Vietnamese journalistic commentary discourse?

D. Significance of the Study

This study aims to extend the application of Appraisal Theory to the analysis of Vietnamese journalistic discourse by positioning *Affect* as a strategic discursive resource. Through a comparative analysis of COVID-19–related commentaries in the two newspapers, the study demonstrates that the selection and distribution of *Affect* resources are closely associated with each newspaper's communicative goals and social roles, thereby elucidating the relationship between *Affect,* discursive stance, and institutional context.

E. Theoretical Framework

(a). Overview of Appraisal Theory

Developed within the theory of Systemic Functional Linguistics, Appraisal Theory is a functional model concerned with interpersonal meaning at the discourse-semantic level. The Appraisal framework provides a systematic account of the linguistic resources through which evaluative meanings are construed in discourse. Martin and White (2005) argue that evaluative language extends the interpersonal metafunction by enabling speakers and writers to express stance and negotiate interpersonal relationships. They classify the Appraisal framework into three interrelated systems: *Attitude* (expressing emotions and positive or negative evaluations), *Engagement* (sourcing voices and negotiating dialogic space), and *Graduation* (adjusting the intensity or degree of evaluation). Within *Attitude*, three subsystems are identified: *Affect* (emotions), *Judgement* (evaluation of behaviour), and *Appreciation* (evaluation of things and phenomena). This study focuses on the *Affect* subsystem, which concerns the representation of individuals' positive and negative emotional responses to ongoing events and entities in their environment.

(b). Affect Subsystem

Affect refers to the expression of positive and negative feelings of individuals, such as happiness or sadness, and confidence or anxiety. Authorial *Affect* refers to the authors' own emotional responses to events and entities, whereas non-authorial *Affect* captures the emotions of other participants in the discourse as observed and reported by the authors.

Martin and White (2005, p. 35) classify *Affect* into four categories: *inclination*, *happiness*, *security*, and *satisfaction*. Each category is construed along a positive–negative polarity, forming pairs of contrasting emotional meanings, including *inclination/ disinclination*, *un/ happiness*, *in/ security*, *dis/ satisfaction*.

Dis/inclination concerns emotions related to wishes and desires, such as *miss*, *wish*, *long for/neglect*, *reject.*

Un/happiness concerns emotions related to affairs of the heart, such as *happiness*, *smile*, *joy/sadness*, *hate.*

In/security concerns emotions related to feelings of *safety* and *confidence*, or, conversely, *anxiety* and *fear*.

Dis/satisfaction includes emotions related to the fulfilment or frustration of goals, such as *satisfaction*, *comfort*, *boredom*, and *frustration*.

Each of these emotional states is realized through a system of lexico-grammatical resources, including words, phrases, and sentence types.

(c). Resources for Realizing Attitude

The term "*resources*" refers to the elements, means or conditions necessary to perform an activity, achieve a goal, or maintain a system. Resources may exist in different forms depending on the field of research and application. In linguistics, resources are understood as the set of linguistic means that enable individuals to construe and communicate meaning in discourse.

Language is structured into multiple strata, including: (1) phonology, which concerns sounds and pronunciation; (2) lexis, which comprises words and their meanings; (3) grammar, which involves the rules governing the formation of words and sentences; and (4) discourse, which refers to the organization and use of language in specific communicative contexts. Each of these strata provides corresponding resources: (1') phonological resources, including such means as phonemes, syllables, and intonation; (2') lexical resources, realized through words (in terms of word formation and word classes) and fixed expressions; (3') grammatical resources, consisting of linguistic means such as free word combinations (understood as combinations of words in coordination and subordination) and sentence types; and (4') rhetorical resources,

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which encompass a set of devices and stylistic strategies that enable speakers or writers to express meaning in a vivid, persuasive, and expressive manner.

Each language possesses its own evaluative resources. Although Martin and White have examined these resources in English, typological differences across languages mean that evaluative resources in Vietnamese do not fully correspond to those in English. Based on an examination of the corpus, we find that the expression of *Attitude* in commentaries in *Tuoi Tre* and *Nhan Dan* is realized through lexicogrammatical resources, specifically through such linguistic means as words, free word combinations, and sentence types:

- Words are analysed in terms of word formation, word classes, and fixed lexical combinations.
- Free word combinations are understood as combinations of words formed through coordination and subordination.
- Sentence types in the corpus are classified according to communicative purposes.

II. Literature Review

Over the past two decades, Appraisal Theory has been widely applied in a wide range of research domains. In political discourses, studies have focused on how politicians employ evaluative language to construct self-image, legitimize authority, and position opponents (Jalilifar & Savaedi, 2012; Ni & Tao, 2009). These studies demonstrate that evaluative language functions as a strategic instrument for shaping public attitudes and emotions. In the field of education, Appraisal Theory is applied to examine classroom discourse, academic writing, and teaching materials, thereby clarifying how teachers and learners express attitudes, make arguments, and demonstrate levels of academic commitment (Coffin, 2006; Guan, 2009; Hood, 2010; Hu & Choo, 2015). These studies highlight the role of evaluative language in developing learners' reasoning and critical thinking skills.

In translation studies, Appraisal Theory has primarily been employed to investigate how attitudes, stances, and emotions are transferred from source language to target language, particularly in political, journalistic, and literary translation (Munday, 2018; Liu & Yu, 2021; Xu & Wang, 2017). These works indicate that translators do not merely reproduce informational content but actively adjust evaluative tone and stance in accordance with the target sociocultural context. In journalism and media studies, Appraisal Theory has been considered as an effective tool for analysing how news discourse simultaneously constructs an appearance of objectivity while expressing its stance and shaping public opinion. Studies by White (1998) demonstrate that evaluative language plays a central role in organizing journalistic voice, managing heteroglossia, and persuading audiences.

As shown, Appraisal Theory has been developed and refined for nearly two decades, and it is no longer a new research direction in applied linguistics. Due to its flexibility and adaptability across various communicative contexts, the framework has shown its potential for application to discourse analysis in less explored languages such as Vietnamese. In Vietnam, the application of Appraisal Theory, based on the SFL approach, remains relatively novel. The doctoral dissertation by Sao (2010) is considered a pioneering study applying the Appraisal Framework to investigate the interpersonal metafunction in international news and reportage in both Vietnamese and English newspapers. Subsequently, several follow-up studies have investigated different systems of the Appraisal framework across various corpora, including journalistic discourse, academic discourse, and Vietnamese–English contrastive analyses (Hien, 2017; Hong, 2023; Lan, 2026; Trang, 2020; Hau, 2025). Overall, these studies have contributed to demonstrating the adaptability of the Appraisal Framework to Vietnamese and identifying differences in evaluative resources between Vietnamese and English. However, most research has concentrated on broad systems (Attitude, Engagement, and Graduation) and on cross-linguistic comparisons, while in-depth investigation of a specific subsystem, particularly *Affect,* within a clearly defined journalistic genre remains limited.

An overview of both international and Vietnamese studies reveals that, although Appraisal Theory has been widely employed in journalistic discourse analysis, the *Affect* subsystem has not received proportional attention, especially in journalistic commentary research. Moreover, within the context of Vietnamese journalism, which is characterized by diverse institutional orientations, very few studies have examined the use of *Affect* in relation to journalistic voice and the social roles of different media organizations. This gap becomes even more salient in times of social crisis, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, when emotion functions not merely as an individual reaction but as a strategic discursive resource for shaping public perception and social behaviours.

Against this backdrop, the present study focuses on the *Affect* subsystem in Vietnamese journalistic commentary discourse through a comparative analysis of commentaries published in *Tuoi Tre* and *Nhan Dan* newspapers. By doing so, it aims to elucidate the relationship between *Affect*, discursive stance, and institutional orientation in contemporary media practice in Vietnam.

III. Methodology

A. Data Collection

The corpus of the study consists of 40 commentary articles published in *Tuoi Tre* and *Nhan Dan* between January and June 2022. Articles were selected from relevant sections of each newspaper and covered four thematic domains related to the COVID-19 pandemic: health, education, economy, and tourism. Each thematic group consists of five articles from

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each newspaper, ensuring a balanced distribution and comparability of content. Although both *Tuoi Tre* and *Nhan Dan* are published in print and electronic formats, the present study focuses on the print versions to ensure textual stability and avoid potential changes resulting from post-publication updates or revisions.

B. Theoretical Framework

This study draws on Appraisal Theory (Martin & White, 2005), focusing on the *Affect* subsystem of *Attitude*. *Affect* is analysed in terms of emotion types (Un/Happiness, In/Security, Dis/Satisfaction, and Dis/Inclination), polarity (positive/negative), and sources of appraisal (authorial/non-authorial). The analysis is limited to inscribed *Affect* and does not examine invoked appraisal resources.

C. Data Analysis Procedures

The analysis was conducted through a combination of discourse analysis, descriptive and statistical methods, and comparative analysis to elucidate how emotions are expressed in the commentary discourse of the two newspapers. After selection, each sentence and paragraph in the corpus was carefully examined and annotated for potential expressions of emotion. The identification and classification process was conducted in the following steps:

(1) identifying *Affect* expressions based on linguistic criteria such as part of speech, syntactic structure, and semantic features;

(2) classifying these expressions according to the four *Affect* emotional pairs and additional criteria (polarity, sources of appraisal, and modes of realization);

(3) coding the data and entering them into a database, with each entry representing one analytical unit;

(4) synthesizing and processing quantitative data by calculating the frequency of different types of emotions across newspapers, topics, and classification categories;

(5) conducting qualitative analysis to interpret the discursive functions of *Affect* in relation to argumentative strategies and discourse style, and to examine similarities and differences between the two newspapers.

Qualitative analysis plays a central role in this study, enabling a deeper understanding of emotional expressions in relation to genre characteristics, ideological orientation, target audience, and the persuasive strategies of each newspaper. Linguistic phenomena are situated within the specific socio-political context of the pandemic period to ensure a close connection between language use and authentic discourse.

IV. Findings and Discussion

A. Frequency and Realizations of Affect in Commentary Discourse in Tuoi Tre and Nhan Dan Newspapers

(a). Frequency of Affect in Commentary Discourse in Tuoi Tre and Nhan Dan Newspapers

- *Frequency of Affect in commentary discourse in Tuoi Tre newspaper*

Based on the analysis of 20 commentary articles on health, education, economic, and tourism issues published in *Tuoi Tre* between December 2021 and June 2022, the following results were obtained (Figure 1).

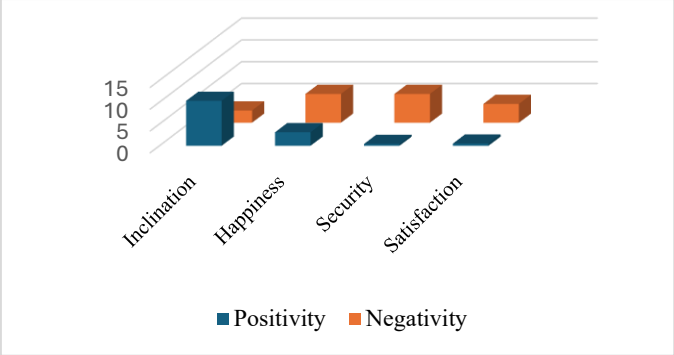


Figure 1. Polarization of *Affect* in Commentary Discourse in *Tuoi Tre* Newspaper

As shown in Figure 1, *Inclination* has the highest frequency (112 times), followed by *Happiness* (87 times) and *Security* (61 times), while *Satisfaction* records the lowest frequency (38 times). Among these, *Inclination* is the only subtype with a higher frequency of positive instances than negative ones (3.16 times). All other *Affect* subtypes have more negative than positive instances, with *Happiness* showing 2.03 times more negative than positive instances. Notably, negative instances of *Security* and *Satisfaction* far outnumber positive ones: for *Security*, negative instances are 16 times as frequent as positive ones, while for *Satisfaction*, the figure is 7.6 times. This disparity can be attributed to the social context in which the emotional subjects are situated. All commentaries in *Tuoi Tre* were produced during a critical period when both the world and Vietnam were confronting the COVID-19 pandemic, characterized by threats to human life, economic disruption, and educational interruption. Commentaries in *Tuoi Tre* focused on workers' precarious living conditions, public anxiety and fear, pressures associated with online learning, and dissatisfaction with opportunistic behaviours during

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the crisis. Therefore, the emotions expressed in the *Tuoi Tre* commentaries largely reflect the suffering, anxiety, and fear experienced by workers affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. Illustrative examples are given below:

(1) *If this package were passed and effectively implemented, millions of workers would feel* ***warmed*** *because their difficulties had been understood and supported.* (*Tuoi Tre*, January 10, 2022)

The Emoter in (1) were non-author: *millions of workers*. The *Affect* subtype of (1) was *Happiness*: workers would feel happy if the Government's COVID-19 support package for workers were passed and effectively implemented because they felt that the Government understood the difficulties that they had suffered due to the impact of the pandemic. *Happiness* was realized through the word "*warmed*".

(2) *The* ***desire*** *of policy makers when designing a BHXH* (social insurance - writer's note) *network is to ensure the lives of workers after retirement.* (*Tuoi Tre*, April 14, 2022)

The Emoter in (2) were non-author: *policymakers*. The *Affect* subtype expressed in (2) was *Inclination*: the purpose of policymakers when designing the social insurance network was to ensure the lives of workers after they retired. *Inclination* was realized by the word "*Desire*".

(3) ***Unable*** *to endure the situation after a hard day's work, workers return to their cramped, stuffy rented rooms day after day, month after month*. (*Tuoi Tre*, April 26, 2022)

Example (3) is classified under the *Affect* subtype *Dissatisfaction*, in which the Emoter is the author, whose presence is implicit. This subject-suppression strategy enhances objectivity and persuasive force. The writer's dissatisfaction, arising from the observation of workers' poor living conditions in the industrial park, is realized through the lexical item "*unable*".

(4) *Information about the increase in gasoline prices for all products, including the 5th consecutive increase in gasoline prices, RON95 gasoline exceeding 30,000 VND/liter from 3:00 p.m. on May 23, once again makes the poor and workers* ***flounder and worry****.* (*Tuoi Tre*, May 25, 2022)

In Example (4), the Emoters are non-authorial, namely the poor and workers. This instance is categorized as *Insecurity*, as the rise in gasoline prices—an essential commodity affecting daily life—during the COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated their precarious living conditions, causing them to *flounder and worry* and to experience fear.

- *Frequency of Affect in commentary discourse in Nhan Dan newspaper*

An analysis of 20 commentaries in *Nhan Dan* newspaper reveals that *Affect* is realized through four categories: *Inclination, Happiness, Security* and *Satisfaction*. All categories exhibit a polarity of either positive or negative evaluation. The distribution of this polarity is presented in Figure 2.

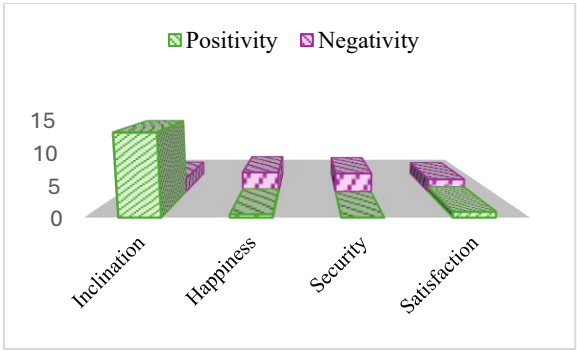


Figure 2. Polarization of *Affect* in Commentary Discourse in *Nhan Dan* Newspaper

Figure 2 shows that *Inclination* is the most frequent *Affect* subtype (132 times), occurring 4.92 times more frequently than *Disinclination*. However, these instances of *Inclination* do not primarily reflect personal feelings, but rather objective needs grounded in rational judgment. Most *Inclination* realizations in *Nhan Dan* commentaries express recommendations or solutions for addressing practical issues, rather than emotions of longing or anticipation, and are typically realized through the modal verb "*need*." In *Nhan Dan* commentaries, authors often express their desires through suggestions, recommendations, or proposed solutions to address problems, while the Emoters (i.e., the authors) are frequently backgrounded. This suggests that authors in *Nhan Dan* newspaper tended to focus more on proposing solutions than on expressing their own emotions, either their own or those of other participants. *Happiness* ranks second with 31 instances, while *Security* and *Satisfaction* occur at approximately similar frequencies. A common pattern across these three *Affect* subtypes is their predominance in negative rather than positive polarity. Notably, *Security* only appeared in negative form. These patterns can be attributed to the social context of the COVID-19 pandemic, which adversely affected all sectors of society, including healthcare, education, the economy, and tourism. During this period, people experienced widespread fear and anxiety about their lives and families, as well as indignation toward those who exploited the crisis for personal gain. Consequently, negative instances of *Affect* occur more frequently than positive ones across these subtypes. Some illustrative examples are provided below.

(5) *This is content that* ***needs*** *to be further researched, supplemented, and revised to facilitate people in choosing medical examination and treatment appropriate to their actual conditions.* (*Nhan Dan*, June 24, 2022)

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In Example (5), the Emoter is the writer, but it remains implicit. This subject-suppression strategy enhances objectivity and persuasive force in addressing relevant parties. The modal verb *need* simultaneously realizes *Inclination* and functions as a resource through which the author proposes solutions to challenges in medical examination and treatment.

(6) *National Assembly representatives are* ***concerned and worried*** *about many issues that are affecting people's health care in daily life.* (*Nhan Dan*, June 24, 2022)

In Example (6), the Emoters are non-authorial (National Assembly representatives). The lexical items "*concerned*" and "*worried*" are used to realize anxiety and *Insecurity* about the current healthcare situation affecting the public.

(7) *The above information not only helps workers and labourers who are renting accommodation* ***get excited*** *but also motivates many businesses to receive more orders.* (*Nhan Dan*, April 12, 2022)

In Example (7), the Emoters are workers and labourers. After two years of severe disruption caused by the pandemic, many businesses were forced to suspend production, leading to significant income loss among workers. Consequently, their return to normal work and extended working hours generated strong feelings of happiness, realized through the verb phrase "*get excited.*"

(8) *With the* ***positive*** *changes taking place, the damage to the labour market has somewhat eased.* (*Nhan Dan*, April 20, 2022)

With positive results in epidemic control and the gradual recovery of the labour market, the writer (the implicit Emoter) expresses *Satisfaction*, which is realized through the lexical item "*positive*".

(b). Realizations of Affect in Commentary Discourse in Tuoi Tre and Nhan Dan Newspapers

In *Tuoi Tre* and *Nhan Dan* commentaries, *Affect* is realized through a range of lexicogrammatical resources, including nouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs, phrases, and sentence types.

The findings on *Affect* resources from the analysis of 40 commentaries are presented in Tables 1 and 2.

TABLE 1
AFFECT RESOURCES IN COMMENTARY DISCOURSE IN *TUOI TRE* NEWSPAPER

Resources	Inclination		Happiness		Security		Satisfaction		Total	
	Quantity	Frequency	Quantity	Frequency	Quantity	Frequency	Quantity	Frequency	Quantity	Frequency
Sentence types	1	1	0	0	1	4	1	2	3	7
Nouns/noun phrases	3	5	12	22	6	13	1	1	22	41
Verbs/verb phrases	20	98	18	30	12	40	5	11	55	179
Adjectives/adjective phrases	1	2	11	26	3	4	8	8	23	40
Adverbs	2	6	0	0	0	0	1	5	3	11
Idioms	2	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	2

TABLE 2
AFFECT RESOURCES IN COMMENTARY DISCOURSE IN *NHAN DAN* NEWSPAPER

Resources	Inclination		Happiness		Security		Satisfaction		Total	
	Quantity	Frequency	Quantity	Frequency	Quantity	Frequency	Quantity	Frequency	Quantity	Frequency
Sentence types	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Nouns/noun phrases	2	2	3	7	2	4	2	2	9	15
Verbs/verb phrases	11	121	5	8	6	11	5	8	27	148
Adjectives/adjective phrases	1	2	3	14	3	9	4	6	11	31
Adverbs	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1

Results on the *Affect* resources in commentary discourses in the *Tuoi Tre* and *Nhan Dan* newspapers are presented in Figure 3.

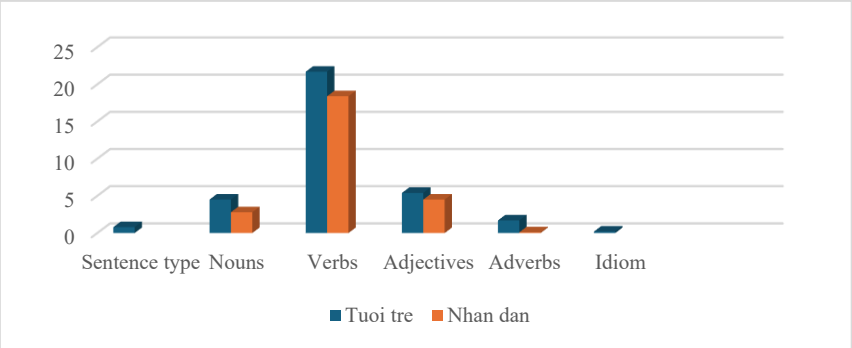


Figure 3. Ratio of *Affect* Resources in Commentary Discourse in *Tuoi Tre* and *Nhan Dan* Newspapers

As shown in Tables 1 and 2 and Figure 3, *Affect* resources are more prevalent in *Tuoi Tre* newspaper than in *Nhan Dan* newspaper. In both newspapers, verbs and verb phrases are the most frequently used linguistic resources for expressing

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Affect, whereas idioms and adverbs are the least frequently employed.

B. Realizations of Affect in Commentary Discourse in Tuoi Tre and Nhan Dan Newspapers

(a). Inclination Realizations

Inclination refers to emotions associated with wishes or intentions, whether latent or realized in practice. Corpus analysis shows that *Inclination* is the most frequent *Affect* subtype in both newspapers, realized through both lexical and grammatical resources.

❖ *Tuoi Tre* Newspaper

In *Tuoi Tre* newspaper's commentary discourse, *Inclination* is realized through the following lexicogrammatical resources: nouns and noun phrases, verbs and verb phrases, adjectives and adjective phrases, adverbs, fixed expressions (particularly idioms), and sentence types.

• Resources used to express *Inclination* include: nouns/noun phrases (e.g., *hope, dream, expectation*); verbs/verb phrases (e.g., *wish, need, must, desire, be forced to, hope, want, etc.*); and the adverb "*kindly*".

• *Disinclination* is also expressed through nouns/noun phrases (e.g., *difficulty, barrier*), verbs/verb phrases (e.g., *fail to, can't count on, can't hope, be left with no choice but to, fail to meet, don't want, not live up to, be forced to, etc.*), adjectives (*bumpy*), adverbs (*never*), and idioms (*might just as well, out of necessity*).

Some typical examples are as follows:

(9) *Many families* ***desire*** *a summer fully spent together, but this year's summer will not be behind closed doors like the summer of 2021 - but in a place with a warm blue sea and sunny weather, in a place with green roads filled with the scent of fragrant leaves...* (*Tuoi Tre*, June 26, 2022)

In Example (9), many families function as non-authorial Emoters of *Affect*. After two years of the COVID-19 pandemic, during which most people studied and worked from home, they experienced confinement and stress. As a result, they express a legitimate and positive desire for a happy summer vacation with their families. This *Inclination* is realized through the verb "*desire*".

(10) *The world oil market is in a sensitive phase, prices are about to increase, and supply is unstable. Therefore,* ***never*** *let the domestic oil market become "hotter", affecting consumer psychology, because behind that is national energy security.* (*Tuoi Tre*, February 11, 2022)

In Example (10), the writer functions as an implicit Emoter. This strategy of backgrounding the Emoter enhances objectivity and strengthens the persuasive force when proposing solutions to existing problems. The writer expresses negative emotion toward the increasingly tense petroleum market situation, realized through the adverb "*never*".

❖ *Nhan Dan* Newspaper

The emotion of *Inclination* in commentary discourse in *Nhan Dan* newspaper is also realized through nouns/noun phrases, verbs/verb phrases, adjectives/adjective phrases and adverbs.

• Resources used to express *Inclination* include verbs/verb phrases (e.g., *need, be required to, want, wish, request, demand, expect, etc.*) and the adverb "*soon*."

• *Disinclination* is realized through the following elements: nouns/noun phrases (e.g., *entanglements*, *extreme psychology*), verbs/verb phrases (e.g., *must, be forced to, suffer, miss, don't want, reduce desire, be demanded to, etc.*), and the adjective "*difficult*".

Among the linguistic means realizing *Inclination*, the verbs *need* and *must* occurred with the highest frequency. These verbs not only encode the writer's desire—often implicitly constructed as the Emoter—but also function to propose suggestions or solutions to address existing limitations and shortcomings. Therefore, it can be seen that the authors of *Nhan Dan* newspaper rarely express their subjective emotions, and the desires often arise from rationality and objective requirements of reality. This can be illustrated by the following examples.

(11) *To control the average annual consumer price index growth rate at about 4% as set by the National Assembly, relevant sectors* ***need*** *to continue to make efforts to remove difficulties for production and business, ensure abundant supply, and gradually increase income for people and workers.* (*Nhan Dan*, February 15, 2022)

(12) *However, given the complicated situation of smuggling and commercial fraud in petroleum products, state management agencies* ***must*** *have a plan to fight resolutely to prevent this problem.* (*Nhan Dan*, April 5, 2022)

In Examples (11) and (12), the Emoter is the writer, though implicitly represented. The verbs "*need*" and "*must*" are employed by the writer to propose suggestions to hypothetical readers and relevant parties so that they could consider and implement them. Simultaneously, these verbs also encode the writer's objective desires for the subjects mentioned in the discourse (*relevant sectors and state management agencies*).

(13) *According to the latest survey by the Vietnam General Confederation of Labor on the lives of workers in 2021, 21% of workers* ***must*** *eat more instant noodles, 48% reduced their daily meat intake, 22% switched their daily shopping to food provided by relatives, 15% combined meals to reduce costs, 60% saved on expenses, 11%* ***must*** *borrow money to spend, 0.3% had to borrow at high interest rates, black credit or social insurance.* (*Nhan Dan*, April 8, 2022)

In Example (13), the verb "*must*" is not used to propose a suggestion but to encode the worker's unwillingness. A decrease in quality of life is something that no one desires, and "*must*" is used to express this negative emotion.

(b). Happiness Realizations

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Happiness concerns emotions related to inner feelings such as joy, sadness, admiration, gratitude, and suffering. In the corpus, it is the second most frequent *Affect* subtype in both newspapers. This emotion is realized in positive and negative forms through lexicogrammatical resources.

❖ *Tuoi Tre* newspaper

In *Tuoi Tre* commentary discourse, *Happiness* is realized through lexicogrammatical resources by the following means:

• *Happiness* is realized through nouns/noun phrases (e.g., *good news, joy, blessing, happiness, gladness, excitement, hearty laugh, jubilation, etc.*), verbs/verb phrases (e.g., *rejoice, cheer, be moved, get excited, delight in, burst out, tense up, exult, lose, hurt, jubilate, revel in, temporarily resolved, etc.*), and adjectives/adjective phrases (e.g., *warmed, eager, bustling*.)

• *Unhappiness* is realized through nouns/noun phrases (e.g., *difficulty, misery, burden, unfortunate victim, tragic scene, depression*), verbs/verb phrases (e.g., *fume, complain, grieve, sacrifice, bear, hurt, "injured", endure, despair, sulk, accept to sacrifice, suffer, suffocate, torment, etc.*), and adjectives/adjective phrases (e.g., *difficult, disadvantaged, hard, miserable, arduous, burdensome, unbearable, tragic, painful, heartbreaking, grievous, confusing, tough, bitter, angry*).

Consider some examples:

(14) *The story of the crimes committed by individuals involved in the citizen rescue flights makes people **grieve**, but that is not the reason for us to deny the policy, the focus, and the priority that the State has strived to give to Vietnamese people around the world during the pandemic.* (*Tuoi Tre*, April 16, 2022)

In the face of the controversy about citizen rescue flights, the writer (the hidden Emoter) felt sad. This subject-hiding strategy universalizes the emotion, presenting it as shared by the public rather than as a purely personal response, thereby enhancing reader empathy and engagement. The negative emotion is realized through the verb "*grieve*".

(15) *The director of a tourism company **rejoiced** and boasted that this year his company had just given 13th-month salary bonuses to employees, and that Tet tours were gradually booked.* (*Tuoi Tre*, January 24, 2022)

The director (the Emoter) rejoiced because the company's finances were stable and he was able to pay the 13th-month salary to his employees after two years of the pandemic. This instance of *Happiness* is realized by the verb "*rejoice*".

❖ *Nhan Dan* newspaper

Happiness in the commentary discourse of *Nhan Dan* newspaper is realized through lexical resources across 11 different linguistic means, occurring 29 times.

• Realizations of *Happiness* include nouns/noun phrases (e.g., *joy and gratitude, optimism*) and verbs/verb phrases (e.g., *get excited, rejoice, believe*).

• Realizations of *Unhappiness* include nouns/noun phrases (e.g., *pressure, hurt, etc*.), verbs/verb phrases (e.g., *crack, disadvantage, negatively affect, etc.*), and adjectives/adjective phrases (e.g., *difficult, painful, unfortunate*).

Examples are:

(16) *Mina Bui said, wherever she looked at, she felt **painful** as if she was being hurt.* (*Nhan Dan*, June 9, 2022)

Mina Bui (the Emoter) felt painful and unhappy about the devastation of the epidemic on the tourism industry in general and her own tourism business in particular. The feeling of *unhappiness* is realized through the adjective "*painful*".

(17) *However, witnessing Vietnam's effective control of the epidemic, as well as its admirable economic recovery, as soon as the country reopened, Mina Bui decided to pack up and return to her homeland with full of **optimism and confidence**.* (*Nhan Dan*, June 9, 2022)

The noun phrase "*optimism and confidence*" expressed *Mina Bui*'s (the Emoter) *happiness* at the amazing recovery of Vietnam's tourism industry after the COVID-19 pandemic.

(c). Security Realizations

Security refers to feelings of safety or anxiety related to social security issues, ranging from optimism and confidence to fear and concern about potential future difficulties. In both newspapers, *Security* ranks third among *Affect* subtypes. Notably, *Insecurity* occurs far more frequently than positive *Security* in both corpora.

❖ *Tuoi Tre* newspaper

In the commentary discourse in *Tuoi Tre* newspaper, the emotion of *Security* only appears 4 times through the following linguistic means: verbs/verb phrases (e.g., *believe, lift the burden*); and adjectives (*confident, optimistic*).

The emotion of *Insecurity* is realized through: nouns/noun phrases (e.g., *concern, risk, apprehension, dark side, worries, insecurity and risk, disaster, anxiety*); verbs/verb phrases (e.g., *worry, wonder, fear/ dread, concern, apprehend, panic, brood, alarm, warn, hesitate, fail to calm down, flinch, etc*.); and adjectives/adjective phrases (e.g., *risky, insecurity*).

(18) *The city's tourism businesses are in the busy and nervous days of the Tet business season, but they still fully **believe** in themselves.* (*Tuoi Tre*, January 24, 2022)

The verb *believe* realizes the emotion of *Security* of tourism businesses (the Emoters). They have confidence in a bright future for the tourism industry after the pandemic.

(19) *According to the Vietnam Hotel Association, in many localities, only 50-60% of accommodation establishments are back in operation, while the majority are in a serious human resource crisis and lack capital to maintain services... That is a real **concern**.* (*Tuoi Tre*, March 16, 2022)

In Example (19), the Emoter is the writer, though it is left implicit. Faced with the serious crisis in many aspects (human resources, capital, etc.) for accommodation establishments after the pandemic, the Emoter feels worried about the future of the tourism industry. That worry is realized through the noun "*concern*".

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❖ *Nhan Dan* newspaper

In the commentary discourse of *Nhan Dan* newspaper, our survey did not identify any linguistic means that explicitly express the emotion of *Security*. The emotion of *Insecurity* appears 24 times, realized through 11 linguistic means, including: nouns/noun phrases (e.g., *risk, worry, panic*); verbs/verb phrases (e.g., *worry, warn, fear, dread, flounder, panic, etc*.); and adjectives/adjective phrases (e.g., *worried, lonely, weak, anxiety, etc.*). For example:

(20) *The policy is in place; however, when implemented, problems have arisen, causing many labour experts and unions to* ***fear*** *that the policy's coverage may not reach all workers and labourers.* (*Nhan Dan*, April 12, 2022)

The verb "*fear*" realizes the anxiety of *labour experts and unions* (the Emoters). They worry that the policies to support workers after the pandemic might not be able to reach all workers.

(d). Satisfaction Realizations

Satisfaction relates to feelings of fulfilment or disappointment in achieving goals or expectations. In both newspapers, it is the least frequent *Affect* subtype, occurring more often in its negative than positive form. In *Tuoi Tre* and *Nhan Dan* commentaries, *Satisfaction* is realized through lexicogrammatical resources.

❖ *Tuoi Tre* newspaper

The linguistic means used to realize the emotion of *Satisfaction* in the commentary discourse of *Tuoi Tre* newspaper include verbs/verb phrases (e.g., *like, somewhat accept*) The emotion of *Dissatisfaction* is realized through: nouns/noun phrases (e.g., *accepting mentality*); verbs/verb phrases (e.g., *cannot accept, must/have to accept, really regret, resent, disagree*); adjectives/adjective phrases (e.g., *temporary, indignant, outraged, annoying, frustrated, upset, negative*); adverbs (*never*); and sentence types. Consider some of the following examples:

(21) *We can* ***somewhat accept*** *solutions to cool down the price increase, such as supporting rent for some workers, reducing VAT, supporting interest rates for some groups...* (*Tuoi Tre*, March 30, 2022)

In this case, "*we"* functions as the Emoters, encompassing both the author and readers. The use of this pronoun reduces the distance between writer and audience, presenting the writer's attitudes and emotions as shared with readers. This strategy serves to attract readers, guide emotional alignment, and enhance persuasive impact. In Example (21), the writer expresses *Satisfaction* with the measure to curb price increases; however, this satisfaction is weak, as indicated by the phrase *somewhat accept* which conveys reluctant acceptance by the Emoters.

❖ *Nhan Dan* newspaper

The emotion of *Satisfaction* in the commentary discourse of *Nhan Dan* newspaper is realized through the following linguistic means: nouns/noun phrases (e.g., *improvement, positive energy, positive sign*); verbs/verb phrases (*flourish*); and an adjective/adjective phrase (*positive*). The emotion of *Dissatisfaction* is realized through: verbs/verb phrases (e.g., *fume, decrease the satisfaction level, can hardly accept, bear, stir, strain*); and adjectives/adjective phrases (e.g., *negative, inadequate, discontented*).

Consider some examples:

(22) *Although the development of the COVID-19 pandemic is still very complicated and unpredictable,* ***positive energy*** *has been returning to socio-economic life.* (*Nhan Dan*, February 26, 2022)

In Example (22), lexical items such as *positive energy* and *return* convey optimism and evoke feelings of joy and reassurance. This expression not only reflects personal emotion but also encourages the community and guides public attitudes in a positive direction.

(23) *Previously, at the 3rd National Don Ca Tai Tu Festival held in Can Tho city from April 7 to 11, Mr. Le Quoc Khanh, a member of the art troupe from Hanoi participating in the festival,* ***fumed*** *about the tourist boat driver* ***harassing and forcing*** *him to buy tickets to visit Ba Hiep fruit garden in Phong Dien district.* (*Nhan Dan*, April 25, 2022)

Example (23) reveals Mr. Le Quoc Khanh's anger and discomfort toward harassment by a tourist boat driver. This emotion is realized through negative lexical items, such as *fumed*, *harassing,* and *forcing him to buy tickets*, which emphasize his strong opposition and dissatisfaction. The incident occurred during the National Don Ca Tai Tu Festival, a cultural event where participants were expected to enjoy an artistic atmosphere but instead encountered disturbance and coercion. Consequently, this example reflects not only personal emotion but also implicit criticism of a negative social reality, expressing frustration with behaviours that undermined the festival experience.

C. Characteristics of Evaluative Language in Vietnamese Journalistic Commentary Discourse

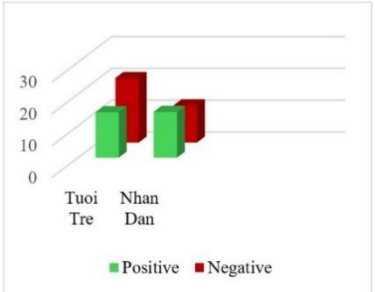


Figure 4. Polarization of *Affect*

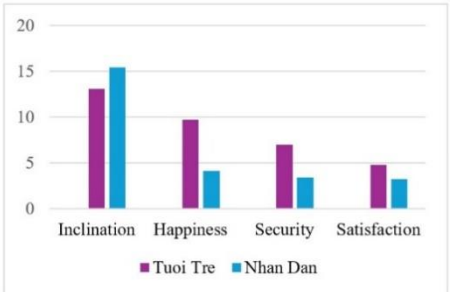


Figure 5. Frequency of *Affect's* Categories

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Based on the results and analysis above, both similarities and differences are identified in the ways in which the two newspapers expressed *Affect*.

Similarities: Across both corpora, *Affect* constitutes the most dominant subsystem within the Attitude system, manifested through four subcategories: *Inclination, Happiness, Security*, and *Satisfaction*, with *Inclination* occupying a central position. In both newspapers, *Inclination* displays a higher proportion of positive than negative values, whereas the remaining categories are predominantly negative, reflecting the strong impact of social context and situational circumstances on the expression of attitude in commentary discourse. In terms of realizations, the two newspapers show considerable similarity in their use of linguistic resources to encode *Affect*. Moreover, *Affect* in commentary texts is mainly sourced from the authorial evaluator, with particular emphasis on the expression of *Inclination* directed toward competent authorities.

Differences: Despite these shared tendencies, the two newspapers also exhibit notable differences in the frequency and stylistic deployment of *Affect*. *Affect* occurs with higher frequency in *Tuoi Tre* commentaries and is realized through a wider range of linguistic resources than in *Nhan Dan*. Although *Inclination* appears more frequently in *Nhan Dan* than in *Tuoi Tre*, it does not represent subjective or emotion-driven feelings; rather, it is grounded in rational judgment based on objective reality, and takes the form of proposals or recommendations addressed to relevant social actors in order to resolve existing problems. By contrast, *Inclination* in *Tuoi Tre* is largely rooted in the evaluator's personal emotions and heartfelt concerns. These differences can be explained in terms of each newspaper's institutional orientation and political mission: *Nhan Dan* prioritizes a normative and restrained voice with controlled emotional expression, whereas *Tuoi Tre* fulfils its role as a public forum, allowing for more explicit manifestations of personal emotion and subjective stance.

Remarks: Based on the similarities and differences in the realization of *Affect* between *Tuoi Tre* and *Nhan Dan*, several stylistic characteristics of evaluative language in Vietnamese journalistic commentary discourse can be identified, as follows.

Firstly, at the generic level, Vietnamese journalistic commentaries demonstrate a clear tendency to prioritize the mobilization of *Affect* resources within the Attitude system in order to construct stance and enhance the persuasive force of discourse. With the full presence of the four subcategories, *Inclination, Happiness, Security* and *Satisfaction*, commentary reflects the nature of the genre as a discourse situated at the intersection of reason and emotion. Among these, *Inclination* occupies a central role, enabling writers not only to express emotional states but also to orient social action through appeals, proposals, and recommendations directed at authoritative actors.

Secondly, the findings demonstrate that social and situational contexts significantly shape the structure and value of Affect. The dominance of negative *Affect* (*unhappiness*, *insecurity*, and *dissatisfaction*) mirrors the turbulent realities of the pandemic and indicates that evaluative language in commentary discourse is closely tied to collective experience rather than individual emotion.

Thirdly, Vietnamese journalistic commentaries tend toward author-centred evaluation while flexibly incorporating non-authorial voices to strengthen objectivity and argumentation. Authorial *Affect*, especially *Inclination*, plays a crucial role in shaping textual tone and expressing both personal stance and collective concerns.

Finally, the contrast between *Tuoi Tre* and *Nhan Dan* reveals that the stylistic use of evaluative language in Vietnamese journalistic commentary is not homogeneous but varies according to each newspaper's institutional orientation and social function. *Nhan Dan* adopts a more rational and policy-oriented style with restrained subjectivity, whereas *Tuoi Tre* allows greater emotional expression and employs more diverse linguistic resources to foster reader engagement.

Overall, Vietnamese journalistic commentary operates along a continuum between institution–reason and forum–emotion. In both cases, *Affect* functions not only as an expression of attitude but also as a strategic resource enabling the press to reflect, guide, and intervene in contemporary social issues.

V. Conclusion

This study applies the Appraisal framework within the SFL Theory to analyse the *Affect* subsystem in 40 commentaries from *Tuoi Tre* and *Nhan Dan* newspapers. The findings show that *Affect* is a key evaluative resource in journalistic commentary, mainly realized through lexicogrammatical means and shaped by social and institutional contexts. Both authorial and non-authorial voices contribute strategically to *Affect*, with authorial *Affect* tending to be implicit and non-authorial *Affect* enhancing representativeness and persuasion. Comparative results indicate stylistic variation according to media orientation: *Nhan Dan* favours restrained, rational, and directive expressions, whereas *Tuoi Tre* employs more personal Affect to promote empathy and reader engagement. Overall, Vietnamese journalistic commentary operates along a continuum between institutional reasoning and emotional expression, with *Affect* functioning as a strategic discursive resource for meaning-making and social intervention. This research contributes to a socio-functional understanding of Vietnamese news discourse and provides insights for teaching and researching evaluative language in commentary genres.

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To Teach or not to Teach? A Qualitative Study of Chinese University Teachers' Cognitions on Literature in Language Education

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***Abstract*—While Literature in Language Education (LLE) has gained renewed theoretical prominence, the cognitive processes driving its implementation in pragmatic, skills-oriented EFL contexts remain under-researched. Guided by Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory and Borg's teacher cognition framework, this qualitative case study investigates the cognitions of three university EFL teachers in China regarding the integration of literature. Data, derived from in-depth semi-structured interviews, were subjected to thematic analysis. The findings suggest that while teacher participants recognized the intrinsic value of literary texts, they varied in how they positioned literature in this course and in how consistently they enacted LLE. Their cognitions and practices were heavily mediated by a complex interplay of contextual affordances and constraints, including personal prior experiences, perceptions of student proficiency, and systemic pressures from institutional curricula and material conditions. The study highlights the pedagogical tension inherent in literature instruction within an examination-oriented culture, offering critical implications for teacher professional development, curriculum design, and the alignment of assessment with humanistic educational goals.**

***Index Terms*—Chinese EFL teachers, literature in language education, Sociocultural Theory, teacher cognition**

I. Introduction

The incorporation of literature into second/foreign language (L2/FL) curricula involves a long-standing pedagogical tradition (Hall, 2016; Kramsch & Kramsch, 2000; Maley, 2012; Paran, 2008). More recently, literature has shifted from being treated primarily as an object of aesthetic study to being used as a pedagogical resource for developing language proficiency, critical thinking, and intercultural awareness (Carroli, 2008; Rosenblatt, 2016; Naji et al., 2019). Thus, literary texts are repositioned as rich classroom resources that offer linguistic input, cultural insight, and aesthetic engagement (Bland, 2018). As a result, literature has gained renewed prominence in the actual language classroom (Tsang & Paran, 2025), leading to the development of instructional frameworks designed to bridge the gap between language learning and literary interpretation (Bloemert et al., 2019; Paran, 2008).

Despite the international consensus that literature should play an important role in L2/FL curricula, the implementation of literature-based instruction remains limited in most English language classrooms (Paran, 2008; Duncan & Paran, 2017, 2018). While literary-oriented approaches (e.g., critical literacy; cultural literacy) have gained popularity in some Western educational settings (e.g., Bobkina & Stefanova, 2016; Paesani & Allen, 2012), language-based and skills-oriented approaches continue to dominate in traditional English as a foreign language (EFL) settings, particularly in China (e.g., Cheung & Hennebry-Leung, 2020; Tsang et al., 2020; Sun, 2023). In recent years, China's Ministry of Education (CMOE) has issued policy documents that promote literary and cultural literacy within undergraduate English education, shifting it towards cultivating international perspectives and cultural competence (CMOE, 2018) and further requiring English-major training to strengthen liberal arts components through formal curriculum integration (CMOE, 2020). However, in Chinese higher education, utilitarian learning goals, assessment pressures, and tightly structured curricula often leave limited space for sustained literary engagement (Hall & Yang, 2018), and teachers commonly report low confidence and substantial constraints when attempting to incorporate literary components in classroom practice (Cheung, 2019; Sun, 2023; Tsang & Paran, 2025). These tensions make it important to examine the cognitive and contextual conditions that shape how teachers understand and implement literature in

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tertiary EFL settings.

Against this backdrop, the present qualitative study addresses the issue of underexplored teacher-cognition research on LLE in Chinese tertiary EFL settings by examining how EFL teachers' cognitions about LLE are formed and practiced. Drawing on semi-structured interviews with three in-service teachers, the study adopts a case study approach to explore how teachers perceive the value of literature and how their cognitions are shaped within a specific tertiary environment. Grounded in Borg's (2015) teacher cognition framework and informed by the Sociocultural perspective (Vygotsky, 1978), this study addresses two research questions: (a) What are EFL teachers' cognitions about implementing literature in language education? and (b) What factors mediate EFL teachers' cognitions?

II. Literature Review

A. Literature in Language Education

While some refer to it as Literature in Education (LIE), the area is also known as Literature in Language Education (LLE), which is often viewed as a key means of fostering cultural awareness alongside language development (Carter, 2007; Hall, 2015; Lazar, 1993; Paran, 2008). Paesani's (2011) notion of "language-literature instruction", defined as "the deliberate integration of language development and literary study across the university curriculum" (p. 162), frames the two as mutually reinforcing in L2 settings. This integration is further justified by arguments that literature can enhance motivation and engagement, and that close, sustained reading supports higher-order thinking and deeper engagement with texts (Hall, 2016).

Drawing on Carter and Long's (1991) three models of teaching literature, the benefits are commonly discussed in relation to language development, cultural learning, and personal growth. Linguistically, literary texts provide authentic, context-rich language and complex discourse that can support vocabulary, grammar, and reading development (Bobkina & Romero, 2025; Calafato & Paran, 2019). Literary language may also stimulate more nuanced oral and written production, encouraging creative writing and critical engagement (Hall, 2017; Jones, 2019). Culturally, literature offers aesthetic and intercultural encounters with diverse perspectives and values, aligning with curricular emphases on intercultural communicative competence (Bland, 2013; Bobkina et al., 2021; Carroli, 2008). In addition, sustained engagement with literary worlds is often linked to whole-person education, supporting cognitive, affective, and moral development and enhancing motivation through emotional investment (Hall, 2015, 2016; Naji et al., 2019).

Recent empirical work has examined instructional models (e.g., Bloemert et al., 2016; Bloemert et al., 2019; Paran, 2008), literary text selection and teaching approach (e.g., Graham et al., 2024; Luukka, 2019; Mohaideen et al., 2020), and learners' experiences and perceived benefits (e.g., Tsang et al., 2020; Md Salleh & Ismail, 2022; Viana & Zyngier, 2020). When classroom studies are available, findings commonly point to potential gains in language-related outcomes and engagement (Bobkina et al., 2021; Calafato & Paran, 2019), while also indicating that students' engagement can depend on scaffolding and may be accompanied by uncertainty when pedagogies depart from familiar information-oriented norms (Nguyen, 2016). A large-scale survey by Duncan and Paran (2017, 2018) further suggests that students frequently value literature for instrumental language purposes, and that teachers' reported approaches and time allocation vary widely, with curricular conditions shaping practice in powerful ways. However, comparatively fewer studies have centered on teachers' cognitions and decision-making. Across diverse contexts, available evidence points to a recurring implementation gap in which teachers express positive attitudes toward literature yet report limited classroom practice, commonly attributing this to insufficient preparation or confidence and to systemic pressures such as assessment washback, time constraints, rigid curricular specifications and mandated textbooks (Calafato, 2018; Cheung & Hennebry-Leung, 2020; Saka, 2018; Sun, 2023; Zengin et al., 2019).

B. Teacher Cognition on Literature in Language Education

Teacher cognition is fundamentally defined as "the unobservable cognitive dimension of teaching - what teachers know, believe and think" (Borg, 2003, p. 81), a construct widely regarded as pivotal to understanding the rationale behind instructional decision-making. Early works, largely influenced by cognitive psychology (Barcelos, 2003), tended to treat teachers' mental lives as relatively stable and measurable through quantitative tools such as questionnaires (Borg, 2018). More recent scholarship challenges this view, arguing that cognition is personal and situated, emerging through teachers' ongoing engagement with practice rather than existing as a fixed set of traits (Burns et al., 2015; Kubanyiova & Feryok, 2015). In response, sociocultural perspectives have become more prominent, conceptualizing cognition as dynamic, complex, and continuously reconstructed through teachers' interactions with social and contextual contexts (Johnson, 2018; Li, 2020). This shift has broadened empirical work from documenting what teachers think to examining how cognitions develop, what mediates them, and how they relate to classroom practice across instructional domains and educational settings (Borg, 2015; Gao & Zhang, 2020).

Empirical studies across contexts suggest that teachers generally admit the pedagogical value of literature and associate it with multiple learning gains, particularly in language development (e.g., Bobkina et al., 2021; Calafato & Paran, 2019; Sun, 2023), cultural awareness, and personal growth (e.g., Bobkina & Romero, 2025; Zengin et al., 2019). At the same time, evidence suggests that these positive orientations are often accompanied by an instrumental framing of literature, whereby literary texts are primarily justified as means to achieve utilitarian language objectives rather than as opportunities for sustained interpretation or aesthetic engagement (Férez Mora et al., 2020). Relatedly, teachers tend

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to report greater confidence in literature's contribution to reading development and lexical growth than to oral communication, signaling an uneven perceived value across language skills (Bobkina & Romero, 2025; Duncan & Paran, 2017, 2018), and a recurrent tension between valuing LLE in principle and adopting pragmatic, constraint-sensitive enactments in practice (Cheung & Hennebry-Leung, 2020; Sun, 2023; Tsang & Paran, 2025). What remains under-examined, however, is how teachers' cognitions and decision-making about LLE are constructed and mediated in situated institutional contexts, particularly in Chinese tertiary EFL settings. Addressing this gap, the present study investigates Chinese university EFL teachers' cognitions about LLE and explores how these cognitions are mediated by contextual constraints and reflected in teaching practice.

C. Theoretical Framework

This study draws on Sociocultural Theory (SCT) (Vygotsky, 1978) as an explanatory framework to understand how EFL teachers' cognitions are formed, mediated, and constrained. Central to SCT is the concept of mediation, which views human cognition as developing through participation in socially organized activities rather than residing solely within the individual (Wertsch, 1991; Johnson, 2006, 2009; Li, 2020). From this perspective, thinking is always mediated by culturally constructed tools and signs, such as language, texts, curricula, assessment systems, and institutional norms, that shape how individuals interpret and act upon their experiences (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006). Importantly, mediation can be explicit when a person (e.g., a teacher) intentionally brings in visible tools during an activity, such as guiding questions, paraphrasing, pointing, gestures, or visual materials, to direct learners' attention and help them solve the task, so their thinking and actions are guided step by step (Wertsch, 2007; Lantolf, 2006). In the present study, teachers' cognitions are not treated as fixed internal states but as dynamic processes shaped by ongoing engagement with textbooks, syllabi, assessment regimes, student profiles, and disciplinary traditions. In this sense, SCT complements Borg's (2015) teacher cognition framework by clarifying how contextual factors mediate the link between teachers' thinking and pedagogical decision-making. It also helps interpret tensions between teachers' stated beliefs and their reported instructional choices not as inconsistencies, but as outcomes of contextually mediated cognition that is continually reshaped with institutional and cultural environments (Li, 2017).

III. Methodology

The present study employed a qualitative case study design to explore Chinese university EFL teachers' cognitions about implementing LLE, as qualitative research helps explore teaching processes in real classroom settings (Creswell, 2007). A case study approach was selected as particularly appropriate given the study's focus on how and why questions concerning a contemporary educational phenomenon (Yin, 2018).

A. Context and Participants

This study was conducted in a public comprehensive university in mainland China. English education in such settings generally reflects national policy orientations while facing common structural constraints, including exam-oriented assessment regimes and limited curricular space for sustained literary engagement. The research site was selected as a "local knowledge case" (Thomas & Myers, 2015, p. 16), thereby enabling in-depth access to institutional practices and participants' perspectives.

As part of a larger qualitative project, eight university EFL teachers were initially recruited using purposive sampling (Patton, 2015) to ensure variation in (a) overall teaching experience and (b) prior exposure to literature-related training. Among these participants, three teachers (Irene, Lily, and Julia) were purposively selected for the present study as they all taught the same course type (a skill-oriented course named Comprehensive English), which enabled a more controlled, course-level comparison of how different teachers interpret and respond to shared curricular expectations. At the same time, these three cases retained meaningful variation in how they positioned literature within language teaching, making them analytically useful for examining differences in cognition under comparable instructional conditions. To protect participants' confidentiality, pseudonyms were assigned and identifying institutional details were removed. Table 1 provides an overview of teachers' basic information:

Table 1
Teacher Participants' Profile

Teacher	Academic Qualification	Years of Teaching	Courses
Lily	BA (English Language Teacher Education), MA (English Language and Literature)	14	Comprehensive English (prominent); English Language Teaching Methodology
Julia	BA (English Language Teacher Education), MEd (English Language Teaching)	24	English Phonetics (prominent); Comprehensive English
Irene	BA (English), MA (English Language and Literature)	20	Comprehensive English (prominent); British Literature; Selected Reading in American Literature; English Rhetoric

B. Data Collection

Data were collected in March 2025 through semi-structured interviews, which are widely used in educational

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research to facilitate in-depth exploration of participants' perspectives, experiences, and interpretations (Miles et al., 2014; Patton, 2015). In teacher cognition research, interviews are regarded as a particularly appropriate method for accessing teachers' beliefs, reasoning, and pedagogical decision-making, as these cognitive processes are not directly observable in classroom practice (Borg, 2015). Semi-structured interviews combine pre-prepared guiding questions with flexibility to probe emerging issues, allowing for systematic coverage of key topics while enabling participants to elaborate on context-specific experiences (Salmons, 2014).

The interview protocol consisted of three sections (see Appendix). This structure ensured alignment with the research questions while allowing participants to introduce salient issues. All interviews were conducted on a one-on-one basis, audio-recorded with participants' informed consent, and transcribed verbatim. Chinese was used as the interview language, as both the interviewer and participants were native speakers, allowing for more nuanced expression of beliefs and experiences. Each interview lasted approximately 90 minutes. Follow-up questions and probes were used to clarify responses and explore emerging themes in greater depth.

C. Data Analysis

Data analysis followed an iterative thematic analysis informed by Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase framework and guided by a sociocultural perspective (Vygotsky, 1978) and Borg's (2015) teacher cognition model. All interview recordings were transcribed verbatim to preserve participants' original meanings and minimize interpretive bias at the transcription stage. Transcripts were returned to participants for member checking, allowing for clarification and confirmation of accuracy.

The analysis began with repeated reading of the transcripts to achieve familiarization, during which initial analytic notes were recorded. Initial coding was conducted inductively at a semantic level, generating data-driven codes that stayed close to teachers' own wording (e.g., references to literature as "supporting language learning," feelings of "difficulty" or "confidence"). These initial codes were systematically reviewed and refined to ensure consistency and accuracy across participants. A codebook approach was subsequently adopted to organize related codes into subthemes and higher-order themes through constant comparison across cases. Analytic tables and thematic mapping were used to examine patterns and relationships within the dataset. Themes were identified at the semantic level and iteratively reviewed against coded extracts and the full dataset. During the review phase, some subthemes were refined or merged to enhance conceptual clarity. This iterative process resulted in a final codebook comprising three overarching themes: cognition conceptualization, cognition enactment, and cognition mediation, each with clearly defined subthemes and codes (Table 2). These themes directly addressed the research questions and provided an analytically coherent structure for reporting the findings.

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TABLE 2
CODEBOOK

RQs	Codes	Categories	Themes
1) What are EFL teachers' cognitions on implementing literature in language education?	❿ Strengthening English-major identity	❿ Literature as professional knowledge	❿ Cognition Conceptualization
	❿ Demonstrating disciplinary expertise		
	❿ Supporting language teaching goals	❿ Literature as pedagogical resource	
	❿ Enriching vocabulary		
	❿ Developing reading comprehension strategies		
	❿ Serving as input for writing		
	❿ Transmitting cultural values and perspectives	❿ Literature as cultural content	
	❿ Encouraging Chinese-Western comparison		
	❿ Delivering ideological education		
	❿ Selecting familiar literary genres	❿ Patterns of integration	❿ Cognition Enactment
	❿ Relying on personal preference		
	❿ Fitting lesson goals		
	❿ Providing background information	❿ Instructional framing	
	❿ Contextualizing literary text		
	❿ Guiding interpretation		
	❿ Prioritizing language proficiency outcomes	❿ Curricular prioritization	
	❿ Focusing on exam content		
2) What factors mediate teachers' cognitions?	❿ Having limited pedagogical training	❿ Personal experiential mediation	❿ Cognition Mediation
	❿ Receiving theory-oriented coursework		
	❿ Developing low self-efficacy		
	❿ Experiencing emotional anxiety		
	❿ Considering students' language proficiency	❿ Contextual mediation	
	❿ Noticing low student interest		
	❿ Experiencing assessment washback		
	❿ Responding to institutional expectations		
	❿ Working with outdated textbooks	❿ Artefact mediation	
	❿ Following fixed syllabi		
	❿ Relying on prescribed materials		

IV. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This section reports the findings from semi-structured interviews with three Chinese university EFL teachers: Irene, Lily, and Julia. Adopting a qualitative case-study design, the analysis is informed by SCT (Vygotsky, 1978) and the teacher cognition framework (Borg, 2015). Accordingly, the section is organized into two RQ-focused subsections: the first outlines how teachers conceptualized the role of LLE and how these conceptualizations were reflected in their reported instructional choices; the second examines how teachers' cognitions and enactments were mediated through multiple interacting influences.

A. Teachers' Cognitions on Implementing LLE

(a). Cognitions on LLE

All three teachers agreed that literature was consistently regarded as important in language education; however, they differed in how they articulated why it matters and what literature learning should accomplish. In particular, they linked literature's value to English-major education while also recognizing that early-year courses provide limited exposure to sustained literary reading, making preparatory or selective forms of LLE salient in *Comprehensive English*.

For Irene, literature was closely tied to her professional identity as an English major teacher. She framed literature as a form of disciplinary expertise that distinguishes English majors from non-English majors. In her view, literature constitutes an essential component of subject-specific competence and contributes to students' professional literacy. As she explained:

> The role of literature, I believe, is to cultivate a professional and disciplinary literacy that distinguishes English majors from other non-English majors. If you study English but lack knowledge of significant literary works from English-speaking countries, it feels like a gap in your expertise. (Irene, interview)

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Lily expressed a similar view, although with a slightly different emphasis. She regarded literature as part of "what helps students understand English as a discipline and develop professional literacy as English majors". The statements indicate that literature was not viewed as extra reading material but as content that carries disciplinary meaning and contributes to the formation of English majors. This aligns with teacher cognition research arguing that teachers' understandings of subject matter shape what they regard as valued curricular knowledge in a programme (Borg, 2015; Ellis, 2006).

At the same time, teachers also connected literature to language teaching goals. Irene explicitly acknowledged that in *Comprehensive English*, literature often takes a supportive role and is introduced to serve course objectives, stating, "It's important. To meet teaching objectives, we need to incorporate some literary elements".

Julia made the language-learning orientation even more explicit. She evaluated LLE mainly by its instructional utility and the extent to which it can enhance language proficiency outcomes:

> The focus should primarily be on language skills, with a focus on how to leverage literary works to enhance language proficiency. Their word choice and language expression, I believe, are significantly better than in their previous functional writing assignments. However, gains in listening and speaking appeared limited. (Julia, interview)

Julia's narrative reflects an instrumental tendency noted in previous research, in which literature is frequently justified through utilitarian language objectives in skills-oriented institutional contexts (Cheung & Hennebry-Leung, 2020; Hall & Yang, 2018; Sun, 2023; Tsang & Paran, 2025).

Lily also treated literature as compatible with language learning, but she did not frame it only as a tool for skills improvement. Instead, she viewed literature as a planned component that runs alongside language learning and supports longer-term development. She emphasized a stable, intentional integration guided by a structured rationale:

> This module has two key features. The first is that I have a systematic framework; my primary focus is on embedding literature to cultivate students' literary literacy. The second is incorporating teaching practice to develop their professional competence. These are the two pillars. Since I exclusively teach Comprehensive English to teacher education students, my approach centers on these objectives. (Lily, interview)

Lily's cognition, therefore, blended pedagogical and professional aims, as she believes that literature supports both literary literacy and future teacher competence. It helps explain why Lily sought to create entry points for literature even in non-literary units, treating early-stage skill-oriented courses as transitional preparation for later literature courses.

In addition to disciplinary and pedagogical values, the teachers also highlighted literature as culturally meaningful. Julia emphasized that literature provides access to historically situated values and perspectives, which support comprehension:

> Because you'll find that in that era, within that context, the author's values and perspectives were different from ours today. This is a form of cultural transmission. Understanding that culture helps you grasp why someone made certain choices back then… If students lack this cultural context, they struggle to comprehend the work. (Julia, interview)

Lily echoed from a broad perspective by stressing that "literature and culture are inseparable", implying that cultural knowledge is not optional but necessary for interpreting texts in meaningful ways. Irene also described using Chinese-Western comparison and ideological elements, indicating that she sometimes approached literature as a carrier of values and perspectives beyond language forms.

To sum up, although the three teachers differed in emphasis, they all positioned LLE as meaningful for language education and justified it through overlapping functions. This pattern is consistent with empirical evidence showing that teachers often value literature for both instrumental language purposes and broader cultural learning, while teachers' orientations and classroom priorities vary substantially across contexts and course conditions (Bobkina et al., 2021; Duncan & Paran, 2017, 2018; Viana & Zyngier, 2020).

(b). Cognitions on Implementing LLE

Although all three teachers endorsed literature as meaningful for language education, their accounts of implementing LLE in *Comprehensive English* show that enactment was typically selective, bounded, and negotiated within a skills-oriented course. A shared feature across teachers was that LLE tended to enter lessons through available openings, especially when the textbook or unit theme already contained authors, genres, or identifiable literary elements. Yet teachers differed in how systematic and sustained that integration became.

Irene described her integration as frequent but fragmented, emphasizing that literature appeared in "almost every lesson" but remained "piecemeal" rather than continuous:

> But in comprehensive English classes, it's fragmented, though there is some integration in almost every lesson. Whenever the textbook mentions a writer, I'll introduce that writer; whenever a text involves literary elements, I'll discuss them. But overall, it's very piecemeal. (Irene, interview)

Lily also acknowledged that early course textbooks include very few literary texts, but she reported a more deliberate and continuous approach. She actively created connections through concepts and terms embedded in non-literary units, treating these moments as planned "seeds" for later literature courses:

> Although Books 1 and 2 have very few literary texts, I still incorporate them. For instance, there's a term called 'Romantic.' Anyway, it's about Romanticism. So, I naturally tied it into literature. When I mentioned

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> Wordsworth, I told them: remember this for future literature classes. Even if you only recall that there was a man named Wordsworth, that he was a romantic poet, and that his core belief was revering nature. For one year, I tried playing audio and video clips; it left a deep impression. (Lily, interview)

Julia's reported enactment was comparatively low-intensity and more contingent on course aims and materials. She explained that unit selection and mandatory coverage were often decided collectively in the course group to "deal with the final exam questions," which oriented the course toward "language proficiency training" rather than sustained literary exploration. Within this structure, Julia noted that most taught units contained "almost no literary works," and when literature-related units did appear (e.g., Shakespeare), she usually offered "simple introductions" rather than extended literary teaching. When she taught literary excerpts, she tended to rely on contextual scaffolding by explaining "the author's background" and "the historical context of the era," and she sometimes required students to read the original work (e.g., *The Pearl*) before analysis. At the same time, she reported that her literary background was "relatively weak," so she prepared more thoroughly, consulted colleagues, and avoided elaborating on unfamiliar literary points in depth to prevent feeling "less confident."

All three teachers' accounts suggest partial alignment between their positive cognitions about LLE and their reported enactment: all attempted to include literature in some form, but implementation was typically constrained in continuity and depth. A recurring misalignment was that literature was often valued as disciplinary, pedagogical, and cultural content, yet in *Comprehensive English,* it was enacted mainly through opportunities provided by unit themes and prescribed materials, resulting in fragmented or low-intensity integration. This pattern is consistent with research showing that the cognition-practice relationship is complex and dynamic, not simply linear (Burns et al., 2015; Kubanyiova & Feryok, 2015), and that teachers' stated beliefs do not always translate into classroom action due to contextual constraints (Borg, 2015). It also resonates with SCT perspectives that such enactment is also mediated by institutional routines and the materials through which teaching is organized, which can shape what teachers perceive as feasible at particular moments (Johnson, 2009; Li, 2020).

B. Factors Mediating Teacher Cognition

In Borg's (2015) model, teachers' cognitions are formed and re-formed through experiential histories, classroom practice, and contextual influences; SCT further explains how such cognition develops through culturally situated interaction and the mediational means available in activity (Johnson, 2006, 2009). Drawing on these lenses, the findings are organized into three interrelated forms: experiential, contextual, and artefact mediation (Johnson, 2009), to show how teachers' cognition and practice co-evolved within their local teaching context.

Experiential mediation captures how teachers' prior language learning histories, professional coursework, and accumulated teaching experiences shaped both their understandings of LLE and their confidence to enact it. This aligns with the "apprenticeship of observation" (Lortie, 1975), which emphasizes the lasting influence of learning histories on teachers' instructional perceptions (Cheung, 2019; Ngo, 2018).

Irene and Lily highlighted a strong literature background but a lack of pedagogical preparation for teaching literature:

> During my studies, I didn't study teaching methods at all. I went to comprehensive universities, so they basically didn't teach you how to teach a subject as other normal universities do. They only taught us the theory and the subject knowledge, but not how to teach literature in the actual classroom. (Irene, interview)
>
> Honestly, there wasn't much of that practical stuff; you still have to figure it out on your own. Concrete practical guidance remains scarce. You still need to adapt things to your own specific circumstances. For me, it's all about intuition, which is purely intuitive and developed gradually. (Lily, interview)

This perceived gap supports prior work showing that limited pedagogical preparation can constrain teachers' capacity to translate subject knowledge into classroom enactment (Golombek, 2015; Kubanyiova & Feryok, 2015). It also helps explain why Irene and Lily reported relying on self-exploration and accumulated teaching experience to develop strategies.

Julia foregrounded the affective dimension of experiential mediation, describing early helplessness, reliance on colleague support, and perceived weakness in literary background:

> When I first started teaching the Pearl, I felt quite helpless… these points were unfamiliar to me; I didn't know how to expand on them… Then I'd usually ask my colleagues for help… But I do feel my literary background is weak, and I'm not entirely comfortable teaching literary texts. (Julia, interview)

Her narrative shows that experiential mediation also shapes teachers' emotions and self-evaluations. In this sense, the lack of method-focused preparation resulted in significant teacher tensions, such as low self-efficacy and emotional discomfort, which functioned as internal barriers to LLE enactment. It also aligns with evidence from the Chinese context that insufficient training in literature teaching may contribute to constrained or utilitarian conceptions of LLE and lower levels of integration in practice (Sun, 2023).

Contextual mediation refers to how teachers' cognitions were shaped by micro-level classroom realities and macro-level institutional culture (Salinas, 2017), consistent with research emphasizing that teacher cognition develops in interaction with the surrounding environment (Borg, 2015; Burns et al., 2015; Johnson, 2006, 2009). At the micro level, teachers' judgements about students' readiness and engagement shaped what they considered feasible. Irene repeatedly referred to students' limited literary background as a key obstacle, noting that "you simply have no starting point." Lily similarly highlighted student-related constraints (e.g., limited background; low interest), shaping her decisions to keep

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texts and tasks accessible. Julia also noted students' limited prior exposure to full-length originals, narrowing the depth of feasible engagement. Similar patterns have been reported in previous studies, where student factors can discourage teachers from using literary texts or from conducting deeper literary discussion (Sidhu et al., 2010). At the macro level, assessment expectations and exam pressure strongly regulated priorities. Lily stated that "literature isn't heavily assessed" and that assessment "influences what we teach," while Julia noted that "there are almost no literary elements in final exams". This pattern aligns with research describing exam-oriented values in China as redirecting classroom priorities toward test preparation and assessable skills (Luo et al., 2019; Zhu & Shu, 2017; Mo, 2020). When literature is weakly represented in assessment systems, it is more likely to be positioned as supportive rather than central, encouraging utilitarian language-oriented classroom practice (Sun, 2023; Tsang & Paran, 2025). The results support Borg's (2015) argument that contextual influences exist both inside and outside the classroom, and many are beyond teachers' control.

Artefact mediation was particularly crucial. Textbooks, syllabi, and curricula functioned as powerful mediational tools that shaped instructional priorities. Teaching materials shape what teachers can realistically do and how complex the teaching process becomes (Calafato, 2018). Across cases, outdated textbooks and relatively fixed syllabi reduced flexibility and limited teachers' opportunities for sustained LLE. Irene described the prescribed textbook as outdated and lacking contemporary relevance, while Julia noted that it had remained largely unchanged for many years, requiring teachers to supplement it with newer language resources. These artefacts did not merely transmit curricular expectations but actively structured teachers' pedagogical reasoning, confirming SCT claims that material tools both enable and limit cognition (Li, 2020).

Overall, the findings extend SCT claims that thinking develops through mediated activity within cultural and institutional settings (Vygotsky, 1978; Lantolf & Thorne, 2006), while also aligning with teacher cognition research that places teachers' cognitions and decisions in interaction with prior experience, professional learning, and contextual constraints (Borg, 2015). The present cases further show that the cognition-practice relationship is often mediated by the conditions of teachers' work (Freeman, 2002). Recent teacher cognition research increasingly stresses the socially embedded nature of cognition and the importance of context in explaining teachers' instructional decisions (e.g., Cheung, 2019; Gao & Zhang, 2020; Ngo, 2018). Therefore, rather than interpreting limited LLE enactment as a simple mismatch between belief and practice, it may be more appropriate to understand it as an outcome of teachers' mediated decision-making within specific social and institutional environments.

V. Conclusion

This qualitative case study examined Chinese university EFL teachers' cognitions about implementing LLE within a skill-oriented course, from the perspectives of SCT and the teacher cognition framework. It found that teachers' understandings and enactments of LLE were mediated by their prior experiences and knowledge, as well as by social and institutional conditions, which often lead literature toward skills-oriented uses. Overall, the study adds context-sensitive evidence by clarifying how multi-level mediation shapes what teachers see as available when teaching literature in a constrained EFL course context.

The findings provide several implications for teachers and stakeholders who aim to strengthen LLE in tertiary EFL settings. First, in teacher education and professional development, it is important to go beyond treating literature as content-based knowledge and offer more practical support, such as modelling how to scaffold students' interpretation, how to design discussion tasks that still fit course aims, and how to evaluate literary learning. Second, at the departmental level, curriculum and assessment should be better aligned with LLE goals, because if literary competence is not clearly valued in assessment, literature is likely to remain marginal even when teachers recognize its importance. Third, at a curricular level, updating prescribed resources, allowing flexible supplementation, and creating space for teacher collaboration on text choice and task design may help support a more coherent link between language learning and meaning making through literary texts.

Several limitations should be noted. First, this is a small-scale qualitative case study with three teachers in one institutional setting, which supports depth rather than broad generalization. Second, the evidence base relies on interviews, which illuminate reasoning but cannot fully capture how LLE unfolds in actual classrooms or how students actually respond. Future research could therefore triangulate interviews with classroom observation, teaching artefacts, and student-focused data to trace how cognition, mediation, and enactment interact over time. Extending the design across multiple universities and course types or adopting a longitudinal lens on how teachers' LLE practices develop through professional learning and institutional change, would also strengthen understanding of how LLE can be supported under exam- and syllabus-driven contexts.

Appendix. Semi-Structured Interview Protocol

Section 1. Teachers' personal background information

1. Could you please introduce yourself briefly?
2. Could you please introduce the EFL course you are teaching briefly?

Section 2. Teachers' literature learning experience

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3. Could you share your experience of learning literature in your school years and your teacher education courses? Did you receive any preparation for teaching literature?
4. How did your experience of learning literature affect your teaching practice in integrating literary works in the language classroom?

Section 3. Teachers' cognitions and practices about literature in language education

5. What, in your view, is the impact of teaching literary works in the language classroom?
6. What kinds of abilities or outcomes do you expect for your students?
7. What is your overall view of the relationship between literature and language learning in this course?
8. What challenges or tensions have you experienced when teaching literature?
9. How do you choose texts/authors/genres for this course?
10. What materials and resources do you currently use to support your literature teaching?
11. Could you walk me through a typical lesson on how you use literature?
12. What are the major factors that affect your practice of using literary works?
13. Is there anything that you would like to add?

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The Indian *Wounded Storyteller*: Understanding Frank's Illness Narrative Typology Through *Cancer, You Picked The Wrong Girl* (2021)

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***Abstract*—This study employs Arthur Frank's illness narrative typology to analyze Shormistha Mukherjee's *Cancer, You Picked The Wrong Girl: A True Story* (2021). It examines how this work challenges the prevailing biomedical restitution narrative, which conceptualizes illness as a temporary disruption followed by recovery. The select autopathography emphasizes the tension between clinical objectivity and the subjective, embodied experience of a breast cancer patient in metropolitan India, addressing the psychosocial impacts of mastectomy, reconstruction, and treatment. Although Frank's framework originated in Western contexts, this analysis demonstrates how Indian cultural elements expand its theoretical scope. This study further addresses how the autopathography subverts Western breast cancer narratives that prioritize visible survivorship by reclaiming agency, confronting medical authority, and resisting the medicalization of female suffering through candid, nuanced storytelling infused with humor and irreverence. Thus, the study underscores the importance of culturally sensitive illness narratives in critical medical humanities, advocating for patient-centered care that values lived experience alongside biomedical advances.**

***Index Terms*—breast cancer, biomedicine, critical medical humanities, autopathography**

I. Introduction

Breast cancer is a significant global health concern, with increasing incidence rates worldwide. It is the most common cancer among women and a leading cause of cancer-related mortality. In India, breast cancer has emerged as a major public health issue, with a steady increase in its incidence over the past few decades (Mallath et al., 2014), presenting unique challenges in diagnosis, treatment and patient care. Breast cancer is the leading cause of morbidity and mortality among women in Indian metropolitan areas, surpassing all other cancers (Malvia et al., 2017). The delayed diagnosis of breast cancer (which could result from lack of awareness, physical shame or financial constraints) in certain regions of India, results subsequently increased mortality rates (Malvia et al., 2017). Thus, there is an urgent need for national and state-wide awareness programs that engage multiple stakeholders in society and the health system to increase public awareness of the illness (Gupta et al., 2015). India remains the nation with the highest incidence of breast cancer according to the GLOBOCAN 2022 statistics (Balachandrakumar et al., 2026; Ferlay et al., 2024). Research on breast cancer indicates that breast cancer mortality rates are significantly higher in developing nations than in developed nations, largely due to delayed diagnoses (Rajagopal, 2022; Porter, 2008) and as mentioned, this is attributed by "shame" towards the illness, lack of awareness and financial constraints (Balachandrakumar et al., 2026; Malvia et al., 2017). In the West, the Breast Cancer Movement arose in response to the need to break the silence surrounding breast cancer and challenge prevailing societal assumptions about how ill women should appear and behave, as well as how the illness should be addressed by the medical establishment (Rajagopal, 2022). However, Western medicine, since the late 18th century, typically views illness as a physiological process best understood and described by physicians, often minimizing the patient's subjective experience (Armstrong, 1984). And in relation with this, Susan Sontag's *Illness as Metaphor* (1978) was among the first works to initiate a critical conversation on the risks associated with negative metaphors and symbolic meanings attached to cancer. These associations contribute to feelings of shame among patients, often discouraging them from disclosing their diagnosis or seeking medical care.

Even though diaries and journals can be found in abundance, it is striking that autobiographical descriptions of illness belong exclusively to the second part of the twentieth century (Hawkins, 1999, p. 11). And since the publication of *The Cancer Journals* (Lorde, 1980) (one of the first book to deconstruct the biomedicalization of cancer), breast cancer survivors have argued the "validity and visibility" (Schultz, 2013, p. 1). However, in India, the situation was never the same; due to several cultural and traditional beliefs, even self-breast examination remains an undisclosed and

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interdicted instance (Jadhav et al., 2024). Hence, a new generation of cancer autopathographies from Indian women is required not only to empower the narrator to assert more discursive independence while simultaneously illuminating aspects of the cancer experience that have been previously overlooked. *Cancer, You Picked The Wrong Girl* (2021) by Shormistha Mukherjee is one such Indian narrative unfurls the experience of a woman diagnosed with breast cancer in metropolitan part of India; Mumbai.

Shormistha renders the unsparing reality of her experience with mastectomy, reconstruction, body image, and medical interactions, and the memoir critiques the gendered silences and patriarchal expectations placed upon female patients in India. Rather than positioning cancer as an adversary to be conquered, Mukherjee situates her experience within a larger critique of medical authority, gender norms, and the cultural politics of illness in India through her unfiltered, candid rendering infused with strategic humor. Arthur W. Frank through his eponymous work *The Wounded Storyteller* (Frank, 2013) elaborates on studying the stories of illness through the examination of their structures (Thomas-MacLean, 2005). This study applies Frank's narrative typology to a phenomenological study of breast cancer through the Indian narrative *Cancer, You Picked The Wrong Girl* (2021). It is also important to understand that narrating one's physical transformations resulting from an illness challenges the autopathographer to reconcile the disparity between the body's lived experience and its cultural emplotments (Thomas-MacLean, 2005).

II. The Rise of Illness Narratives and Critical Medical Humanities: Literature Review

This study examines how illness narratives reveal extensive knowledge about personal pain, alongside self-reflective and medical humanities approach to health conditions. The medical humanities have evolved significantly from their initial focus on personal illness narratives and cultural interpretations of health to a more complex, interdisciplinary framework known as critical medical humanities. At its core, medical humanities began by distinguishing between illness and disease, a foundational concept articulated in *Illness and Disease* by Cassell (1976). He defines illness as a private experience while disease remains a scientific medical diagnosis and his argument demonstrates how narratives should capture subjective experiences as a way to improve clinical care and healthcare empathy according to his research (Cassell, 1976).

Illness is understood as a private, subjective experience, whereas disease is a scientific or medical diagnosis. Cassell's work emphasizes that disease encompasses social and emotional dimensions unique to each individual's context, faith, and experiences, highlighting the necessity of capturing subjective narratives to improve clinical care and empathy. This early focus on personal stories underscores the importance of narrative medicine as a tool for enhancing patient-centered healthcare. Later, DasGupta and Hurst (2007) built on this concept and explored how healthcare providers should develop empathy and relational awareness by recognizing the full consequences of illness beyond biological symptoms. Contemporary medical humanities studies unite cultural approaches with health evaluations, delving into community factors that determine women's perceptions of their health issues. Herndl (2006) established through her analysis that breast cancer narratives reveal that identity consists of multiple layers rather than fixed, unchanging self-definitions. Medical humanities engage with this process, recognizing that illness transforms identity while eliminating all possibilities of recovering the previous state.

The inclusion of feminist and cultural critiques further enriches the medical humanities. Waples (2013) examines breast cancer discourse through feminist and speculative lenses, while Audre Lorde's activism confronts restrictive survivor narratives and challenges mainstream "pinkwashing" (Ehrenreich, 2001) practices that sanitize and commodify illness experiences. These perspectives expose how dominant cultural narratives often limit authentic healthcare experiences and patient agency. The medical humanities as an emerging field of research acknowledges both the medical reverberations and personal interactions to understand holistic health conditions. The reformulated medical humanities framework introduced by Viney et al. (2015) is present in *Critical Medical Humanities: Embracing Entanglement, Taking Risks* which analyzes medical science through a power analysis of diverse socioeconomic groups using multiple racial intellectual points of view. Nielsen's (2019) critical review of breast cancer culture highlights how marketing strategies sustain gendered constructs and manage emotional distress, illustrating the commodification of illness experiences. This analysis links individual political disputes with broader societal conflicts embedded within illness narratives, reinforcing the need for a critical examination of cultural and economic forces shaping health perceptions. Kleinman (1988) extends the illness–disease distinction by emphasizing narrative-based care, where patient stories are essential for understanding suffering and tailoring medical treatment. His advocacy promotes a shift from purely biomedical models to approaches that recognize the complexity of patients' lived experiences. Historical perspectives also inform critical medical humanities. Gallagher's (2018) research on 18th-century literature shows how cultural representations of breast cancer reflected and reinforced social expectations of female virtue and emotional self-restraint, while simultaneously eliciting reader sympathy and challenging conservative norms. The historical perspective used by the author binds together present-day critiques of breast cancer representation with evidence showing that cultural expectations have a long tradition of determining how illness is depicted.

Together, these contributions illustrate how critical medical humanities transcend traditional medical humanities by emphasizing multidimensional narrative structures, cultural sensitivity, and interdisciplinary collaboration. It critiques simplified medical interpretations and advocates a holistic understanding that includes personal hardship, social determinants, and systemic power relations (Saleh & Zidan, 2024). Thus, the evolution from medical humanities to

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critical medical humanities represents a shift from focusing primarily on individual illness narratives and identity transformation to embracing a comprehensive, justice-oriented framework. This framework integrates narrative medicine, cultural critique, artistic expression, intersectionality, and historical analysis to humanize healthcare, challenge reductive illness portrayals, and promote equitable medical practices. Critical medical humanities thus serve as both an analytical and activist platform committed to deepening the understanding of health, suffering, and identity within complex social contexts. Through these discussions, the autopathography *Cancer, You Picked The Wrong Girl* (2021) stands as an important addition to critical medical humanities, promoting greater engagement with narrative medicine, feminist illness writing, and the sociocultural aspects of cancer discourse, specifically in urbane India.

III. Arthur Frank's Typology of Illness Narratives

This study utilizes Arthur Frank's typology of illness narratives as an analytical framework (Frank, 2013) and explores how the author interrogates dominant cultural constructs surrounding breast cancer, femininity, and survivorship in India. While biomedical discourse predominantly adheres to a restitution narrative, conceptualizing illness as a temporary disruption followed by recovery, Mukherjee subverts this paradigm by foregrounding the psychosocial and embodied dimensions of breast cancer. Her memoir oscillates between chaos and quest narratives, capturing the unpredictability, trauma, and existential distress inherent in illness, while simultaneously engaging in meaning-making and self-reclamation (Lakshmi et al., 2025). Situated within Frank's quest model, Mukherjee's narrative disrupts the gendered silences surrounding breast cancer through the strategic use of humor and extemporaneous discussions on mastectomy, reconstruction, and body image. The memoir critiques patriarchal constructions of the female body, the authority of the medical establishment, and societal imperatives of resilience, aligning her voice with Frank's conception of the "wounded storyteller" (Frank, 2013, p. 1), wherein individual suffering becomes a site of broader social critique. In contrast to Western breast cancer memoirs, which often emphasize hyper-visible survivorship, Mukherjee's account challenges the dominant restitution narrative prevalent in Indian medical discourse, which privileges survival over a subjective understanding of illness. The researchers have summarized the different narratives explained by Arthur W. Frank in the form of a table along with description and key features of each narrative.

Table 1
Arthur Frank's Narrative Typology (Author(s)'s Own Synthesis)
Note: Adapted from The Wounded Storyteller (Frank, 2013).

Type of Narrative	Restitution Narrative	Chaos Narrative	Quest Narrative
Description	This typology of the narrative focuses on the recovery of the illness; to return to normal lifestyle with better health condition.	This particular narrative reflects the overwhelming nature of the illness and as the name suggests discussed the chaos in life due the illness.	Quest narrative reflects the journey as a transformation and meaning making.
Key Features	Illness → Treatment → Recovery	Emphasizes the suffering, despair and unpredictability	Emphasizes resilience and considers illness as an opportunity to unlearn.

Arthur Frank suggests different types of illness narratives as a listening device because according to him, when we listen only, we can articulate the pain and subjugation. He also suggests that listening to all the illness stories can be difficult because they mix and weave different narrative threads (Frank, 2013, p. 7) and hence he proposed the three narratives. To formulate these three narratives–restitution, chaos, and quest narratives–Frank has implemented factors concerning the narrative, which included plot, elective affinity that each narrative has while looking into the actions of embodiments, then how the following narratives work as a personal narrative; self-story, and finally, he discusses the power of each narrative and its restrictions. Most illness narratives are a blend of the three narrative types; at any time, one of these narratives can overtake and guide the story the narrator wants to perceive. Frank strongly argues that each of the illness narrative strongly reflects the cultural and personal preferences. By employing Frank's critical approach, this research analyses the ways in which Mukherjee's account asserts agency (Mukherjee, 2021), challenges medical and cultural silences, and resists the medicalization of women's suffering. After a preliminary diagnosis with her oncologist, the doctor discusses the treatment, starting with mastectomy, and Shormistha feels, "How do you describe a day where you are told that you have cancer? And that one part of your body, a part that defines you as a woman, will have to go" (Mukherjee, 2021, p. 44).

The Restitution Narrative

The narrative of restitution, "Yesterday I was healthy, today I' m sick, but tomorrow I'll be healthy again" (Frank, 2013, p. 77) underpins the biomedical discourse surrounding illness. Medical diagnosis and treatment typically follow this narrative, which represents the most prevalent illness story. The framework posits illness as a transient disturbance

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that medical interventions should rectify, thereby restoring the patient to their pre-illness state. However, this approach can be limiting for breast cancer patients in India, among others, who experience persistent physical, emotional, and cultural changes alongside the disease (Frank, 2013). The assumption of complete recovery neglects the enduring effects of mastectomy, reconstructive surgery, and permanent alterations in body appearance.

The Chaos Narrative

Chaos narratives present complete opposites to the restitution model. Individuals adhering to chaotic narratives often perceive their illness as a significantly greater and uncontrollable force, generating conditions of unpredictability and ambiguous meaning. According to Frank (2013), the restitution narrative concludes with hope, whereas chaos narratives resist clear closure because of a lack of well-defined conclusions. Frank also notes that these narratives are challenging for both listeners and storytellers, as they disrupt established storytelling norms. Such narratives manifest as multiple disconnected elements that lead to personal despair and existential distress. Mukherjee exposed the elements of chaos through her personal stories about breast cancer pain alongside medical uncertainty and emotional distress in *Cancer, You Picked The Wrong Girl* (2021). She deliberately avoided shielding readers from the illness's disruptive impact on her life routines, interpersonal bonds, and personal self-identity. Her resistance to presenting an uplifting recovery narrative aligns with the chaotic narrative's rejection of prescribed meaning.

The Quest Narrative

According to this narrative framework, illness transforms individuals as they gain new insights into themselves, often assuming a proactive role in their own care or developing fresh perspectives through adversity. Unlike restitution and chaos narratives, the quest narrative empowers sick individuals to assert control by analyzing their experiences and discovering purposes within them (Frank, 2013, p. 115). Through these quest narratives, individuals move beyond patient dependency to become active agents of their own health and empowerment. Mukherjee utilized the quest narrative structure in her memoir (Mukherjee, 2021), transforming sickness into a personal growth experience that critiques societal rules and norms. Her use of humorous storytelling, incorporating uncensored truths, challenges societal expectations regarding female cancer patients and reclaims authority over her life story. Mukherjee analyzed how medical institutions treat female bodies through procedures of control and regulation, resisting conventional medical authority. This narrative aligns with feminist analyses of illness storytelling, recognizing that societal expectations dictate how female cancer patients should behave following such diagnoses, particularly in breast cancer cases.

IV. Discussion

Cancer and its course, as presented in biomedical narratives, are frequently framed by return to normal or restoration narratives, promising complete health recovery. However, Mukherjee challenges this trope by presenting her cancer journey as a complex experience of transformation. Mukherjee's narrative recognizes and attests to long-term psychological and physical alterations that persist long after treatment concludes, thereby challenging a key tenet of illness: the assumption that it represents a temporary deviation from an otherwise stable life trajectory. By refusing to reduce her experience to a neat arc of illness, treatment, and recovery, Mukherjee critiques the dominant discourse that prioritizes clinical cure over ongoing lived experience. Mukherjee's invocation of plain language, humor, and irreverence disrupts this established voice, which is typically stoic and clinical. This approach humanizes the experience of breast cancer and challenges the culture's stigmatization of women and illness. Her narrative becomes an act of defiance–a refusal to allow the disease to dictate her experience or to permit medical institutions or cultural expectations to determine her recovery. As Charon (2006) argues in her work on narrative medicine, this wounded tell-all serves as an ethical act of reclaiming agency over one's own story and, consequently, identity (Charon, 2006; Peterson & Langellier, 1997). The narrative also critiques not only the medical establishment but also broader sociocultural forces shaping the experience and narrative of illness. Nevertheless, Mukherjee lays bare the emotional turmoil, the continuous confrontation with altered body image, and the nuanced interplay between weakness and strength; thus, questioning the assumptions underlying the "heroic survivor" model. This necessitates a timely rethinking of the experience of illness, aligning with emerging perspectives in the medical humanities that emphasize chronicity, alteration, and the realities of living with long-term health repercussions. Individuals with long-term health conditions or undergoing significant medical procedures often face marginalization because their experiences diverge from these expected outcomes. Mukherjee confronts complex recovery expectations due to mastectomy and the multifaceted consequences of breast cancer, which disrupt the possibility of full health restoration. She undermines the idea of restitution by illustrating how breast removal, combined with intensive chemotherapy and radiation therapy, creates enduring symptoms resistant to complete remedy. The physical scars resulting from cancer directly contradict the human hope of returning to a pre-cancer life. According to the memoir, survival should not be seen as a return to pre-cancer life.

"Why the rush" (Mukherjee, 2021, p. 9) because the narrator clearly felt that no matter what, the lump will not become anything serious. She believed that visiting her family doctor could fix the issue of the tumor, which was detected during the sonomammography. Mastectomy is a notable physical consequence of breast cancer, producing long-term visible changes. Mukherjee describes it as a medical operation representing a substantial transformation in her life. Mukherjee explains the psychological weight of breast loss, arguing against a traditional recovery-focused model that promises wholeness. Mukherjee's writing illustrates how her experience of cancer denies a return to pre-

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illness normalcy, as she cannot address her situation through surgery or expect to forget the cancer experience. She details the permanent health effects of mastectomy, specifically its impact on her femininity, sexual self, and body image. According to Mukherjee, she cannot heal from her breast surgery and remaining scars through conventional methods. These body alterations fuse into her new self. For Mukherjee, breast cancer extends beyond an isolated incident, involving continuous adaptation and permanent bodily changes. The physical alterations following mastectomy continue to present a permanent presence in her life, as she exists in an impossible state of former normalcy. Mukherjee adopts the continued psychological and emotional consequences of mastectomy operations rather than pursuing the restitution perspective that promises a physical return to pre-mastectomy body states. Reconstructive surgery helps restore the body but fails to eliminate the traumatic cancer experiences or the difficult process of adapting to life with an altered physical being. Mukherjee provides extensive insights about the lasting side effects of chemotherapy, which was an essential aspect of her cancer treatment. The life-saving treatment, chemotherapy, generates numerous side effects that sometimes endure even after treatment termination. She narrates, “I start falling to pieces the morning after chemo” (Mukherjee, 2021, p. 176). The author reveals how chemotherapy destroyed her body structure through hair loss, fatigue, and cognitive dysfunction, which persisted during periods after her apparent final treatment. After her second chemotherapy session, she narrates, “I’ve lost the will to live. I’m only moaning. If this is chemo, I don’t want it. I can’t go through it” (p. 179) and she also realizes that eyelashes and eyebrows fall off along with her hair (p. 193).

Through her memoir, Mukherjee speaks about active chemotherapy residuals, which she combines with an assessment of the restitution narrative's failure to properly recognize enduring patient side effects; “your pee, thanks to chemo medicine, smells like you set up a little chemical factory in your crotch” (p. 187). The ongoing exhaustion and hormonal irregularities and mental confusion which Mukherjee experiences serve as evidence that cancer treatment side effects result in prolonged health complications. Through this story Mukherjee reveals there will be no immediate restoration towards normality yet shows the ways the self transforms while confronting constant challenges. Mukherjee dismisses the traditional notion of recovery to expose the inadequacies of medical knowledge about healing processes. Through her matter-of-fact discussion about chemotherapy's enduring impact, she exposes the significant disparity between medical institutions' idealized portrayals of "healing" and the actual post-treatment experiences of cancer patients. Her narrative demonstrates that survival extends beyond the completion of treatment since living becomes an intricate and continuous procedure that negates basic return to pre-illness routines.

Mukherjee reveals that her goal extends beyond opposing the normalcy trope by demonstrating her resistance to restitution narratives. In her memoir, survival does not seek a return to past circumstances but develops through the capacity to adapt, find purpose, and establish new methods for understanding oneself within an ever-changing present. Mukherjee presents survival as a dynamic undertaking following cancer treatment and its aftermath, denying that recovery leads to the simple restoration of pre-illness life. Frank would interpret the illness experience as a self-discovery journey of reinvention (Frank, 2013, p. 4), aligning with the narrative presented by Mukherjee. In her memoir, Mukherjee portrays survival as a transformative process through which the difficulties of life after cancer treatment become pathways to develop a fresh identity distinct from the previous one. Mukherjee presents survival through mastectomy and chemotherapy in a multifaceted manner because she highlights the lasting effects that challenge the superficial promise of normalcy after treatment. For example, despite being against reconstruction after her mastectomy surgery, she writes about her true opinion on reconstruction; “It feels good because it fills a bra, because it gives me cleavage, because when people see me, they have no idea that technically I don’t have one breast” (Mukherjee, 2021, p. 193).

Hence, Mukherjee’s memoir, *Cancer, You Picked The Wrong Girl* (2021), offers a compelling critique of the restitution narrative in the context of cancer and illness. The author frames mastectomy and the effects of cancer treatment as enduring experiences rather than temporary disruptions, generating a narrative centered on transformation instead of a return to normalcy. She criticizes how society defines healing and survival and shows how cancer yields lasting physiological and psychological effects. Through her story, Mukherjee creates an opportunity to review the meaning of survival while promoting a better understanding of cancer life existence after treatment.

In the context of illness narratives, Frank identifies the chaos narrative as profoundly linked to disorientation and fragmentation experienced by individuals confronting the unpredictable and traumatic world of illness. This narrative resists the typical linear order associated with storytelling, embracing uncertainty and emotional turmoil presented by serious illness. In *Cancer, You Picked The Wrong Girl* (2021), Shormistha Mukherjee engages with the chaos narrative to convey the raw emotional landscape of her breast cancer diagnosis and treatment. The uncertainty of her illness, coupled with the nonlinear recounting of her experience, allowed her to challenge and reshape traditional narrative expectations, reflecting the complex emotional reality of survival against breast cancer. The chaos narrative centers on depicting uncertainty, an uncertainty that threatens an individual’s sense of stability, identity, and control. Mukherjee's memoir begins with her diagnosis of breast cancer, a moment of profound cruelty that shattered any illusions of a predictable future. Shock, disbelief, and fear dominated her experience, ensuring that the chaos narrative she described captured the disruption of order and normalcy. Mukherjee's interactions with the medical system and her fluctuating emotions align with Frank's (2013) description of chaos as an experience of illness as a disruptive force. The author, describes her initial diagnosis with considerable confusion and helplessness, feelings commonly experienced by cancer

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patients. Ultimately, when Shormistha recognizes the significance of the lump in her breast, she “burst into tears” (Mukherjee, 2021, p. 3), marking a shift from a narrative of restitution to one of chaos. As Shormistha guides the reader through the initial trauma of diagnosis, she also explores the trauma associated with treatment. The physical and emotional devastation resulting from chemotherapy, surgery, and radiation is undeniable. Mukherjee does not minimize the brutality of cancer treatment; instead, she embraces chaos and unpredictability in her discussion of it. The demanding nature of chemotherapy constituted a physical assault on her body and an emotional challenge to her sense of self. These periodic emotional lows, followed by renewed hope exemplifies the inherent emotional volatility of chaos narrative.

Trauma, as suggested by Herman (1992), is not an event in itself but a process that continuously transforms a survivor’s temporal, spatial, and identitarian relationships. Mukherjee's situation exemplifies this trauma, as it foregrounds her struggle against being reduced to the effects of medical treatment. The imposition of illness upon herself and her body, a reality that will leave lasting shadows on her daily life, is a key consideration for Mukherjee. The traumatic experience of cancer, as Mukherjee suggests, cannot be neatly encapsulated or processed; however, it will resonate throughout her being. Her raw emotions—fear, anger, grief, and confusion—remain with her, and the memoir engages with these feelings in a deeply personal and visceral manner. She allows her feelings to arrive in all their complexity, with moments of despair alongside those of resilience and hope. For example, the way she writes in an unfiltered manner about the periods of uncertainty; regarding her prognosis, when she fears that cancer is progressing and then during her surgery period. These reactions are not presented as isolated events but are integral to the ongoing emotional landscape of living with cancer.

In her autopathography *Cancer, You Picked The Wrong Girl* (2021), Shormistha Mukherjee presents a distinctive approach to the quest narrative genre, which typically chronicles an individual ’s journey towards self-discovery, empowerment, and transformation. Quest narratives traditionally follow a protagonist’s movement toward a predetermined goal; Mukherjee’s memoir adapts this pattern by centering on the transformative impact of illness–specifically, breast cancer. Mukherjee challenges the prevailing notion of cancer as solely a destructive force, instead portraying it as a challenge worth resisting, thereby catalyzing her own growth and assertion of agency. Through the use of humor, irreverence, and ongoing reclamation of her body and identity, Mukherjee crafts a narrative that reinserts her agency over her illness experience while confronting societal norms and expectations surrounding cancer. Mukherjee turns the conventional narrative about cancer on its head. Cancer is re-imagined not as a passive experience but a site for active resistance. By narrating her personal journey of fighting for her health, she establishes cancer as a space for reclaiming power, rejecting normative assumptions imposed upon her and ultimately redefining her relationship with her body and identity. She goes against the passive victimization narrative associated with cancer patients. Rather than viewing her diagnosis as a battle she was destined to lose, she positioned herself as an active agent in her own recovery process. Mukherjee counters the medicalization of illness, which frequently renders patients passive, by asserting that individuals should remain active agents in their own recovery. Her perspective aligns with Bartky’s (1990) discussion of resistance against societal power structures, where engaging in the reclamation of one's own body through self-narratives constitutes an act of resistance. Mukherjee chooses to frame and negotiate with her illness; thus, she reformulates the experience of cancer as yet another vehicle of resistance against the normative expectations imposed by society on suffering, healing, and femininity. Mukherjee actively resists the victim narrative by challenging medical authorities and societal conventions, critiquing stereotypical portrayals of cancer patients as fragile and helpless. She confronts the idea that cancer defines individuals as "survivors" or “victims” seeking to construct a more empowering narrative. Such resistance illustrates self-authorship and agency in the fight against life-threatening illness.

Mukherjee's quest narrative is unique in its deployment of humor and irreverence to disrupt the typical somber narrative of illness. In this context, humor represents a common coping mechanism, such as crying in response to trauma and the unsettling effects of disease. One might presume that Mukherjee utilizes humor to avoid confronting the severity of her illness; however, she strategically employs it as a weapon to subvert and challenge the conventional expectations of cancer patients. Through irreverence, she reclaims her identity and bodily experience, and defies the neurophysiological effects of cancer. Despite this, throughout the memoir, she deploys levity to challenge the solemnity associated with cancer and never seeks to distance herself from the illness through a superficially cheerful demeanor. She punctures the conventional pretense of cliché severity surrounding cancer with moments of humor, disarming her perceived dominance over her. Mukherjee achieves this with considerable irreverence, particularly when commenting on the cultural and sociological implications of the diagnosis and established expectations regarding women's bodies. She reclaims herself and her own identity through sustained irreverence directed at the cultural expectations surrounding cancer. Mukherjee proves that she is an unconventional writer because, instead of lamenting the loss of the breast, she makes fun of, turns around, and subverts the standard discourse on breast cancer and femininity. There is an aversion towards the hospital because the space treats everyone like a patient, ripping off their identity as a common person. Shormistha describes hospital spaces as a place that makes “you sit and stare at some of the bleakest things…Now if the verdict is bad, you’re already a shivering wreck who’s expecting the worst from the world” (Mukherjee, 2021, p. 14).

This journey extends beyond Mukherjee’s physical form, encompassing her emotional and intellectual realms. Mukherjee's narrative demonstrates that it is not solely about the diagnosis and treatment of cancer but also a protracted

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process of self-empowerment and self-expression. Her humor, challenging medical narratives, and refusal to be defined by her illness reflect her ongoing reclamation of autonomy. Through this process, Mukherjee illustrates how illness can serve as a catalyst for personal growth, self-discovery, and the establishment of a more powerful sense of self. Shormistha Mukherjee's memoir, *Cancer, You Picked The Wrong Girl* (2021), aligns strongly with the quest narrative, as cancer becomes a site of resistance and transformation. Mukherjee utilizes humor, irreverence, and a continued reclamation of agency over her body and identity to challenge conventional illness narratives that often portray cancer as a story of victimization. Instead, she presents cancer as a transformative passage that empowers and redefines the self, thereby facilitating a more nuanced and intricate understanding of illness and identity. This allows Mukherjee to reclaim her body and essence while contesting narratives at the intersection of cancer, femininity, and womanhood within broader societal contexts.

V. Conclusion

Mukherjee's narrative transcends scholarly debate by fostering public awareness and reshaping societal attitudes toward breast cancer, particularly in India where the breast cancer remains stigmatized. Through her candid exploration of the physical and emotional consequences of treatment, she challenges culturally entrenched ideals of beauty and health, inviting a more compassionate and informed public discourse. This openness is pivotal for cultivating robust support systems, as illness narratives that confront stereotypes and encourage dialogue enhance community empathy and solidarity. Such narratives have demonstrated their value in healthcare by motivating caregivers and professionals to adopt more patient-centered approaches. Mukherjee's memoir has the potential to influence public health institutions and advocacy groups, encouraging the integration of narrative medicine practices that affirm patients' experiences and foster empowerment. By validating the voices of survivors, the memoir not only inspires individuals to share their stories but also generates supportive networks that contribute to improved mental health and resource accessibility. Importantly, Mukherjee's account emphasizes the need to balance biomedical advancements with the recognition of patients' subjective experiences. While technological progress in diagnosis and treatment offers undeniable benefits, it must not overshadow the personal and cultural dimensions of illness. Her memoir advocates for a symbiotic relationship between medical innovation and the lived realities of cancer survivors, ensuring holistic care that respects individual narratives beyond clinical parameters. From a policy perspective, insights drawn from Mukherjee's story can inform culturally sensitive interventions that address stigma and promote early detection. Mukherjee's memoir also contributes to broader ethical discussions about storytelling in healthcare, illustrating the power of personal narratives to challenge dominant biomedical and restitutional frameworks. By rejecting the notion of a linear "return to normalcy," she presents a nuanced, ongoing experience of illness that contests sanitized clinical portrayals. Her use of humor and emotional honesty humanizes the cancer journey, dismantling social stigmas and reclaiming agency. This counter-narrative encourages readers to reconsider the meaning of survival, emphasizing complexity and continuity rather than simplistic recovery.

Cancer, You Picked The Wrong Girl (2021) as an autopathography enriches illness narrative literature from a non-Western perspective, where cultural constructs of femininity and health deeply influence patient experiences. Mukherjee's story reveals the tensions between societal expectations and the realities of cancer, while opening space for reimagined identities that transcend conventional norms. In conclusion, Mukherjee's narrative acts as a catalyst for social and healthcare transformation. It underscores the importance of listening to patients' lived experiences to build supportive environments that value holistic well-being alongside biomedical progress.

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